

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Meredith Brock: Hi, friends. Welcome to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast, where we share biblical truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Meredith Brock, and I am here with my co-host, Kaley Olson.

Kaley Olson: Hey, Meredith.

Meredith Brock: If you're new here, then we hope you feel right at home. We created this podcast with you in mind, so whatever season of life you're in, wherever you find yourself today, this is just for you.

Kaley Olson: That's right, Meredith. Our mission is to intersect God's Word in the hard places and the good places in life we all experience. We hope that regardless of your age, background or stage of life, that you gain valuable insight from listening to each episode. We're actually a couple of episodes deep into the podcast now and I already love how different the topics are and how they really do apply to any season of life. So far we've covered forgiveness and your identity as a Proverbs 31 woman, you can't see me, but I'm doing air quotes right now about the Proverbs 31 woman, and anxiety.

Meredith Brock: You know, I'd really like to meet just one person who says they don't struggle with any of those topics because I know I sure do and it has been such a gift to be able to be here on the podcast and hear some really valuable teachings on each one of those. I know for me personally, these past couple of weeks have brought a sort of healing in my life and it's honestly helpful for me to open my mind to the way people older than me and younger than me, like you two, I don't want to admit it because I still think I'm in my 20s, how you guys process what we've talked about. I think that's what makes our podcast so special and unique.

Kaley Olson: Yeah, and every episode is different every single time. I love that we don't just talk about what we're struggling with, but we put God's Word behind it.

Meredith Brock: That's right.

Kaley Olson: You know that you're hearing some solid truth whenever you listen to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast. Speaking of truth, I think we should go ahead and dive into today's teaching because it's in an area where I need a lot of truth. We're going to be talking about perfection, and today we have the lovely Ashley Hodges to do our teaching. Welcome, Ashley.

Ashley Hodges: Hi. Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here.

Kaley Olson: We are so excited to have you on the show, Ashley. Some people might be new around here, and they hear Ashley Hodges and they think, "Who in the world is that?" But what they don't know is that you are originally Ashley TerKeurst. Now you're Ashley TerKeurst Hodges. Will you tell these fine folks listening a little bit about yourself?

Ashley Hodges: Yes. Like you said, I'm Lysa TerKeurst's daughter. My name is Ashley. I'm 23 years old. I'm married to David Hodges. We've been married for just a little over two years now. This September we're expecting our first child, so we're super excited about that.

Meredith Brock: Oh! So exciting!

Ashley Hodges: Yeah. We live in Los Angeles, California. My husband is a pastor at Hillsong, LA. I serve alongside him, and also run my lifestyle and fashion blog ashleyterk.com. That's a little about me.

Meredith Brock: Man, girl, you have got a lot going on. Holy smokes. I am so excited to hear your teaching today. I believe the title of it is "Perfection is my Enemy." The title alone grabbed me. I think there might be, I don't know, I'm not going to impose this or inflict this on anyone, but there might be a few people out there thinking, "What does a 23-year-old have to say about perfection?" and wondering what kind of authority you could possibly bring on this. Man, I know you personally, I know your family really well, and you really do have so much to offer on this subject. In your short 23 years you have done some pretty amazing wrestling, and I can't wait for people to learn about it.

Meredith Brock: I remember, one of the things I want us all to remember here on the podcast, is that we know that biblical truth is truth. End of story, right?

Ashley Hodges: Yeah.

Meredith Brock: It can be applied to any season, so I'm excited to hear from your cute little 23-year-old self, Ash. I can't wait.

Kaley Olson: I'm sweating over here a little bit thinking about this because I'm a one on the Enneagram, so if any of you listening out there struggle with perfection, I do too. So Ashley, I really can't wait to hear what you have to say on this.

Ashley Hodges: Yeah so, I'm super excited. A couple of months ago I wrote a blog post called, "Perfection is my Enemy" — it was kind of my way of putting words to something I have struggled with my whole life. 'Cause I constantly think things in my head like, I already know it's not gonna look good so I'd rather not waste my time on it or I would say like, "I guess it's good but it's not perfect so let's try again." Or another thing I would think to myself is like "It should be better, or I should be better. Or if I just had this or do this I could make this perfectly." So finally after struggling for a while, again it's been something that I've struggled with my whole life, but I looked up the definition of perfectionism.

Ashley Hodges: It says perfectionism is defined by a personality trait characterized by a person's striving for flawlessness, setting high performance and sometimes unrealistic standards which that's huge. Most of the time I'm shooting for something that's unrealistic. And it's always with critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations. I think that's so true — I am setting standards that most of the time are unrealistic and I have to remind myself, am I doing this because I'm trying to get approval by other people? I don't know, perfection is one of my biggest weaknesses and it became even more apparent when I started my own business. I always give the excuse, this is just how God made me. And I believe that it was okay to be this way because I make everything look better and think better but then, I started paying way too high of a cost for being so demanding and it really honestly stole my joy and it put a huge wedge in my relationships.

Kaley Olson: Yeah Ashley, I can go back and think through that list that you just said, about the things that you thought about "Oh it's good but it's not perfect so let me try again." Or "I already know that I'm not gonna do it well so I'm just not gonna even try." I can one hundred percent identify with that and I'm curious what finally drove you to the point where you realized that you couldn't do it anymore? What was your breaking point?

Ashley Hodges: Honestly Kaley, it was the exhaustion. I was so exhausted and I finally decided physically and emotionally, I just really couldn't do it anymore. When I started my blog ashleyterk.com and became a social media influencer on Instagram, that's when it really became apparent and then emotional and physical exhaustion kicked in to an extreme. 'Cause being a blogger, especially in the lifestyle and beauty, and fashion, travel world there's always so much that I could do and content that I could create. And it started making me exhausted because in my head everything had to be perfect, and I started being so critical of myself. It honestly made me not even enjoy or like what I was doing anymore. And because of that I was just miserable and tired, and tired of feeling miserable and tired of feeling not good enough or that nothing I created was good enough or tired of procrastinating because I felt like I couldn't do something good enough or I would just not even do it.

Ashley Hodges: So finally, with great desperation I just cried out to God and I begged Him to help me understand, why do I have such a desire to make things perfect? Why does it matter how much I tell myself "Stop, don't be a perfectionist"? The desire is so strong, and I just couldn't understand it. I finally just spent a long

season just praying and begging God for wisdom and answers, and He slowly started revealing a few nuggets of wisdom. And the first thing He revealed to me was something that I heard my mom actually teach about. She said, "Our hearts were created for the perfection of the garden of Eden, but we don't live there anymore." And I don't know, that just hit me so much because it's so true. When God first created everything, everything was perfect and then sin entered in and everything wasn't perfect anymore. So I think that our hearts crave this perfection that God originally designed for us to live in, but the reality is now sin came in and we're not gonna live there anymore until, or at least on this side of the eternity.

Ashley Hodges: We're always gonna have that void and desire for perfection in our hearts. While it kind of made me mad, cause I'm like "That's not fair." But then honestly the more I thought about it, it's actually a good thing because that craving for perfection is actually what draws our hearts to the only perfect match for our longing, which is Jesus. Jesus came to live a perfect life and die for our sins so we don't have to be separated from the glorious eternity God has planned for us. One thing I have to constantly remind myself is the Lord is the only thing who can fill that ache that I feel so deeply and I feel like a lot of us feel so deeply. None of our attempts at perfection will ever fill that void. No matter what I do, nothing is gonna fill that void and I have to just remember that only God and His plan is perfect.

Ashley Hodges: Secondly, perfection is a sin. It's really a trap, I think it's the enemy's way of convincing us that we can somehow earn our worth. At least for me, I just feel like there's so many things I do to try and feel worthy or to earn my worth and my worth was totally wrapped up in that lie. But if I can just post one more perfect picture, or produce one more perfect blog post, or do this project perfectly that I would somehow earn my worth or prove that I was a good blogger. And especially when it came to David and I, I thought that if I could write the perfect post about everything I've learned in marriage and attend every church event, and cook dinner every night, and keep my house clean, and above all making sure not to say or do the wrong thing that I would somehow prove that I was a good pastor's wife. I thought all this stuff perfectly would make me worthy of having influence in the ministry world, and the reality is that's just exhausting to constantly wake up and feel like I have to prove myself and prove my worth.

Ashley Hodges: But the truth is I'm worthy because I am a child of God, and it's my conviction in Christ, not my perfect performance, that gives me my worth. I have to remind myself of that. I have two scriptures that I like to, I'm a Post-it note girl, I like to put Post-it notes on my mirror and just remind myself cause I can get so caught up in my head sometimes. Two verses that I love to hold on to, especially when the perfectionism is just so strong in my life, is Psalm 18:32 and it says, "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my weight perfect." And Ephesians 2:8-10, "For it is by grace you have faith, you have been saved through faith and this not from yourself it is a gift from God. Not by works so that no one can boast, so we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good work. Which God

prepared for us in advance to do." And another one is Psalm 139:14, "I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, my soul knows it well."

Meredith Brock: Wow, Ash. I am scribbling down notes over here just cause I think so much of what you're saying is such good truth and such good reminders for us in a world where I feel like, our world is screaming at us, "Be perfect. Be flawless. Be accomplished, be successful." And it just seems to drive a hole, where it's just this void that sucks more things down into it the more we try to feed it instead of really addressing like you said, what it really is. And it's that longing for the Garden of Eden, that we really were created for perfection, but perfection with our God. Not here in this very flawed and sinful world. Man, such good things!

Meredith Brock: One of the things that I really have wrestled with personally, I think those who are really close to me know this, but those who might see me from a distance would think that I struggle with perfectionism, because I do a lot. I get a lot done and I do it well. But I don't actually struggle with perfectionism, I am far more of an achiever meaning I want to get a lot done, and as long as it's done well I'm good. But it doesn't have to be perfect, it doesn't paralyze me the way that I have seen others be paralyzed by perfection. And I realized this when I had my little boy, Harvey. I have a 6-year-old little boy who I cannot even explain what it has been like to watch him. This last year he's learning how to write and learning how to read and it is paralyzing for him if he can't make an "E" perfect. Like the "E" needs to have the straight part, and then the curved part, and it can't be too curved because then it looks like an "O," and it will literally, he can't talk himself out of this cycle and then before I know it he's on the floor crying because he didn't make his "E" perfect.

Meredith Brock: My husband and I have had a lot of conversations about how can we help sweet Harvey process this perfection? Perfectionism that he is struggling with, first I want to say, completely one hundred percent honestly, I'm still learning how to do that. He's 6, and some days I feel like I do it okay and some days I feel like, sweet Jesus, take my little boy in your hands cause I see how hard it is. But what's really interesting Ashley, is that one afternoon Harvey was having an incredibly difficult time with something he was making, I can't even remember what it was, but he got so worked up about the fact that it wasn't perfect. I was at a total loss, I didn't know what to do.

Meredith Brock: I took him to this scripture, Psalm 139:14 to help him process, "Hey buddy, it's not a reflection of you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. This thing that you're working on that is just an exterior thing, but you are still so fearfully and wonderfully made." And this little thing that you're working on whether it's an art project or a blog post, or a podcast that we're doing right here. Kaley right now is like, "Is this perfect? Is this perfect?" I'm not, I'm like "Is it getting done? Is it getting done?" But for me to be able to show him that what you do on the exterior is not an indication of your worth and it is okay to be imperfect, but we still strive for excellence.

Meredith Brock: Now wait, let's pause there. That's confusing. Ashley, I've heard you talk a little bit about this, so what have you learned about the difference between perfectionism and excellence?

Ashley Hodges: Wow that's such a great question because I think that the first thing I realized was that my worth doesn't get wrapped up in this whole perfectionism thing and that I am worthy and I don't have to prove my worth. So then I went to this season where I was just like, get it done. 'Cause like you Meredith, I'm an achiever but because I have that perfectionism in me I tend to sometimes procrastinate, and then I get mad because I'm not achieving. So it's just a never-ending cycle. Finally I was like, okay I'm not gonna be a perfectionist, I'm just gonna let it go. But then the content and the things that are being created were not good and it was making me even more mad. So then I was like, "All right Lord, this is so hard. How do I still produce excellent content? Where's the line between excellence and perfection?"

Kaley Olson: Yes.

Ashley Hodges: I think God showed me that excellence and perfection are two completely different things, and yes God created me with a special eye for excellence and I love that He did that. But I just can't take it too far and over the line to the point of perfection and I love this quote by Jon Bloom — he said, "When we pursue excellence we're determined to do something as well as possible, within a given set of talent, resource, and time limits." So again, it's like that line of this is what excellence is but then when you cross over that line and you take it too far he says that "Perfectionism is a pride or fear-based compulsion that fuels our obsessive fixation on doing something perfectly to prove our worth." And I think that's so true. I think that's worded so perfectly, because perfection is our desire for acceptance and fear of rejection, and fear of what people think of us.

Ashley Hodges: And excellence is being confident in the skills God has given you, and giving it your best shot without fear of failure. You see, excellence is fueled from having confidence and who God says you are, and perfection is totally fueled by insecurity. I love what Colossians 3:23 says, it says, "Whatever you do, work at it with your whole heart as if working for the Lord and not for men." So again I just have to remind myself, let me do the best I can and I give myself a time limit on it and I also know okay this is what I can create, so I can't set an unrealistic standard or expectation of something that I know that I can't create cause then I'm just gonna get trapped in this never-ending cycle of perfectionism. So I just have to be okay and know I gave it my all and I think it's excellent and I have to be confident in that.

Meredith Brock: So good.

Kaley Olson: Yeah that's good, Ashley, and I love that you even admitted a little bit how you got fed up with your perfectionism, and then just decided to do it and put it out there. I wrote down here, it says "Giving up perfection is not a free pass." It doesn't mean when I give up perfection I have a free pass and can just slop

something together and hand it in, but if I am striving for excellence then there's freedom in knowing that I'm doing my best. Like you said there are some time limits and things that you can give yourself; I love how practical that is. Do you have any more practical steps that maybe we can take to overcome perfectionism? And what does that look like?

Ashley Hodges: Yeah, so actually in my blog post I narrowed it down to four steps that for me, personally, have helped me overcome perfectionism and I can go over those with y'all. So the first one is be prepared. Meditate on who God says you are and how much He loves you daily, that's huge for me cause I have to know that I am worthy before I set out to do something; otherwise, I'm gonna get caught up in the lie that I have to prove my worth. I remind myself, like I said that I'm worthy because God says so and He believes I'm so worthy that I'm worth dying on the cross for. I don't know, that's just huge. It's not just a saying; He legit went and died on a cross for us and before doing something I ask myself, "Am I doing this because I'm trying to prove my worthiness to cover up an insecurity I have?" And if the answer is yes then I have to just stop and reevaluate. I think that, at least for me, it's so worth it just because otherwise you're gonna go down that trail of perfectionism and it's just gonna steal your joy and you're basically just handing your joy over to the enemy. For me, it's a disaster.

Ashley Hodges: The next thing is to set realistic goals. Be realistic with your goals and expectations. Now don't get me wrong, having big dreams is a great thing and that's not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about actual goals and expectations that you have. 'Cause having unrealistic goals and expectations is setting yourself up to fail and be disappointed and ultimately lose your joy, and just sacrifice too much in your relationship.

Ashley Hodges: And the third one is be okay with failing. I love this quote by this woman named Jen, she says, "It's okay to fail. I know it doesn't feel like it, I know you don't want to, but really, it's okay. You can fail and still be loved, you can fail and still be worthy of love, and believe it or not, failure can actually be a good thing. When we fail, we are given the opportunity to affirm the reality that we are just human beings, not human 'doings.' Failure also gives us the chance to ask for help and rely more fully on God." I just love that quote so much and sometimes I wake up, I'm like "Okay, I'm not perfect. No one's perfect. And I'm just gonna go ahead and give myself a pass today to fail and be okay with it." If I fail at something, whether the blog post went out and it had typos or my husband wanted me at an event and I got stuck in traffic and I didn't get there, or the dinner was horrible which that happens all the time. It's like, I'm already setting myself to know I can't be perfect so then when I do fail it's not like the world is ending. It's all right; you know what, I failed.

Ashley Hodges: Guess what? There's so many things that I did do great and that's leading me to my next point which is celebrate your wins. I just think that's a huge one, just celebrating the wins and looking at all the good things that you did and looking at everything you did right rather than focusing on everything that you did wrong.

Meredith Brock: Wow, Ashley, those are such clear, concise, do-able steps. I wanna recap them very quickly for people because I think that this is worth writing down for people. The first one that you said is be prepared. And in my mind I think that means, you know, what if I know I'm a perfectionist, let's go ahead and start the battle before I'm in it. I want to win this battle. Being prepared for the fact, admitting I'm a perfectionist, I am gonna fight this battle, I'm gonna fight it by living from a place that I know that I'm loved. I'm already loved, so I think that's so solid.

Meredith Brock: Second step, set realistic goals. Stop putting yourself in a place where you say, "I'm gonna do all this stuff," and then you really can't because there's only 24 hours in a day, right? Third step, be okay with failing, that's so good, knowing that that is part of the process. For a perfectionist, or for a not-perfectionist, I think that's a hard one, so be okay. All of us have to get to a place where we're okay with failing as long as we learn from that. And that last step is probably the hardest for me because I'm on to the next thing but celebrating your wins is hard. It's hard for some of us to slow down enough to say hey, "Hey, I did that and it was good. And I can stop and celebrate that God used me in that way." Or that I have made progress in that area. So so good, I love from all of this, I think one of the biggest things seems kind of elementary in my mind is such basic component of our faith, and what I'm gonna take away from today is only God is perfect. That's not my job.

Kaley Olson: Yeah.

Meredith Brock: It's not my job and I can rest in knowing that I am flawed and He is my Savior. Because I am so deeply flawed I need Him so deeply. So really good stuff Ashley, thank you for sharing with us today. Kaley, what about you?

Kaley Olson: Yeah well I wrote down this line that you mentioned earlier, you said, "Am I doing this because I'm trying to prove my worthiness to cover up an insecurity?" And a lot of times whenever we're struggling with something we kind of want to pass it, because it's too hard and we don't want to dial into it but I think in those moments that's when the Lord really does want us to lean in because a lot of times whenever something surfaces it's not a good feeling or it's ugly and we don't want to deal with it. But when we get frustrated, we have to remember, Ashley your mom says this, "My feelings are indicators not dictators."

Meredith Brock: Right; that's right.

Ashley Hodges: Yeah.

Kaley Olson: And feelings are indicators that something is up inside and I need to deal with it and maybe God is trying to teach me something to make me better, maybe He would rather help me get over an insecurity that I have than help me be perfect on something that I'm trying to do because that's not really gonna solve the issue.

Meredith Brock: That's so good, and even for people like me who may not struggle with the exact motivation of everything being perfect. Like I said earlier I'm much more of an achiever, I wanna check off the list and get as much done as I can in a day. I think one of the things that I really have enjoyed about today's conversation is that this continues to give me a little peek behind the curtain of some of my dearest friends, of my 6-year-old little boy who struggles with perfection and realizing that it's a really really deep struggle for a lot of people that I think if Satan has his way will really push you away from God instead of toward Him. When there really is, if you can open up about it and be honest and vulnerable like you have, Ashley, and let the Lord really speak to your heart in that way, it can be such a beautiful gateway for God's love into your heart and so I just hope anybody today who whether you're a perfectionist and you're saying okay it's time, it's time for me to take these four steps to admit that I really am a perfectionist. Prepare my heart. Set realistic goals, be okay with failing and celebrate my wins. Or if you're like me, it's good for you to lean in and say Lord how can I love those around me who are struggling with perfection? And who I see are keeping themselves up at night trying to figure out how to make something perfect or working themselves to death to where they're not eating or sleeping. How can I love those people around me? To push them toward the acceptance and love that God has to offer them. So good stuff, really good stuff.

Kaley Olson: Yeah that's really good. Thank you so much for your teaching today, Ashley, and I think my favorite thing about what you taught us today was that it's practical. Meredith just reviewed the four steps and I think for those of us who struggle with perfection and I'm sure you can identify with me here Ashley, we don't need another set of rules to follow up and measure up to. I think there's freedom in these little parameters instead of something else to have added to our list. Well if you learned something from Ashley's teaching today then share what you're learning with us on social media and tag us @proverbs31ministries. We would love to know what you're learning on the podcast.

Meredith Brock: You can even take it a step further and share it with a friend. Maybe you have a girlfriend that you know struggles with perfectionism in her life and you know that this teaching would help her. Send her the link! Let her know about this episode; I hope that it sets her free.

Kaley Olson: Yeah and for more information on the podcast or all the amazing free resources you can get from Proverbs 31 Ministries, just visit proverbs31.org.

Meredith Brock: Thanks so much for joining us today everyone, we pray that today's message is truth you can apply to your life right now today, wherever you're at in life. We'll see you next time.