

Chapter One:

You!

Self Esteem

Jesus answered, the first is, hear oh Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Mark 12:29-31

You were born perfect. There was nothing in your history. There were no bullies, no failed baseball games, and no job firings. There was no hatred, loathing, or mistrust. It was a perfect thing when you were born. If all goes well, you will find a way to understand that this is true of you and your neighbors.

Ask yourself this question: If anyone else treated you the way you treat yourself, how would you react to that person? If you smoke, imagine that someone else forced you or your children to smoke. How would you react? If you work on projects until the wee hours of the morning, how would you react to an employer who asked you to work that hard? If you have a hard time determining your own value, and you cannot say “I am a great creature made in the image and likeness of God,” when you look in a mirror, how do you treat people at the grocery store who tell you that you are worthless? How do you feel about your spouse when he or she tells you that you are worthless?

Self esteem is one of the rarest commodities known to mankind. The lack thereof is the underlying cause of all evil that man has ever brought upon himself. Volcanoes and earthquakes, tidal waves and tornadoes, floods and hurricanes may all happen on this fine planet with or without self esteem, but every other negative event begins and ends with it. The lack of self esteem can be easily attributed to every death perpetrated by one human upon another beginning with Cain and Abel, and following throughout history to the Iraq War or the streets of New York or LA. If anywhere there is one human being hurting another, its cause is related to the lack of self esteem.

Let us examine this premise. How could self esteem be the cause of say, the race riots of the 1960's? This one is easy; since very simply applying the words of Jesus makes the riots go away. Who would participate in a riot if he or she was busy loving his or her neighbor as himself or herself? If you love your neighbor as yourself, you would not do anything that results in harming either your neighbor or yourself.

In fact, during the race riots, and this is true of all riots in all cities, participants actively hurt their neighbors. If you eliminate this simple fact from the story, it is no longer a riot; it is a neighborhood block party. But that does not spell out the entire scenario.

If I am busy loving my neighbor as myself, I do not feel inferior or superior to my neighbor, but rather the equal of my neighbor. There would be no riots because there would be nothing to motivate a riot. There would be no whites behaving badly. There would be no African-American – or any other hyphenated Americans – who feel a need to fight for distinction or equality. We should make our frame of reference the notion that every other human who comes into contact with us is, in fact, our equal. This is true of a dinner luncheon with the United States president or across the table from a homeless person at a soup kitchen. We are neither better than they are or less than they are. And if we have brothers and sisters, our impression of them cannot be based on failures we remember from our childhood, or even last week. They too, are our equal.

The bottom line is, if you truly love yourself, then and only then, can you truly love your neighbor.

**It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him.
A. Lincoln, August 14, 1862**

Lack of self-esteem is also the number one cause of violence in the home. The importance of this cannot be over emphasized. The number one cause of death in infants less than one year of age in the United States of America is homicide. The most dangerous place for a woman in the United States of America is in her own home. It is time to shake things up, and each one of us to take note of what society we are building for our children, and in doing so, take our own lives to the level that we want.

The author has learned that ten years prior to this writing, nearly 2000 adult murders occurred within families. Of those, roughly 1500 were women victims. Allow a small translation: Every Single Day in 1998, an average, 5.5 people were murdered by their spouse. That was every single day. Do you realize what this says about people as a whole? Not only are we willing to kill each other, we are willing to watch as others among us kill each other!

The Center for Disease Control reports that in the year 2005, for every hundred thousand people, nineteen point six (19.6) white men, four point nine (4.9) white women, nine point two (9.2) Black men, one point nine (1.9) Black women, nine point four (9.4) Hispanic men and one point eight (1.8) Hispanic women took their own life! This same report says there were eighteen thousand, one hundred twenty-four (18,124) people had someone take their life for them (they were murder victims)!

In 2005, for every one hundred thousand babies born in the United States, seven point five (7.5) of them were murdered before their first birthday. These are babies! (This does not include the million or so babies murdered while still in the womb each year by “choice.”) They cannot walk,

they cannot talk, they are clearly as perfect as human beings can be. The self esteem problem cannot be allowed to be any bigger.

As of this writing, the United States is involved in a terrible war in the Iraqi theatre. We see signs on every third yard that say “end the war” or “bring home our troops.” As of this writing, we have been at war there approximately 6 years. In that time, the United States has donated the lives of 4113 of the very finest and bravest military people the world has ever known. The average there is 1.8 deaths per day. Statistically, we are killing a little more than three times as many citizens in domestic violence every day than are dying in a current war on the other side of the world. Should we not get some yard signs that say, “Make peace at home”?

Nearly three times as many women die every day because of the murder committed by their husbands than are soldiers (who are paid to fight and die) dying in the war in Iraq. If we cannot see a problem with self esteem, or at the very least, our priorities from these facts, someone should probably hit us with a shovel. Not counting deaths from the disease of smoking and those things related to it (which includes all forms of cancer and heart disease and strokes, which encompass the top four killers according the CDC), humans killing humans in only these statistics (we are not counting death by homicide or suicide for ages 1 to 18), sixty four thousand, nine hundred twenty-four (64,924) people died in the United States alone in the year 2005 by HOMICIDE.

This does not address the problems that arise when a parent abuses a child, or when a maladjusted parent uses children to abuse the partner. And while women may do the larger share of the dying in these domestic statistics, they are by no means the only victims. In the statistics referenced above, 1.5 million cases of domestic adult abuse were reported. 874,000 had women victims, 832,000 had men victims. This problem exists on both sides of the gender lines.

Just as it is true that each of these problems can trace its origins to the lack of self esteem, if you add self esteem to any conflict, that conflict can be resolved. The chapter on making friends will address this issue more, but here, we are not writing to change the planet all at once; we are writing to one person at a time. It is done this way because YOU are worth it. This text is not intended to be a journal of statistics detailing the problems within relationships in the world, but rather a description of the fundamental need and the method of correcting problems on an individual level that will allow societal change on a global level.

If you are a person who has experience with this, and the majority of the readers will find that they are, or if you are not, either way, this book is called The Rags To Riches Project because the details of the project are described and laid out in the way necessary for each person who follows the example to achieve the riches that they desire, no matter how you define the word “riches” or who you are.

Every person alive, every person who ever lived, and every person yet to be born is forced to make a simple choice every day of their lives. The choice has never changed since Adam and Eve or the Neanderthals and the Homo sapiens. In the days of Jesus, Gandhi, Genghis Khan, Shakespeare, Mussolini, Hitler, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln, there was always this choice. The authors make the same choice. You make the same choice.

The choice is made first when we open our eyes at the beginning of the day. Each moment that passes the choice is remade. Some of us do not realize we are making the choice, but we make it none the less. Some of us wish secretly that we could make the choice different than we do, but we are deceiving ourselves when we think this way, because each of us individually and only all alone can make the choice. No bad guy holds a gun to our heads telling us what to choose between these two things.

It is a toss of a coin, really. It is one of the most fundamental concepts that will lead us to all other things. What is this choice that has such far reaching consequences? As surely as this ink appears on this page, the choice is which of two emotions you are choosing to experience right now. There are only two.

There are only the two, and each moment you are conscious, you actively choose one or the other. Your subconscious mind will continue your choice while you sleep, which will have a direct impact on the dreams you experience during your sleep.

If you choose the stronger of the two, you will see peace and harmony every where and with every turn. You will only find courteous drivers on the highway. Your wait staff will always be in a good mood. You will always find your car keys. And your kids will always be perfect. And while you sleep at night, you will find that the nightmares that can sometimes wake you from an otherwise peaceful night of sleep will go away. You will still dream, but the dreams will not frighten you anymore.

If you choose the weaker of these two emotions, you will find fault with everyone. You will find few people who like you. You will be stuck in traffic. Your wait staff person will be having a bad day. Your kids will always argue and fight with every decision you make. The world, in general, will be an ugly place. Your sleep at night will contain dreams that occasionally wake you from fright. The nightmares may not be every night, but most certainly they will be there. What are these two emotions? Love and Fear.

When you argue with your spouse, it is very easy to slip into fear: fear of being rejected; fear of being disliked; or the fear of saying the wrong thing, among many other fears. It is during these times that we need to concentrate on being in love. If you can stop the argument long enough to ask yourself why you are afraid, odds are that calmer heads will prevail and the argument will dissipate. If you are fortunate enough to have a mate with similar beliefs, your arguments will be eliminated in short order.

What is Fear, anyway? The best definition of Fear that I have found is in Denis Waitley's book, *Seeds of Greatness*, when he introduces the acronym False Education Appearing Real (34). Think about this a minute. If you are afraid of anything, your defenses go up, your heart rate increases, your breathing becomes faster, and your senses are heightened. Often you find yourself in a first strike situation if you have been there before. It is easy to find examples of people describing Fear as ignorance. As soon as we learn about something, we are rarely still afraid of it.

Jane was a middle aged woman who lived unaware that there was anything she could do about her circumstances. She inherited some money from her father's death that should have been enough to survive in her lifestyle for a decade or more. But Jane lived her life in Fear. Jane received phone calls from her grown children, she received calls from musicians who played with her second husband's band, and she received calls from both her former husbands; everyone needing help, and the only help that would suffice was monetary. The two grown children each took their new car with a smile on their face. The teenager enjoyed shopping for new clothes, phones, and music devices. The people who came from the distant past all went away with the short lived smiles that only money can buy.

Failing to create a plan for us humans is the equivalent of making a plan to avoid success. Oh, and there was one single plan that Jane did make.

She planned to invest in a small company that purchased her deceased father's home; the home where she grew up; the home she wanted for herself. In exchange for investing a little over half of her inheritance, she would hold forty nine point nine percent of the company that would remodel the home. She would be allowed to live there rent/mortgage free for two years, and receive half of the profit when, after two years, the newly remodeled home was offered for sale and sold.

She had it all – her dream house for two years, until her teenager would graduate from school and move on to college. She also had her nest egg in the house, confident that it would sell for a great profit at the end of the two years. Her take was estimated to be six digits left of the decimal, the first being a three. The plan was set. She began to pay the money to invest. But there was a problem.

Her family and friends told her she was making a mistake. And obviously, in their mind, she was. If she invested this money in her own future, there would not be any left to invest in their present.

The voices of her friends won the day and she cancelled her partnership twenty months before its maturity. This had consumed approximately thirty percent of her total inheritance. This was false education appearing real. This was friends, in name only, spreading their fear. And as assuredly as you can catch a cold if you are not careful, you can catch fear. The false education came from these friends who had never owned a home, who had never owned or even participated in their own business, and who did not love themselves and therefore could not love their neighbor.

Jane gave in to this false education, and six months later, she had nothing. She frantically started calling everyone she knew looking for financial help. She called social services who told her she had inherited too much to qualify for any social programs. She went back to the people who were interested in her partnership and while crying, asked if she could have some money back. She even demanded that they owed it to her.

Jane believed that if she could get the money she had invested returned, all would be well. But if she squandered seventy percent in six months, how long would her fear allow her to keep thirty percent?

Even Jane's children could not offer her any help. Not even the new cars could be used to help their own mother buy food.

Jane lived in Fear, and now her worst Fears were a reality. They always were real, now she was living in them. She was a middle aged woman with no money, no family, no career, and now, no hope.

Keith grew up in an era when it was acceptable (by most) for white people to segregate themselves from all other races. He went through puberty during the Second World War. Because of this, he (a white man) believed to an extent that African-American people should be thought of as lower class, as thieves, as criminals who are on their way to commit a crime. But did he ever meet a person who was African-American? Or Latino? Or even Native American? No. He, himself had lived in a segregated environment, where any race other than white was not to be found. His belief was based on ignorance. It was his False Education Appearing Real. How would he feel and what would he believe if he spent an hour in conversation with Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice? What would be his reaction if he spent an hour with Lloyd X (a good friend of the author who happens to be of African descent)? Chances are, his education would be adjusted; his fear would be lessened.

What about Jane? Her False Education Appeared Real when everyone treated her as a friend. This only occurred because she had a little cash, but she felt that she was helping friends and family who would, in turn, help her when she needed it. She spent her time throwing away what she had, trying to buy self esteem from people who did not have it for sale. Her False Education is that she is supposed to be impoverished. And her False Education is also her self fulfilling prophecy.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This was the single most difficult thing for the author to understand while he was growing up. If the author loved his neighbor as himself, neither would stand a chance! The author grew up in a home in which the term self esteem was often expressed, but usually it was expressed as a hopeful goal, not a reality. No member of the home had the knowledge to teach self esteem.

Throughout this book, you will find examples of laws of the Universe, and the first one of those is here: If you do not possess a thing, you cannot sell it, or even give it away. If you do not love yourself, you cannot love another.

This self love can be described in three levels. Let us consider for a moment; one day, little Mary, who was four years old, was showing that she was a "big" girl by helping herself to some juice in the refrigerator. The juice was kept in an antique glass picture that was irreplaceable. Now, we can see right away that self esteem exists in this family because the expensive irreplaceable picture is in use. The value of the thing is not above the value of the people in the

house. The little girl drops and breaks the picture in a million tiny shards of glass. Now, here we have a perfect plant for self esteem.

The parents of this child may react by yelling and screaming about a broken picture that is irreplaceable, and what a foolish thing to have broken it; but no, this house immediately goes to the attention of the little girl. It is just a thing, and things can be replaced. In this example the parents would be sure the child is not hurt, that the fear that the child would surely feel is unfounded. Then, the parents could calmly discuss the impracticality of carrying a heavy picture of juice on a slippery kitchen floor with slippery socks.

In another example, there are a couple guys who are friends. The first is asked by someone to travel by auto to pick up a race horse and trailer some miles away and he asks the second to ride along. On the return trip, the second notices that the first is driving with a white knuckle grip on the wheel. When the second points this out to the first, the first replies, "I've never had anything this valuable in my car before."

Of course, the second then screams at the first, "I'm a human being, and I'm sitting right next to you!"

In this second level of development, animals are shown to have a higher value than humans. The author is sometimes reminded of this in his own home, when his wife tells the dog to "go to Daddy."

The last level, the highest level, is when we can honestly admit and behave as if we know the truth. We must acknowledge that we have the power to think. Because we have the power to think, we have the power to change our thoughts to those thoughts that instill the most perfect level of self esteem. We have the power to think that we have unsurpassed value – each and every one of us.

WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL

Exactly 3.8 billion years ago, give or take a few, this planet that we live on transformed, or began transforming, from a despicable place with no oxygen, no life, only unpleasantness, into a wonderful beautiful, full of life planet that we have today.

The first transmutation that took place probably involved electrical storms casting lightning about and a few atoms and molecules bouncing into one another until just the right mix occurred to create a few amino acids. Without going into too many details, that is a form of protein. We all need protein.

A billion years go by and these proteins start to evolve and change and pretty soon, we have single celled organisms that eat, metabolize their food, and reproduce. A by-product of this is a little something we call oxygen. This is based on experiments conducted in 1956, when Harold Urey proposed that life began because of the earth's atmosphere, and he oversaw the experiments conducted by his student Stanley Miller based on this premise. Miller's experiments

used ammonia, methane, and hydrogen and introduced electrical discharges (like lightning) as a catalyst. His results produced amino acids.

Well, you know where this is headed. Pretty soon, say another half a billion years, and a few more electrical storms, and water covers the planet. Then etcetera, etcetera, man comes along. But this is something that needs to be examined.

Man was developed from what, exactly? Well, in God's image, yes, but what happened to set man apart? Mankind is the only life form that has the ability to think. Even little microscopic creatures have brains, but only mankind can think. Not only did this life form evolve into what it is today, it can evaluate the world around it and try, through experimentation and examination, to figure out from where it came. The authors state that this particular phenomenon makes mankind extremely valuable. It also helps us to understand that we are all made of the same stuff. The same atoms, molecules and strings of energy that make up a rock found on the side of the road go into making mankind.

Each and every one of us without any other thing to offer is extremely valuable.

The electrons in any human body are sufficient enough to power any major city with electricity for a month¹. Wow. That is a lot of electricity. Because it is so much easier for us to think about it in measurable quantities, let us use dollars. Consider the average major city uses 846.76 million kilowatts per hour. At an average rate of 15 cents each, this adds up to \$91,450,080,000.00. That is in American money.

Now if anyone ever asks you what you are worth, you have a dollar figure you can share. If you need something else to compare that with, Bill Gates, the second wealthiest man in the world today, is said to be worth only \$58 billion. You are now worth almost twice that.

Who is the most important person in the world today? Is it the queen of England? The prime minister? The author? The president of the United States? The president of the United Nations? The Pope? Any one of the multitude of celebrities we have in the world? Your parents? Your brothers and sisters? Is it Bill Gates? How about your children? Perhaps your pastor? No. None of these. The most important person in the world is YOU.

That may be the most important single sentence in this book. Wrap your mind around it for a moment. Take your time. Remember all those negative thoughts from your childhood? Remember when your parents missed your sporting event? Anyone in your family miss a birthday? Did you wear "hand-me-downs"? Were you ever on the receiving end of corporal punishment? Or any physical abuse? How about mental abuse? Were you ever ignored? All of these things fall into a single category: Not your fault. The perpetrators of those things did not understand that you are the most important person in the world, then and now. Now, the author believes the importance of that sentence. Let us repeat it for clarification.

Let us say emphatically and without reservation that the most important person in the world is you. You are the single most important person on the planet.

The way to come to grips with this thought and make it your own is to meditate on it. Quietly and without interruption; repeatedly, stated out loud, engrained into your subconscious mind: “I am the most important person in the entire world.” Say it daily into a mirror. Understand its importance. Know that only with the truthful realization of this fact come all other good things in this lifetime.

Let us say, for example, that you are a parent. It would be easy to say and most people would allow you to say your kids are more important. But the author would present to you, “who will take care of them if you are not here?” What if you get hit by a bus on the way home? What if you become ill, too ill to even get out of bed? Who will help your children? Those of us who are parents owe it to our children to think highly of ourselves for two primary reasons: first, only by treating ourselves as most important can we be assured to be physically and mentally prepared to give the very best we can to our children; and second, through our example is the only way we can be sure to teach these things to our children.

An illustration can be made from this story. In the early 1990’s, the author found himself in a ten-K run, which was a fundraising event for charity. During the course of this event, while the author ran, he thought about a day when he heard his father tell him about a wart on his foot. It was many years earlier, maybe in the 1960’s, when the father went to a doctor’s office to have this wart removed from his foot. This doctor’s visit was conducted during a lunch break from work, and the doctor was instructed to remove the wart without the use of any anesthetic and there was no request for pain medication. The rationalization that he needed to go back to work was used, and back to work he did go. The author continued this ten k run while remembering the quote, “I had a boot full of blood, but I went back to work.” The father continued to work for the remainder of the week, never missing an assigned minute of his schedule; even working overtime.

These were the thoughts of the author as he ran this ten K marathon for charity. These were the thoughts of the author as his knee started to throb with pain around the second kilometer. These were the thoughts he carried with him past kilometers numbering four, five and six. And these were the thoughts – nearly the only thoughts – in his mind when he fell to the ground at kilometer number eight. There he waited for the passing truck to pick him up. These were his thoughts.

What was not in his thoughts then was all the time missed by his father. All the nights at home in pain so great not even alcohol could calm it down. The pain so great that when he came home, not only did he crawl into a bottle to hide it, he hid behind his bedroom door so as not to be disturbed by his children. The time was lost that could have been spent with his children.

In the weeks that followed this charity event, the author followed through his diligence with six weeks of physical therapy and pain numbing medications. It was six long weeks of not having the strength to go swimming with his young son. Six weeks of excuses that kept him from spending quality time with his own young family.

Is this an extreme example to prove a point? No, a perfect example of two generations of what not to do. You must love yourself enough to take care of yourself first, so you can take care of and spend time with your family.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," but better words for some of us may be to "love yourself as your neighbor."

Now, if you, as an industrious individual, have anything in common with any of this, do not be surprised. The common denominator for most who read this will be something similar. Not only should you not be surprised, but you should know it does not make you bad. More important still would be that it is not your fault. It is only your reality when you allow it into your thoughts, which we will discuss in greater detail in a later chapter.

Some years ago, a late night television show did a parody of a (then) well-known psychologist who would look at his reflection in the mirror and recite positive affirmations like, "you're good enough, and you're smart enough." This was both sad and good. It was sad because it was a successful parody. Sad because the success of it demonstrates how far as a society we have slipped down the negative slopes to think it is alright to merely be "good enough."

The good part of it is that the affirmations from you to you are a wonderful tool. If you tell yourself – particularly out loud – to live each day in "love" you will do so. But strive to be the best, because you are above "good enough." You are the best. If you say it enough, often enough, and with conviction, your subconscious mind will pick it up and it will become your life. Your children were born thinking of you as the best. You should be ready to give that to them.

Of course, having money makes this easier. There is nothing wrong with a good strong work ethic. But there is something wrong with thinking that you are doing the best you can when you do not have enough to take care of yourself and your family. That is not the best you can do.

As a Catholic, I believe in Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Heaven is the place we will go if we die without sin and in a condition of sanctifying grace. Hell is where we go if we die in a state of mortal sin. Purgatory is like Hell, but we believe that once our earthly sins have been purged, we will then be promoted to Heaven.

I have many friends and acquaintances who have allowed me to witness them to say, "I'm going to Purgatory and that's good enough for me." The author sees a problem with happy Catholics smiling as they say, "I'm going to Purgatory." As someone who strives for greatness, why would you want to strive for mediocrity? What does our Creator think when we tell Him that we are not working to meet Him, but working instead to come a little bit short? That our goal is to come up short? Does any Olympic athlete train for four years so that he or she can win the bronze? Or do they all train for the Gold?

Each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We are not God, and what a boring place this would be if we were! But we are made in the image and likeness of God. As such, we can and have achieved great things. Nothing is impossible.

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain,

`Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. " MT 17:20

The God I know does not want any of us to settle for mediocrity. To all those Catholics (and any other humans) the author asks, “are you giving your best? Why not?”

Who among you has special dispensation from the law of gravity? Which one of you is without sin? Where in these large groups of people, is the one who can already walk on water? Are you truly giving your best? You who are created in the image and likeness of the Almighty Creator; He did not settle when He made you, why would you settle for less than to meet Him?

Purgatory is not the goal. Go for the gold! Grab that brass ring! Do not stop until you have given your best, and then give a little more.

A long time ago, Thomas Edison invented the electric light. With this masterful invention, all of us today and forever more will have easier lives; able to see in the dark. Edison’s efforts to create this light are the stuff with which all history books are filled. Interesting as this is, he was once interviewed by someone on this subject and about his many trials and errors, when he said, “if I had not found the way to make the light work, I would be working on it right now instead of talking to you.” And this was many years after he had found the way to make it work.

What if Edison would have been striving for Purgatory? Perhaps he would have quit after say, six hundred attempts instead of his noted ten thousand. Perhaps another scientist would have found a way to make it work, but when?

Be like Edison. Work completely. Love yourself enough to see it through.

MAKING MISTAKES

We all sin, and we all make mistakes. But we should be learning from our mistakes in an effort to become better people. If we cannot learn from our mistakes, why bother making them?

The author grew up in a home where the love received by the child was usually conditioned upon the behavior of the child. This means, as an example, there was more love if there were good grades from school, if curfew was followed, or if the house was kept clean. This is actually more common than one would think. It sets up the very next part of self esteem: making mistakes.

Think of it for just a moment or two. Did you grow up in an environment that was encouraging? Where you were praised for failure? Where you were expected to keep trying if whatever you were doing was not working? Or were you a little like the author, being admonished for spilling milk, being told you “couldn’t do it” when you announced you were about to try something new? Chances are, if you were allowed to make mistakes growing up, you are not reading this book. The phenomenon is also important in spousal relationships. The more you are told that you come up short by your spouse, the more your spouse will find that you come up short. It becomes your reality.

Being told you cannot do something is one of the most important things you should ignore in your life if you are to carry positive self esteem; particularly when you are told this by people who have never done what it is that you are trying to do, or people who are close to you. Remember, failure is not coming up short of your goal; it is compliance with other people's opinions. Our society does this to us all the time. This philosophy is reinforced every time we watch a movie or television program, every game show on the air, and almost every newspaper story reinforces this. Have you ever received a letter from a collection agency that said, "Bravo! Keep trying! We know you will get it right!" or are they a little more negative?

The author has not seen such a letter either. All this means that self esteem seems to be in direct alliance with all other parts of society. Ninety five percent of the resources are controlled by five percent of the people. Five percent have their beliefs lined up to support their self esteem. In order to achieve a level of self esteem suitable for whom we are and what we deserve, we must be prepared to go up against ninety five percent of the population. Ninety five percent of the people will tell us (willingly) that we are wrong until such time as we succeed, at which time they will envy us and call us "lucky." The other five percent will be difficult for us to find at first, but will associate with us more and more as we gain self esteem. As we gain success.

These things are what they are and we can accept them. These things are what they are and we can change them. You can think big or small, and as long as you keep thinking, you will keep moving in the right direction. Allow this example:

Thomas Edison is well known for creating incandescent light using electricity as fuel and has already been mentioned here in this chapter. Many of us are even aware of his "failure" rate. He was asked by a reporter how it felt to fail ten thousand times. He replied, "I didn't fail ten thousand times, I learned ten thousand ways it didn't work."

Edison is known for his great contributions to the people as a whole. In his lifetime he managed to accumulate over a thousand patents. Could any person do such a thing who did not allow himself (or herself) to fail? Imagine the world we could live in if we were taught early on in life that it is OK to fail and that failure is encouraged? In fact, one of Edison's first failures was when he was quite young and the school system asked him to leave and not return.

Over a hundred years ago, he was asked by a young employee about the rules at his West Orange, NJ laboratory. "There ain't no rules around here," he said, "we're trying to accomplish something." This totally changes that whole no running with scissors thing, not to mention the quiet, Mommy's sleeping, or you can't play outside in the rain things.

The author remembers a time during his young adult life when employed at a local roller skating arena. While working one night, another man had come in who could skate like he was born with wheels on his feet. He could perform stunts, spins, tricks, in forward and backward directions. He was talented with both skates on the floor, with one skate on the floor, and with both skates in the air.

After watching this man skate with envy for an hour or two, the author watched this talented skater do something which resulted in an ugly fall. There were no injuries, which are actually uncommon in falls at the roller rink, were falls are common, and the author was close enough to

ask if he was all right and upon learning this, made the comment, “I didn’t think I would ever see you fall.”

At that, the talented skater replied nonchalantly, “if you aren’t falling down, you’re not learning anything new.” And he skated off, not realizing that he had left a very profound impact.

A year after that, the author began his career as an entertainer and he had made the announcement to his mother when they were all alone. The mother’s replied: “how long will you give it before you realized it failed?”

For the record, the entertainer’s career lasted twenty two years, played music at nearly a thousand wedding dances, on stage in over a thousand nightclubs, and performing in 14 states. That conversation with his mother took place in spring 1983. In the fall of 2005, the stage gear was sold and a failure was announced. (Yes, this is sarcasm.)

You see, in this example, the mother’s opinion did not become the child’s reality. And it is true for all of us. Someone’s opinion of us must not become our reality.

We must allow ourselves to fail. We must be allowed to make mistakes. Contrary to what most of us have learned throughout our lives, making mistakes must be encouraged, in ourselves and in our children. No one among us can make it through life without making them anyway, so we should embrace them. Mistakes are gifts from the Almighty God as a tool for us to become better at what we do and therefore they bring us closer to God. We should feel better when we stumble, and we should say thank you to the universe when we bump our heads on the cupboard door. We should be able to stand up and be proud whenever we find a way that does not work. And we should announce to the world who it is that owns this failure.

Mistakes can be our downfall. They can, if treated incorrectly, destroy our dreams. We must protect our dreams.

More often, however, mistakes can and do teach us, mold us, and guide us. We all know about Edison’s accomplishments, and now you have a better understanding of his failures. He had more than a thousand patents in his lifetime. If just one patent required ten thousand failures, how many failures did he have in his lifetime?

Jesus instructed us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He must have also wanted us to love ourselves with all our heart, and with all our soul and with our entire mind and with all our strength. Only in this way can we teach others how to treat us and teach our children how to treat themselves, and believe what Jesus taught us.

Dependency

Dependency encompasses the two killers of self esteem: addiction and codependency. The latter is the stealthy killer, associated only by proxy with the former. Together they form a nasty little circle

Codependency is defined as needing someone outside of ourselves to validate our existence; the man who bases himself on the love he receives from the woman in his life, or the child who feels the love they receive is based on the performance at home (keeping the house clean) or at school (sports or grades). It also transcends relationships into employment environments. Sometimes our self esteem is based upon the job we do for a living; and we push ourselves to perform better and receive raises as a testament to our own self image. None of these can reinforce the truth that we are born perfect.

Codependency is born out of dysfunctional family units. The simple definition is not functional. And functional on a very basic level is doing what works for you without fear. That means you live your life to the fullest, giving always your best, enjoying every moment. In essence, functional living is spending every day “in love,” with an absence of FEAR.

So, dysfunctional living is living with FEAR in control. If you are afraid your spouse is having an affair, if you think your job will terminate (and you do not wish this), if you think anyone wishes you harm, this is living in FEAR.

When you live in fear, the single most common symptom is pain. Unfortunately for those of us who experience this pain, there is nothing to allow others to see this pain. You do not have a cast on your arm or a bandage on your head. The two results that dysfunction can create from this pain are: codependency and addiction. And the circle continues.

Addiction happens when pain needs to be smothered in anything that puts a mask on it, whether it is illicit drugs, alcohol, prescription drugs, or cigarettes. Any of these things can change our mood and hide our pain. This change occurs by numbing our senses.

Our senses are gifts from God who created us in His own image and likeness. It is for us to use these senses for the accomplishments that God has sent for us. To mask them is to mask God. If we mask our senses long enough, our very chemical and electrical bodies experience a change in the central nervous system that can become sort of permanent. That is, the body becomes accustomed to the introduction of the chemical change and revolts when it is not there. We experience the physical pain of “withdrawals” when we do not add the mask to hide our pain in frequent enough intervals. This is called addiction.

The biggest problem associated with addiction is the behavior associated with it. A normally shy person becomes an extrovert with the introduction of alcohol. A depressed person becomes cheerful with the introduction of nicotine (which stimulates serotonin production in the brain), an honest person becomes a thief to support their habit, a caring person becomes insensitive. In extreme cases, these changes can leave open the window from which abuse of another person may enter.

Codependency springs forth from this familial archetype, usually not in the person who is ingesting the mood altering chemicals, but in the sober family members. The bottom line for codependents is control. Codependents believe they get their self worth from believing they are in control of an uncontrollable environment or family circle. A perfect plant for a fight exists whenever you have a dysfunctional person trying to control a functional person or another controlling dysfunctional person. Functional people cannot be controlled, and dysfunctional controlling people will fight for their belief that they are the best to be in control. This

manifestation is very remarkable (and a favorite of psychologists) when the codependent becomes the addict.

One hundred twenty years ago, Mabel was happy and lived with her husband George in a rural setting in the central part of the United States. They were farmers who were raising nine children (not uncommon for the time). They worked hard and enjoyed what life had to offer in a humble way, until the great flu epidemic of 1919 took Mabel from her beloved family, as well as a million other citizens of the country. The entire family had become sick and she was buried without the attendance of any of her children. This put a very difficult burden on the rest of the family.

George found another woman to be his wife and stepmother for his children, but by then, the damage had already begun. George Jr was grown and had found that his nerves would calm a bit with the introduction of whiskey. As George Jr's family grew, so too did his dependence on whiskey to calm his nerves. But he was not only calming his nerves, he was drowning in alcohol consumption. The whiskey became the master, and George Jr became the servant to the alcohol.

In a bout of drunkenness, George Jr lost his job and became even more self loathing and more self medicating. The alcohol would not allow him to see that it was the cause of his problems. He believed his problems came from everyone around him, not from within him. He could not love himself any more, and consequently, could not love his neighbor. While he was drunk, he would often act out violently toward his wife and children.

All of his sons grew up thinking this was acceptable behavior. Even the one who disavowed alcohol hung onto the idea that violence was the proper course to "teach" children and spouses. The first child always has it the worst in these families. This one will either follow in Dad's footsteps exactly and begin drinking at a very young age, often before puberty, or they will try with their whole heart, their whole soul, their whole mind, their whole body, and their whole strength to keep up appearances that all is OK. Who is this child today?

This child is the one with perfect grades and perfect clothes, although the clothes are most likely old, tattered and cheap (the best that the used clothing store can offer). This child takes care of siblings as if the other children were their own. This one cooks and cleans and complains very little, if at all. This child is learning and thriving on codependency.

The codependent child will grow up to become an adult who is emotionally unavailable to their mate, perhaps with an unnatural bond to the non-addicted parent (if there was one) and is unafraid of violence as a method of communication. The mate for this child is also codependent, so the rules will be the same for both. Their relationships sail along at two speeds: great and horrible. They will break all the furniture in the room while love making to prove how much they love each other, and break it again during an argument to prove how much they hate each other.

If your self-worth is so little in your mind for any reason, that you need cigarettes or alcohol or drugs to hide the pain, you have forgotten that you were made in the image and likeness of God, or perhaps you never knew. May be you have been forced to work to validate your existence.

Maybe you have been abused so much your beliefs cannot even justify why you are alive at all. These images of you are WRONG!

These self esteem images are False Education Appearing Real. (FEAR. Do you see a theme here?)

You are the single most important person on the planet!

As a child, we were all forced to learn what we were taught by the adults around us. Most of these lessons came from our parents or parental figures. And most of it (the author estimates ninety percent in a different writing) was learned before we were five years of age.

And now you are an adult. As an adult, created in the image and likeness of God, it is up to you to eradicate that which is incorrect. If you wonder about your own self worth, for these or any other reasons, remember that you are created in the image and likeness of God, that you are a thinking creature whose value cannot be measured even in dollars, that you were born perfect, and, if all else fails, remember that you have nearly \$92 billion in electrons in your body right now.

Just the electrons in your body are worth nearly ninety two billion dollars. Add to that your ability to think, and that you were made in the image and likeness of God, and you will be unable to create a dollar value for your worth. You are priceless.

Does this help you understand that you are the most important person on earth?

There are a few of you reading this who struggle with smoking. The author smoked cigarettes himself for twenty five years, and can understand this, so let me now speak only to those who smoke cigarettes.

Let us image for a moment that you have a car. Not just a car, but you have a car worth ninety two billion dollars. Would you allow rats and mice to nest in the back seat? Would you allow the smell of their feces to permeate your beautiful automobile?

What about your friends? Would you allow anyone else to bring their rats and mice to nest in the back seat of your ninety two billion dollar automobile? What if it was their last mouse? Would that even matter?

Would you allow any of this, or would you take GOOD care of your ninety two billion dollar car?

The ultimate "trick" to living a life smoke free is very simple: decide not to put cigarettes in your mouth. Decide not to bend your arm at the elbow. Decide to never again light a cigarette. If you truly believe that you have no control over smoking, surrender also the control to light the cigarette to someone else. Let that other person have the power to light your cigarette. You will find quickly just how much power you do have. And you will discover in short order who loves you truly.

The top four causes of death in the United States (according to the CDC) are all of smoking. If you are still smoking, you are blatantly trying to kill yourself. I suggest you try instead to stay alive! Stop trying to quit smoking and start trying to live!

There are many groups available for support and many books written specifically to help people who seem to be stuck in these areas. Alcoholics Anonymous, Codependent's Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous are only three examples of such groups. The rags to riches project is designed to steer people to whatever they need in order to live happily ever after. Each group you join, each book you read, every action you take toward correction, is a step in a positive direction. Each step builds strength. Take a step, build your strength, and take another step...

Remember this also, of all the creatures on earth ever before or ever after, only one has been given the distinction of "image and likeness of God" and only one has been given a thinking brain. This brain is our likeness to God. With it, we are given a free will; to choose this or that; to put a cigarette in our mouth, or not to put one there; to choose love or fear. We can even to choose pain of quitting over the long term pain of not quitting because with our thinking brain, we can see the future. We can work to achieve the thing we can see in the future. You made a choice to read this, now make a choice to improve more and then more. Make a choice.

The more you choose from knowledge, the less you choose from pleasure. The more you do this, the easier it becomes. The easier it becomes, the stronger you become. The stronger you become, the easier it is to abandon your rags and hold on to your riches!

In order, however, to succeed in this, it is not enough to recognize the words of Jesus and our mistakes. We need another main ingredient...

1. Earl Nightingale Lead the Field, circa 1984.

Chapter Two:

Forgiveness