

Chapter 10

Loving or Lying

If I had turned to secular counsel (or even some Christian counsel, for that matter) to gain self-esteem, I would have been told that my problem was I didn't "love myself" enough. The verse, "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*," would have been pulled out and waved in front of me with long, flowery explanations about how Jesus wants us to have good self-esteem. The path to good self-esteem is positive thinking and self-affirmation. The prescription is to stand in front of the mirror every morning and every night and say twenty-five times: "I am a worthy person, I love myself, I am a worthy person, I love myself..." The only problem with this mentality is it makes me a liar as well as a failure because, no matter how hard I try or how many times I state otherwise, I don't feel worthy and I don't love myself. This approach to self-esteem is like handing someone a colorful Band-Aid for their brain cancer and telling them it will make the disease go away.

I don't think Jesus ever meant for His statement to be the foundation of a self-centered, ego-boosting, self-help movement. And yet volumes have been spoken and written with this statement as the cornerstone of self-improvement therapy. Looking around the world today, it does not appear that we need more self-love. In fact, the Bible warns, "*In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves*" (2 Tim. 3: 1-2). True, most women I talk to have poor self-esteem. But telling them they can change this by chanting the self-love mantra only causes more denial and despair. The woman who killed her unborn child is not a worthy person. The woman who has led a promiscuous lifestyle is not a worthy person. You, the reader, if you are honest about your heart, are not a worthy person. Nor am I.

So, where does this leave us? Should we hate ourselves then? No. Because in reality this, too, is self-centered. It is convoluted pride, and our ego is still at the center. Any time we are focused on ourselves, whether we are priding ourselves or condemning ourselves, we are the center of our focus. Even insecurities are centered in self: "Do people like me? Are they impressed with me? What do they think about me?" Notice the recurring word, *me*. The goal of the Christian is not to *focus* on self, but rather to *die* to self.

The Bible says, "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable*



service" (Romans 12:1). To the Jew, this passage had a much more graphic meaning than it does to us. To understand it we need to know what was involved in a "sacrifice." The following is the description of how a sacrifice was done as found in Leviticus 17:11: After leading his lamb to the north side of the altar, the priest killed the sacrificial animal by cutting its throat. A priest stood by with a basin to catch the blood, "*for the life of the flesh is in the blood...it is the blood that makes atonement.*" The priest cast this life-blood against the altar, signifying that the life belonged to God. The carcass was then skinned and cut it into quarters, while the priest placed the wood on the altar fire. The carcass and entrails were mixed with oil and spices and burned until it was completely consumed. This ritual would be gruesome to Christians today. But to the Jew there was no question as to the significance of this verse. A sacrifice required the death and total consummation of the offering.

If we are to be "living and holy sacrifices," it requires that something dies. What dies is our self. When anger, bitterness, hatred, insecurities, jealousy, pride, hurt, lust, and the other sins of the heart motivate our actions, self is central in our life.

These feelings spring out of our human nature. They are natural, normal human responses to life's hurts and disappointments. But they separate us from God. We could, like so many people, deny their existence in order to live up to the Christian image, but this only results in repressing them. And, although we are repressing them, we will express them at some point. "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*" (Matt. 12:34). We may develop thicker walls and deeper pits to hide these feelings in, but they will come oozing out when the right circumstance presents itself.

Instead of denying and repressing these feelings, it is so much more honest to acknowledge them and to lay them at the foot of the cross. And God can see over the highest wall and into the deepest pit, right into the center of our hearts anyway. Who do we think we are fooling? When we admit to these feelings, admit to our defeat in overcoming these feelings, and offer them to God, we take ourselves out of our focus and place Christ in the center of our lives.

We ask Him to heal our hurts and change our hearts. In doing this, self-condemnation and self-commendation are both eliminated. It's up to Christ—not us. This way, we don't love or hate ourselves; we simply ACCEPT ourselves. We become able to acknowledge and accept our strong points, our weak points, our foibles, our fancies, our insecurities, and everything else about us. Instead of striving to change these things, we surrender them to God and allow Him to do the molding, changing, and shaping. I cannot tell you the freedom that results from this type of walk with the Lord. "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1) takes on a whole new meaning.

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1. Have you ever been to secular counseling?
2. If so, what was your experience?
3. After reading this can you describe the difference between “self-esteem” and “self-acceptance?”
4. Considering the statement: “even insecurities are centered in self.” Why do you think this is true?
5. Do you want Jesus at the center of your life?
6. Are you ready to surrender anything that will move you from the center and replace it with Him?
7. What things do you need to surrender? Ask God to reveal it to you and make a list here.

MEMORY VERSE

*For to me, living means living for Christ,
and dying is even better.*
Philippians 1:21

Chapter 11

Dying to Be Humble

Of all the conditions of the heart, humility is probably the most sought after and least understood by Christians. The Bible is very clear on what God thinks of pride and arrogance. In Proverbs 16:18 we read, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* In Daniel 5:20 we read the reason why King Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from mankind and his heart was made like that of beasts: *“But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.”* We are admonished in the Scriptures and from the pulpit to be humble. But how?

In my pursuit for humility I felt like a gerbil on a wheel getting nowhere. The more I strived to be humble, the prouder I was of my humility. Until I realized I was proud and then I felt like a failure at becoming humble. In all of it. I wasn't even sure I knew WHAT a humble person was supposed to act like. I thought that self-deprecation might be the answer. When someone told me, I was artistic (which I am), I would reply, “Oh no, I'm not artistic at all.” But I knew I was artistic, so then I became a liar as well as a fake. Then I tried to give selflessly to others. The only problem with that, was that I was always gauging how impressed people were with my selflessness. When the recipient of my selflessness would thank me profusely and tell me what a really good person I was, I would respond, “Oh no, no, it was nothing, really.” But I loved their praise and really was rather proud of my selflessness! In other words, it was all based on my performance of what a humble person *should* look like.

I was utterly baffled as to the process of achieving humility. And then I came across this saying: **“Humility is not thinking lowly of oneself, but rather, not thinking of oneself at all.”** It was as if a light went on. Humility is not something to be achieved. It is a by-product of a surrendered heart. I don't have to deny my talents—God gave them to me. I don't have to say negative things about myself or try to convince myself of my motives. I simply must surrender what's in my heart

and God will replace it with His heart. It's not a matter of arriving at a point of spirituality where I achieve humility, but rather a day-by-day, moment-by-moment walk in surrender with Christ. Humility no longer becomes my objective. It is simply the shifting of my focus from self to Christ and the total absence of gauging my spiritual performance at all.



Chapter 11

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Mat. 5:5 *God blesses those who are **humble**, for they will inherit the whole earth.*

Matt. 11:29 *Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am **humble** and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Matt. 18:4 *So anyone who becomes as **humble** as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Matt 23:12 *But those who exalt themselves will be **humbled**, and those who **humble** themselves will be exalted.*

Luke 1:52 *He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the **humble**.*

James 4:6 *And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the **humble**.”*

1. Reading these verses (and there are so many more) what does it tell you about the importance God places on being humble?

God values humility in a person more than any other virtue. **Yet it is utterly unattainable.** If one *tries* to be humble, then we can only succeed in which case we are proud of our humility or we fail in which case we condemn ourselves for our failure.

2. Who is at the center of both of these?

3. How does the statement, “Humility isn’t thinking badly of oneself, but rather not thinking of oneself at all” change your view of humility?

4. Have you ever sat and tried to not think about something? We can’t do it. And so, there must be another way to humility. A way that takes us OUT of the way and allows God to do it all.

That way is surrender. As you take what is in your heart, the ugly, the proud, the mean, the self-motivated, and surrender it at the cross, you pour your heart out and it is replaced with Jesus. As He has filled more and more of your heart, your reactions come from Him, rather than you.

Humility is a byproduct of a surrendered heart.

MEMORY VERSE

*Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I
am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find
rest for your souls.*

Matthew 11:29

Chapter 12

The Truth Shall Set You Free

Some of you might have the impression that in surrendering we all become meek, lowly, bland women. Actually, quite the opposite happens. As you start surrendering those things that you previously denied, it creates a freedom that you may never have experienced before. A freedom to stand up and honestly confront that which needs confronting. As God leads you into honesty with yourself, you will begin to deal honestly with others.

Let me give you an example. When a person hurts us verbally, we react predictably. It may be one of many emotions but they all spring from the same source – self. With our egos wounded, we are not able to focus on the issue itself. Rather we are weighted down with self-pity or righteous indignation or any number of emotions that result from being the victim of someone's vindictiveness.

The first point in surrendering is to recognize that, no matter what the other person did, your responsibility is only for YOUR heart. It is YOUR feelings that God wants to deal with. He wants you to forgive that person for your sake. This doesn't make the other person's offense any less serious or wicked. Your forgiveness does not mean you are denying the other person's actions or motives. Neither does forgiveness mean that the person should be "let off the hook" from the natural consequences of their action. It does, however, release you from the destructive cycle and brought on by the other person's sin.

When Spencer molested my daughter, Satan set out to destroy as many people as possible through this heinous act. Spencer himself, my daughter, his family, my family – all of these were slated for destruction by the master of evil. My hatred would have worked right into his plan. If

I had become consumed with hatred; it would have done great damage to my family and friends. My marriage would have suffered and my relationship with God would have been all but destroyed. When God placed forgiveness in my heart, He used what Satan had intended for destruction for His own glory.

Spencer was sentenced nine months after his arrest. I went to his sentencing to witness his penalty. During that nine long months I had surrendered my hatred and bitterness daily. It had been a struggle because of my



desire to entertain my thoughts of vengeance. I knew though, that if I was faithful in surrendering my thoughts and desires, God would be faithful in healing my heart. I also knew that it would be in His timing – I was only to be obedient. I walked into the courtroom struggling with a fresh onslaught of vengeful thoughts. Midway through the proceedings, as I was praying for the strength to sit

through it and surrendering my heart, I literally felt God wash His peace and forgiveness over me. It was as if a huge weight was lifted from me. I felt light and free for the first time since the ordeal began.

After the sentencing, I was moved to go up to Spencer and his mother and pass on to them the gift God had given me – forgiveness. The Victim's Assistance Officer who had been reluctant to even let me even speak to them stood there with tears running down her cheeks. She said, "I have seen verbal tirades, physical assaults and even attempted murder after trials, but never in the history of my work have I ever seen anyone do what you just did!" I tried so hard to explain to her that I had done nothing. I was merely the recipient of an incredible gift from God called grace that released me from the bondage of hatred! I gave my worst to God, and He replaced it with His peace and forgiveness.

Chapter 12

The Truth Shall Set You Free

Jesus said, *“I am the way the truth and the life.”* He did not say He would show you truth or demonstrate truth. HE IS TRUTH.

Jesus also talks about the devil: *“He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

And then twice in a few sentences in John 8 he says this:

32 *And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

36 *So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.*

1. All life is either truth or lies. It is either of God or of Satan. If we have been set free then who is the author of the bondage we carry from our hurts, betrayals and disappointments?

Knowing the truth is not as easy as it sounds. Our lens is colored by our experiences, prejudices, betrayals and the messages of our parents. But knowing the truth IS possible. It is possible when we surrender those thoughts and emotions we suspect are lies, TRUTH will replace them! It isn't easy, it is a lifelong practice that can start now.

MEMORY VERSE

*And you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.*

John 8:32