

CHAPTER 5 – LOVING YOURSELF

The Bible teaches us we are to love our neighbor as we LOVE ourselves-Matthew 22:39. What if we don't love ourselves? It renders us incapable of loving others, which is a big problem. The distinguishing mark of Christians is their love walk.

“I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another. By this shall all know that you are My disciples, if you love one another (keep showing love among yourselves).” John 13:34-35

People who cannot love and approve of themselves live in tremendous emotional pain. God has not created us for rejection, but acceptance.

How do you feel about yourself? Have you ever spent a day with someone you did not like or despised? That is what you have been carrying around with you about yourself. Not liking yourself is essentially fostering those same feelings! Since God loved us so much that He sacrificed His only Son for us, it is rather disrespectful and insulting to Him for us to despise ourselves.

ENJOYING LIFE

Enjoying life is impossible if we don't enjoy ourselves. Yes, we do make mistakes, do dumb things, or don't like the way you look, or your personality, or even one particular feature of your body, but God can take what we think is a flaw and do great things with it.

His strength is made perfect in our weaknesses. He died so we could have life and enjoy it. John 10:10 Living with daily self-rejection, or even self-hatred, is a horrible way to live. We project to others what we feel about ourselves. If we want others to have a good opinion of us, we must begin by having a good opinion of ourselves.

We should seek from God what we seek from others. If we don't get from others what we seek, we feel rejected, and have those negative feelings increase. Those that do not know how to love themselves in a balanced way are a gourmet meal for the enemy.

A BALANCED ATTITUDE

We are to estimate ourselves according to the grace of God, knowing that

our strengths come from Him and makes us no better than others. We all have strengths and weaknesses! The Word of God says He gives gifts unto men, and He chooses who will receive what gifts- I Cor. 12:4-11. We cannot simply select what we want to be good at.

Knowing our gifts come from God, we are not to critically appraise or look down on someone who is unable to excel at the same things we do. We definitely need to avoid pride. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"- Proverbs 16:18.

Don't fall into the trap of pride, and go to the other extreme and think that self-rejection, self-hatred, and self-abasement is the answer. Instead seek to be a "everything-nothing" person-everything in Christ and nothing without Him. Jesus said, "Apart from Me....you can do nothing" John 15:5.

Strength that comes from confidence can quickly be lost in conceit. It is vital to remain humble. I know I can do nothing of any real value unless Christ is flowing through me. Rom. 7:18. In and of ourselves we can claim nothing good. Don't fail to give God the credit for your successes.

God shows Himself strong in those who are humble enough to allow Him to do so. Although we ourselves are nothing, we are vessels for Him to flow through.

CRACKED POTS

God works through jars of clay-cracked pots. This means we are flawed, so when people look at us and see amazing things happening, they know it must be God at work because it certainly could not be us. God chooses the weak and foolish things on purpose so no mortal can have pretense for glorying in His presence.-I Cor. 1:27-29

Can you love a cracked pot? God can! It is godly to love yourself in a balanced, healthy way. It is ungodly to reject and despise yourself.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

The Word of God instructs us to desire peaceful relations with God, with ourselves, and with our fellow man. – I Peter 3:11. We are to actually suppose to pursue and go after them. The Bible is a book about relationships in all three areas. We are to be at peace with God and experience His love, God's Word also talks extensively about our relationships with other people. The Bible also teaches us about the importance of having a proper attitude toward ourselves. It teaches

about our relationship with ourselves.

Do you have a critical, faultfinding attitude toward yourself? If so, you are out of God's will. Paul refused to sit in judgment on himself, and he paid no attention to anyone else who did judge him: "But as for me personally it matters very little to me that I should be put on trial by you and that you or any other human tribunal should investigate and question and cross-question me. I do not even put myself on trail and judge myself"-I Cor. 4:3

Paul was confident in Christ. He knew where he came from, and he knew where he was headed. He said himself that he had to make an effort to let go of the past and press on toward perfection. He did not claim perfection, but neither did he have a bad attitude toward himself.

Jesus wanted us free so much that he was willing to send His Son to die for us. He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son. The least we can do is learn to see ourselves the way He sees us, which is precious and valuable.

Are you moping around, depressed, discouraged, and despondent? Do you spend so much time thinking about all of your faults that you have lost your hope and enthusiasm about living a good life? It is time to make a change today. Choose a new attitude toward yourself. Paul had to make that choice, I had to make it, and you must make it also if you want to glorify God with your life.

God is not honored by people who have a bad attitude toward themselves and in fact it is downright insulting to Him. If you loved and valued a group of people so much that you were willing to suffer horribly and die for them so they could enjoy themselves and their lives, how would it make you feel if they refused your gift?

SUPER SHEEP

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd risks and lays down His own life for the sheep. John 10:11

Jesus referred to God's children as sheep for a good reason. Sheep are not known to be the most intelligent animals, they need a shepherd. Without guidance and help, they do things that can even be self-destructive. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Isaiah 53:6. Sheep are stubborn-we often choose to do things that will turn out badly for us unless God intervenes. Sheep have many faults, but they don't try to hide them. But we try to hide our faults and that becomes one of our biggest problems.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE LIGHT

The light of God exposes things-John 3:20. When He gets involved in our life, He begins to show us things we prefer not to look at; things we have kept hidden, even from ourselves. We are frequently deceived, especially about ourselves. We prefer not to deal with our faults, nor do we delight in having them exposed. We may feel condemned about them, but at least we feel they are hidden. Anything hidden has power over us because we fear it may be found out. The most freeing thing we can do is face up to what God wants to expose and get beyond the fear of it.

Example: Joyce hid the fact for years that she was sexually abused by her father. She seen it as a weakness, to be ashamed of. Felt there was something wrong with her and second-hand merchandise. She was afraid of anyone knowing about her past and it continued to have power over her. The devil lied to her for 25 years.

She often told lies about her past and her parents. But when it was out in the light, the opposite of what she thought would happen took place. People responded with compassion-not judgment. Her testimony began helping others who were locked in the prison of fear. God's light exposed Satan's lies, and the truth made her free.

You need to expose everything to the open light of God's love. God chooses and uses people with flaws. Refusing to admit that we have them may disqualify us from being used by God. He wants truth, not deception. He wants us to be truthful with ourselves, with Him, and with other people.

When we refuse to embrace and love truth, it will prevent spiritual growth. We are held in bondage by what we refuse to face and deal with. Some things are buried so deep that we don't consciously think about them, but like an infection they are eating away at our life.

The Bible teaches us to confess our faults one to another so that we may be healed and learn to love one another. James 5:16. Joyce's abuse was not her fault, and she had to deal with it. It had to be exposed for her to be a emotionally, mentally, spiritually healthy individual and the same is true of us. It can actually affect your physical health.

Many psychiatrists and psychologists become successful by letting people talk to them about the things that bother them. The main service they provide is a listening ear and patient privacy. They give advice but this is the main focus.

Everyone needs someone to talk to, that they can be honest with, who

won't tell their secrets. If you have trouble accepting yourself, pray and ask God to provide spiritually mature people to be your friends, who you can trust, who will listen and understand, but who will also speak truth into your life. Don't get angry with those God provides to be truthful with you, they should speak the truth in love but also should speak the truth. Eph. 4:15

A NEW BEGINNING

If we never find anyone else, we can be totally open and honest with the Lord. He hates pretense, so just be honest. Ask Him to reveal to you anything you may be hiding from or afraid to face-and then buckle your seat belt. It may be a bumpy ride but will eventually take you where you want to go.

We think we know ourselves, when in reality we are often hiding, not only from others, but especially from ourselves. The Lord showed Joyce she was hard to get along with, controlling, manipulative, fearful, insecure, and hard-hearted. She talked too much. She pretended to be nobody when in reality she was very needed. She acted like a tough raging lion, but on the inside she was as weak as a newborn kitten.

This can be our motto "I am not where I need to be, but thank God I am not where I used to be. I am okay, and on my way!"

Don't be afraid of your weaknesses any longer. Give them all to God, and He will surprise you by using them. Give him all that you are and especially all that you are not. You will be able to live light and free.

Don't let your weaknesses and imperfections embarrass you. You are a human being, so give yourself permission to be one. Love yourself in spite of everything you see wrong with yourself.

If you are ever going to approve of yourself, you will have to do it in your imperfect state.

ENTERING GOD'S REST CONCERNING YOUR FAULTS

Joyce hated weakness and when God told her it was alright to be weak, she thought weak people got walked on. Her mother had been weak and let her dad abuse her verbally, emotionally, and physically. She let him abuse Joyce sexually. Her mother was too weak to deal with it. She never hated her mother but grew to hate her weakness.

She did not respect people who were weak and could not accept weaknesses in herself and tried to be tough in all situations. She tried to overcome every flaw in herself. When she gave herself permission to be

weak (not masking over there were none), instead of her weaknesses multiplying and taking over her life, God began to strengthen her in them. Her relationship with Him deepened. She was being honest being dependent, and needed Him without interruption.

God works in those who believe by making changes on an ongoing basis. Phil 1:6 WE SEE He has begun a good work in us, and He intends to finish it and bring it to completion. The Amplified Bible says, He will be perfecting His work in us right up until Christ returns. God has given us permission to love ourselves as we are. We can enter His rest concerning what remains to be done in our personalities, character, and life. Believing allows us to enter God's rest.

ALL OF US HAVE A LIMP

Jacob was a man who had many weaknesses, yet he pressed on with God and was determined to be blessed of Him. God can gain glory for Himself through those who will not let their personal weaknesses stop Him from flowing through them. First we must come face to face with the fact that we have weaknesses, and then we must determined not to let them bother us.

STOp RIGHT NOW, wrap your arms around yourself, give yourself a big hug, and say out loud: "I accept myself. I love myself. I know I have weaknesses and imperfections, but I will not be stopped by them." Try doing that several times a day, and you will soon develop a new attitude and outlook.

Jacob limped away with his blessing. God will bless us even though all of us have a limp (imperfection).

ACCEPT A BLESSING FOR JESUS' SAKE

David and Jonathan had a covenant relationship that included all their heirs. When Jonathan was killed and David became king he began looking for someone he could bless for Jonathan's sake. God is looking for someone He can bless for Jesus' sake and it can be you, if you will agree.

Jonathan had a son named Mephilbosheth who was lame in both feet. He lived for years in a small town called Lo-debar and it was not a nice town, not popular. When our self-image is poor, we often choose surroundings that seem to fit the way we feel about ourselves. People with self-loathing won't even bother to fix themselves up or even try to dress or look nice. The way they feel about themselves inside shows on the outside.

Other people go to the opposite extreme. They feel so bad about themselves inwardly that they try to hide it by becoming perfectionists outwardly, everything around them must appear to be perfect-their homes, personal appearance, children, spouse, etc. They live under tremendous pressure, and they also pressure the other people in their lives.

We respond to the same problem in different ways depending on our temperament and background. Mephibosheth responded by hiding and avoiding the very people who could have helped him. He knew he had rights to land and other privileges because of his father Jonathan's covenant relationship with David who was now the king, but he remained poverty stricken and lonely.

Why? Because of the way he saw himself. He let his lame feet embarrass him and keep him from demanding his rights. He even called himself a dead dog in II Sam 9:8. "Then he bowed himself, and said. "What is your servant., that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?"

How many of us do the same thing? We won't pray boldly or even receive the blessings? God freely offers but because of the way we see ourselves we don't receive. He finally came to the royal palace by invitation from King David. You see, people with a limp – imperfections- can still be blessed, but they must realize that their imperfections don't stop God.

The scripture in Zeph. 3:14-17. 19 shows the fact that God wants to bless those who would appear to be outcasts, those with "limps" in their life. He has determined to gather them and bless them. He promises to cast out the enemy, who in many cases is shame, blame, and disgrace.

He wants you to rest in peace and enjoy your life. He wants you to enjoy yourself, loving yourself in a balanced way. Thank God for loving you as you are and for teaching you how to love yourself.

Next week we will take what we have learned about self-acceptance and apply it toward some specific battles we need to win to properly deal with the approval addiction. Keep pressing on!

Hello to my Life Groups. God is doing awesome things in the lives of the women who are reading the lessons. Praise reports this past week were of God continuing to show them things in their lives that are not pleasing to God and removing them. Ladies have e-mailed me telling me what they have been thru in marriage and childhood and how God has helped them and is helping them.

Some are still trying to overcome Approval Addiction since some did not realize that was what they were experiencing and some are layer by layer removing those things that hurt. Others are starting to take off the masks that "everything is okay." Other prayers were answered as well.

Prayer request which is urgent: Pray for Bill and Daisy to find jobs that pay at least \$9 an hour. He married a young lady from another country and she will be deported if they cannot find jobs immediately. PLEASE pray for this request.

If you have a prayer request, please send it and we will together pray over it and expect a miracle on your behalf.

PLEASE NOTE: This lesson as been scanned from the book in its entirety. I have added a few questions, comments of my own. You do not need the book unless you want one of your own to mark, etc. Since it was scanned (a friend did it for me) it sometimes has done strange things with words and skipping on down a line, but we have gone over this and hopefully have corrected any error caused by scanning.

Chapter 6 - Overcoming Approval Addiction

When we think of addicts, we may immediately think of drugs or alcohol. But the truth is we can be addicted to almost anything. The apostle Paul stated that he would not allow anything to control him (See 1 Corinthians 6:12). That is a good attitude to have, one that we will have to be very determined to maintain. Even the most "spiritual" people can become addicted to things. Their addictions may not be the things we ordinarily think of when we hear the word addict, but they are real addictions nonetheless.

As we saw earlier, an addiction is something people feel they cannot live without, or something they feel compelled to do in order to relieve pressure, pain, or discomfort of any kind. A drug addict, for example, will do whatever is necessary to get another "fix" whenever he begins to feel uncomfortable. An alcoholic will feel compelled to drink, especially when confronted with life's problems. The substance to which people are addicted helps relieve their pain momentarily, but a controlling cycle begins in their life that is destructive. Is there anything the Holy Spirit is showing you that you are addicted to??

I smoked cigarettes for many years and was addicted to nicotine. I experienced the same types of things I have described, thankfully to a lesser degree. For example, if I was in a tense situation, the first thing I reached for was a cigarette. If I became angry or was under stress of any kind, I smoked even more than I normally did. I used smoking to relieve tension rather than dealing with life's problems the way God would have chosen for me. I would certainly not have considered

myself an addict, but eventually I had to face the truth that not only was I addicted to cigarettes, but there were other things in my life that were controlling me as well. I was addicted to approval, the need to be in control, work, reasoning, and other things. Since I desired to be able to say with the apostle Paul, "I will not allow anything to control me," I had to be willing to face the truth and allow God to change me.

ADDICTED TO REASONING

God revealed to me that I was addicted to reasoning. I absolutely could not feel comfortable and at peace unless I thought I had everything in my life figured out. I wanted to know what was going to happen, and how and when it was going to take place. If I did not know, I became anxious, restless, nervous, worried, and grouchy. I experienced symptoms similar to those of a drug addict who needs a "fix"; the degree of severity was not the same, but the symptoms were. At the time, I was a Christian and part of the "faith movement," meaning that I supposedly walked by faith. Yet in reality, that was not true. I trusted Jesus for my salvation, but in many other areas, I trusted myself to provide the answers I needed for daily life.

People who worry excessively clearly show they trust themselves, and not God, to solve their problems. Worry is a sin and should be repented of like any other sin. Don't try to work out scenarios in your mind as that is a form of not trusting God to do it. He will always do it right. We imagine scenarios we try to make happen to solve our problems.

In my case, there was always something going on either in my life, or in someone else's that I was "working on" or trying to reason out. I thought of various answers that seemed to make sense, and for a time they comforted me; but things did not usually turn out the way I had figured they would. I recall the Holy Spirit speaking to my heart and saying:

"Joyce, you think you have life all figured out. You think you know what I am going to do, and how I am going to do it. But you really don't know much at all. Joyce, you are not half as smart as you think you are." Are you working on your circumstances? Are you trying to work on other's circumstances? Our minds are so preoccupied with "working on things" that God gets left out-no room for Him amidst all the other things.

The Bible tells us not to be wise in our own eyes (See Proverbs 3:7). In other words, "Don't even think you are intelligent enough to run your own life and have answers for everything."

O Lord (pleads Jeremiah in the name of the people), I know that [the determination of] the way of a man is not in himself; it is not in man [even in a strong man or in a man at his best] to direct his [own] steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

Life would be so much easier if we would believe God's Word and act accordingly, but most of us have to find out what works and what does not the hard way. His Word says we don't have it in us to run our own lives, but we still try.

I didn't enjoy peace because of my reasoning, but I had done it for so

long I did not know any other way to live. That is the way addicts are. They don't like their life, but at the same time they can't face having it any other way. They hate it, but they need it.

When I was growing up, I had to take care of myself from an early age. My parents provided housing, clothing, and things like that, but I felt I was being used rather than loved. I didn't trust anyone, because the people who said they loved me abused me and disappointed me. My father abused me, and my mother abandoned me. She didn't physically leave the home, but she pretended she did not know what was happening to me, when in reality she knew quite well. She was unable to take action to help me because of fear; she was afraid of the scandal a child abuse case might cause. The rejection and abandonment I experienced in my childhood was the root of my approval addiction. I had a deep sense of being flawed, and since I didn't approve of myself, I was afraid no one else approved of me either.

As a child, I never felt safe. I did not feel I could express a need or a desire and expect my parents to meet it. I did not want to ask for anything, especially from my father, because there was always a price to pay. I developed a habit of looking ahead mentally, always trying to stay one step ahead of being needy. I didn't want to need anyone. I determined to take care of myself, which is a huge job for a child. I even determined to take care of others, especially my mother. She did not seem to be able to take care of me and protect me, so I became the "rescuer" in the family. I grew up with a false sense of responsibility. Even today, I must resist the temptation to feel responsible for things other people should be taking care of themselves.

I also became addicted to the need to be in control. I was afraid to let others make any decisions, because I had no confidence they would be concerned for me. I was accustomed to being used. Once I got away from home and could run my own life, I determined that I would never get hurt again. I promised myself, "Nobody will ever take advantage of me again; nobody is going to tell me what to do."

I became rebellious toward authority, especially male authority. I wasn't mean—I was afraid! If I was not in control, I became frantic trying to manipulate circumstances in such a way that I would always get what I wanted. Does this speak to you in any way? How about your trust level? There are endless addictions, but let us now discuss "approval addiction."

THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

When we base our self-worth on how people treat us, or on how we believe they think about us, it causes us to become addicted their approval. We do not have to be approved of by certain individuals in order to feel good about ourselves. When we think so, we have a false belief that will open the door for a great deal of misery in our lives. We may spend a lot of time and effort trying to please people and gain their approval. But then, if it takes only one glance of disapproval or one unappreciative

word to ruin our sense of self-worth, we are in bondage. No matter how hard we work please people and gain their acceptance, there will always be someone who disapproves of us.

In Galatians chapter 4, the Bible speaks about two covenants, describing two ways in which we can live. Let's take a look at them.

1. Through works of the flesh

The first way we can choose to live is by works of our own flesh. We can take care of ourselves, make our own plans, and struggle make things happen our way, in our timing. It is the natural way, the normal way that most people live. It is a way that produces every kind of misery. We struggle, get frustrated, fail, and end up weary and worn out most of the time. We are confused, defeated, and have no peace or joy.

2. Through faith

The second way we can live is supernaturally, by the power of God. We can live by faith, trusting God to do what needs to be done in our lives.

This way is described in the Bible as a "new and living way" (See Hebrews 10:20), which we will examine later in this book. This new way produces peace, joy, ease, and success.

Either we can try to gain acceptance from people the world's way, or we can choose God's way.

SUPERNATURAL FAVOR

When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:7)

God will give us favor with people if we ask Him to do so and put our trust in Him. He can cause even our enemies to be at peace with us.

When I first began preaching, I of course wanted people to like and accept me, and I still do. At that time I did not know much about trusting God for supernatural favor, so I felt a lot of pressure to do all the right things in the hope people would accept me and approve of me.

The problem with that type of mind-set is that everyone expects something different, and no matter how hard we try, we cannot please all of the people all the time. Some people felt my conferences were too long, while others wanted me to spend even more time preaching to them. Some thought the music was too loud while others wanted it louder. Most of the people who attended loved my preaching style, but occasionally someone would be offended by my straightforward approach and send me a letter of correction. Any disapproval would literally make me almost sick with worry and feelings rejection until I learned to trust God rather than trying to "earn" acceptance.

In the earlier years of my life, before I allowed God to do a work in me, I did a lot of pretending. Whatever I thought people wanted me to be, that was what I tried to be. I wore many masks, trying to be accepted by everyone. This type of behavior can become a real problem if it is not addressed and changed. God will never help us be anyone other than ourselves.

In *The Mask Behind the Mask*, biographer Peter Evans says that actor Peter Sellers played so many roles he sometimes was not sure of his own identity.¹ In other words, Sellers played so many parts that he forgot who he was. I can remember crying out to God in frustration one day saying, "I don't know who I am or how I am supposed to act." At times I felt like a vending machine. Everyone who came near pushed a different button, expecting a different thing. My husband wanted a good, adoring, submissive wife. My children wanted an attentive mother. My parents and aunt, who are all elderly and dependent on me, wanted my attention. The call on my life demanded many things. The people I ministered to wanted me to be available for them whenever they felt they needed me. I said yes to everything until I finally became sick from stress and realized that if I did not learn to say no, I was in for serious health issues. I wanted everyone to love me and accept me, I desperately wanted their approval, but I was trying to get it the wrong way.

The Lord told me that He would give me favor with people if I would pray for them and trust Him. God can cause people to accept and like us who would normally despise us. The Bible says He changes the hearts of men the way He changes the watercourses (See Proverbs 21:1). If God can make a river flow in a specific direction, surely He can change someone's heart toward us. We wear ourselves out trying to do what only God can do. God can and will open the right doors for you and give you favor with the right people at the right time. For example, God can get you a job that would be far better than anything you could ever get yourself. Actually, God got me a job I was not even qualified to do and then enabled me to do it. I worked in a business as a general manager and handled things most people would need a college degree and many years of experience in order to do. At the time I had neither, but God was on my side. We can have favor with God, and He will give us favor with man.

I trust God for favor. When God favors us, He gives us things and does things for us that we do not deserve in the natural. Actually, the job I do now is one I don't deserve and am not naturally qualified for, but one that God daily enables me to do. Jesus said the anointing of the Holy Spirit qualified Him for what He did (See Luke 4:18-19), and it is the same thing that qualifies me for what I do. God has selected and chosen me for this job. He has anointed me.

He wants to do the same thing for all of His children, if they will let Him. Remember, God begins where we end. Stop struggling, trying to make things happen according to your desires, and ask God to take the driver's seat in your life.

As long as we try to make things happen by the works of our flesh, God will stand back and wait for us to wear ourselves out. Eventually we will do just that, and hopefully at that time we will call upon the Lord.

WE CAN'T PLEASE ALL THE PEOPLE ALL THE TIME

Any of us who intend to do very much in life will have to accept the fact that there will be times when we will not receive approval from everyone.

The need to be popular will steal our destiny. I deal with and minister to a wide variety of people. There is no way humanly possible that I can please all of them all the time. We have more than five hundred employees at Joyce Meyers Ministries. We almost never make one decision that suits all of them.

The Bible says Jesus made Himself of no reputation (See Philippians 2:7 KJV). That is a significant statement. He was not well thought of by many people, but His heavenly Father approved of Him and what He was doing, and that was all that really mattered to Him. As long as you and I have God's approval, we have what we need most. The apostle Paul said that if he had been trying to be popular with people, he would not have been a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ (See Galatians 1:10) Paul was saying that needing people's approval in an unbalanced way can steal our destiny. We cannot always be God-pleasers and people-pleasers at the same time.

Pray for favor. Confess that you have favor with God and that He gives you favor with man. Before embarking on any business venture, ask for favor. When you meet new people, ask for favor. I even ask God for favor before going into a restaurant. He can get me the best seat in the house, the best waiter, the best service, and the best food. The Bible says in James 4:2, "You do not have, because you do not ask." Start asking for favor regularly, and you will be amazed at the acceptance and blessings that come your way. You will have so many friends you will have to pray about which invitations to take or decline.

Develop your faith in the area of favor. Live expecting it all the time.

Remember, you cannot please all the people all the time, but God can give you favor. Trust Him to choose your friends, to open the right doors, and to close the wrong ones. Ask the Lord for "divine connections," friendships that will be perfect for you. God can connect you with people that will add to your life rather than taking away from it.

Even though God gives you favor, you will still encounter times when certain people won't approve of you. Strive to please God, and let Him deal with the people.

BONDAGE OR FREEDOM

As I have mentioned, there are two ways to live. We can live by grace, which is by God's favor and help, or we can live by works, which is by our own efforts, trying to do God's job. One way produces bondage, the other freedom.

There are two ways to prosper in life: trying to make our own way and struggling according to the world's system, or doing what God says by tithing all your increase and giving offerings as God leads. When we choose to honor God with our tithes and offerings, He always meets our needs.

There are two ways to promotion: We can try to promote ourselves, always seeking ways to push ourselves forward, or we can trust God to promote us and give us favor.

There are two types of approval: one is from people, and the other is from God. We want people to approve of us, but if we become addicted to their approval, if we have to have it and be ready to do whatever they demand to get it, we lose our freedom. We trust God for approval, we are freed from the addiction approval.

BOUNDARIES AND BALANCE OR BURNOUT

Those who are addicted to approval frequently get "burned out." For them there always exists the danger of attempting too much. They so desperately want to please that they do everything they feel is expected of them and then some. They may be committed to being "nice." Sometimes they say yes just because they cannot say no, not because they think their actions are the will of God. They burn out for lack of discernment or because of unwarranted guilt. And so, also, their anger builds. We become angry when we feel all used up and pulled in every direction. Burnout makes us angry because we recognize deep down inside that it is not normal. We become angry with the people pressuring us, when in reality we are allowing ourselves to be pressured. To avoid pressure from others and from ourselves, we must take control of our lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Once when I was complaining about my heavy schedule, I heard the Holy Spirit say, "Joyce, you are the one who makes your schedule; if you don't like it, then do something about it."

Frequently we complain and live silently angry lives while at the same time continuing to do the very things that make us angry. It is true people should not pressure us, but it is equally true we should not allow ourselves to come under pressure. We cannot blame others for what is ultimately our own responsibility.

Normal Christian life should be lived within the boundaries of balanced living. Once a person has a serious case of burnout, it is not easy to fix. None of us, not even those of us "called by God," can break His natural laws without paying the penalty. Even though we may work for God, we cannot live without limits. Jesus rested. He walked away from the demands of the crowds and took time for renewal.

Many of God's most precious and well-known saints have suffered from weariness and burnout with a tendency toward depression. We must learn that not all of our problems are spiritual; some of them are physical. We often blame the devil for things that are our own fault. We must learn to say no and not fear the loss of relationships. I have come to the conclusion that if I lose relationship because I tell someone no, then I really never had true relationship at all.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are an important part of life. God desires that we have enjoyable, healthy ones. A relationship is not healthy if one person is in control while the other struggles for approval, gaining it by being ready to do anything the other party wants, no matter what it is or how that individual feels about it personally. If we have to sin against our

own consciences in order to have someone's approval, we are out of the will of God.

I have mentioned that you can buy friends by letting them control you, but you will have to keep them the same way you obtained them. Eventually you will get tired of having no freedom. It is actually better to be lonely than to be manipulated and controlled.

Be careful how you get started in a new relationship. What you allow in the beginning will come to be expected. When we enter business arrangements with new people we have not worked with before, Dave always sets boundaries. If we get a job or product back that is inferior in any way, he immediately lets them know that we expect excellence. If they start out being late for appointments and not calling, he lets them know that type of behavior is not acceptable. There have been times when I have thought he was being a little too hard on them, but he always says, "If we don't establish from the beginning what we expect, we will be taken advantage of later."

Just remember that what you allow in the beginning of a relationship should be what you can be happy with permanently. Let people know by your actions that even though you would like their approval, you can live without it if you have to. Respect others, and let them know that you expect them to show you respect also.

Sometimes people compromise in the early stages of a relationship in order to get something or someone they want. They think they can change the person later, but it doesn't always work that way. I know many women who have married unbelievers thinking they could convince them to love Jesus later. Most of them ended up spending their lives being miserable, "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Recently I was visiting a friend in Minnesota, and while I was there I met a woman who asked me to elaborate on the meaning of not being "unequally yoked with an unbeliever." She was dating a man who claimed to be a Christian but was not really committed to Christ. She herself had been raised in a Christian home and maintained an active, personal relationship with the Lord. Her father had been aggressively opposed to her continuing the relationship with this man, telling her she would be "unequally yoked."

When we are emotionally attached to someone, we must be very careful not to let our emotions override wisdom and drown out the voice of God. I simply told this woman that she would be making a mistake to marry the man hoping he would change later. If he was a Christian, then he needed to prove it by showing commitment to following a Christian lifestyle.

Many people say they are Christians but show no fruit of it. The Bible says, "You will know them by their fruit" (See Matthew 7:16). Many people mentally accept the existence of God, but that does not mean they are committed to serving Him. The world is actually full of people who believe in God but live in sin.

This woman shared with me that the man she was dating was beginning to go

to church with her occasionally and she was hopeful that he would make a serious commitment. I told her to be sure he did so before she married him. I told her not to compromise the beginning of the relationship, but to be very clear about her expectations.

Wisdom always chooses now what it will be happy with later on. Don't live like there is no tomorrow, because tomorrow always comes.

When we choose the people with whom we think we want to in relationship—whether work related or personal—we often find later that our choices were not very wise. Ask God to give you "divine connections." He may choose relationships for you that you would never have chosen because you have preconceived ideas about what you want. Learn to look beyond the exterior of people and see their heart. Someone may look good outwardly and be a nightmare to be in relationship with. Another person may not appeal to you at first glance, and yet when you get to know that individual, he or she may turn out to be the best friend you ever had.

I was insecure and always wanted to be friends with the "popular people," but quite often I ended up getting hurt. I sought the approval of such people because I was filled with insecurity.

INSECURITY AND APPROVAL ADDICTION

As we discussed in the first part of the book, insecure people easily become approval addicts. They want and need other people's approval so much that they will do just about anything to get it. But security is part of our inheritance from God through Jesus. He wants us to feel safe and comfortable at all times. He wants us to be free to be ourselves and to feel accepted. God will give us that freedom and acceptance through Jesus Christ, if we look to Him for it.

If you have been addicted to approval, or if you know anybody who is, you are aware that it is a miserable way to live. You never know when people are going to approve or disapprove of you. Just about the time you think you have figured out what they want, they may change their mind. You are not free to follow your heart or the leadership of the Holy Spirit because you must always think about what the people want, what will make them happy.

My father was totally dysfunctional. In other words, he did not function the way a father should have. Not only was he abusive in every way, he was impossible to please. Oh, he might show approval occasionally concerning something I had done, yet I could do the same thing at another time and get into trouble for doing it. The atmosphere was terribly unstable and supercharged with fear. It made me feel extremely insecure. I was always afraid of being disapproved of and getting into trouble or being punished. I tried my very best to do what I thought he might want, but it was ever changing and therefore impossible to figure out. Going through this experience eventually turned me into an "approval addict"—I so desperately wanted to avoid the pain of disapproval, I was willing to do almost anything to get people's approval.

I had to learn to confront this addiction in my life and confront the

people who tried to control me.

CONFRONTATION

Maintaining healthy relationships occasionally requires confrontation.

That means you must say no even when the other party wants to hear yes.

It means you may have to choose to do some thing you know the other party won't approve of, if you know it is the right choice for you.

If you have not been confronting, and now find yourself being controlled and manipulated, making a change will not be easy. Once you develop a pattern of pleasing people out of fear, it takes a genuine step of faith to break the pattern.

I was very afraid of my father, and telling him no just didn't seem to be an option. When I left home, I fell into the same habit pattern with other people who had a personality similar to his. I had difficulty maintaining my freedom, especially with strong-willed people. If I was with someone who would allow it, I became the controller; however, if the other person had a domineering personality, I always ended up being controlled. True freedom was something foreign to me. I did not know how to give other people freedom, and I did not know how to stand up for my own right to be free.

If people are not accustomed to being confronted, they may react very aggressively until they become accustomed to the change. You may even need to explain that you realize you have allowed them to have their way in everything in the past, but that you have been wrong. Explain that you have been insecure and have needed their approval, but that now you have to make a change. It will be hard for you and them, but in order to have a healthy relationship, you must do it.

Spend some time praying about it before confronting. Ask God to give you courage. Ask Him to help the other person be willing to change. What is impossible with man is possible with God (See Mark 10:27).

The important thing is to make a decision right now that with God's help you will break the cycle of approval addiction. Initially, you may feel very uncomfortable with the thought that someone is not happy with you, but you must remember your only other choice is spending your life being unhappy. Breaking any addiction will produce suffering, but it leads to victory. We can suffer on our way to victory or we can suffer, in a never-ending cycle of addictions. If you are going to suffer, at least let it be for some worthwhile reason.

In the next chapter I want to look at one of the first obstacles we face when we make the choice to overcome the approval addiction—letting go of the emotional hurts of our past.