



Bagels and Cream Cheese... about the title.

On a brisk October night in Southeastern Pennsylvania in 1977, a young 17 year-old man lay motionless on the 45-yard line of his high school football stadium. A healthy crowd of 2,500 people that came to witness a great football game between inner city rivals soon realized that his injury was cause for concern.

The team doctor – as well as a few physicians from the crowd – asked him a number of questions while shoving smelling salts up his nose. But he didn't move away from the smelling salts or answer any of the questions too well. "What day is it?" one asked him. "What is your name?" asked another. And finally, "What did you have for breakfast?" He said nothing...his mind was a total blank. As a running back, he had been accustomed to taking 'good hits', however, this one was a lot different.

He had suffered a broken neck and a severe concussion; and he couldn't answer any of the questions they were asking him. He walked off the field and sat stunned on the sidelines for the final 25 minutes of the game. A teammate reminded him later that week that he kept saying, "Man, I really got my bell rung." And on the team bus, his friend heard him repeating "***Bagels and Cream Cheese***" over and over again. Two hours after 'the hit' that he took to his helmet, he remembered how happy he was that he had finally recalled what he had eaten for breakfast that morning.

The injury was truly a turning point in his life. Miraculously, he had broken his neck without damaging his spinal cord. After just 6 months of therapy, 8 months in a neck brace, and a lot of loving care from his family and the medical community, he had recovered at such a rapid pace that he resumed jogging and shooting basketball just 246 days after the accident.

But, he still wasn't his old self. A football and/or basketball scholarship was out of the question. And his passion for sports was 'snipped away' by an accidental helmet to helmet 'hit'. Fortunately, the ***Bagels and Cream Cheese*** words will always be with him. To him, the words ***Bagels and Cream Cheese*** were a welcome journey back from a very scary and lonely place. It was a time – even if only a relatively short time – when he couldn't remember a thing. Since that night over 23 years ago, he's experienced his share of successes and disappointments. And on numerous occasions, he's murmured "***Bagels and Cream Cheese***" at those times when he realized how he had forgotten what really matters. ***And what really matters is a life of joy!***

All of us need to 'snap back' from the many 'hits' that we take at different times in our lives. We need to repeat '***Bagels and Cream Cheese***' for the times that we've forgotten our loved ones, our dreams, and our reason for being here. Because when all is said is done, if we forget that we're born to love, to be loved, and to live a life of joy...we forget what life is all about. A lot of unexpected daily 'hits' affect each of our lives in so many ways. ***Bagels and Cream Cheese*** is an awakening – a reminder – and a celebration of life! It's a collection of stories and healthy recollections of the 'stuff' that makes life worth living. ***ENJOY! And by the way, my neck feels fine today, thanks.***

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Introduction

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

- *Henry David Thoreau*

If we really took some time to reflect, and we thought about the *one* thing that we all want and need in our lives – both for ourselves and for our loved ones – it would be that we could live a life of happiness and peace.

There are probably many other things that immediately come to mind when we think of being happy like: good health, a great job, a beautiful family, or a nice home. Yet, if we tried our best to clear our minds of all the things that *contribute* to our joy, every one of us would most likely agree that happiness and true peace are what we really want.

And if we thought about it a little more, we'd also agree that just being content with life, or being happy enough just to get by, really doesn't give us 'enough' of what we believe that life really has to offer. In fact, this feeling of not having 'enough' of what life has to offer has many of us wondering what we should do in order to get it right.

Depending on how truly happy each one of us is at any given time, we all recognize – and we strive for – a life that affords us true joy. Without actually realizing it, most of our daily efforts in our relationships, at work, in our free time, and in our thoughts (and our imaginations), are directed at making us *FEEL* better.

As we move on through the various topics presented, the focus will be on trying to discover *what* makes us feel great, *why* it does, and *how* we can *cooperate* with the many things (i.e., Attitude, Money, Relationships, The World of Value, etc...) that can either contribute to, or destroy, our ability to live a happy life. In taking this approach, we can start to truly ask ourselves the right questions, and begin to tap into the *Power of Happiness* that can literally change our lives forever!

As people, we are the perfection of all creation. And we were meant to live a life of joy. This life – your life – is such a great gift! Despite the many hardships and problems that we experience at times, life is a beautiful challenge. And we are *FOOLS* if we don't grab hold of our lives and share in the joy we were meant to experience.

While making reference to Almighty God (and I will do so from time to time) would make an easier and more complete task of the *what, why, and how* of cooperating with the *Power of Happiness*, I will restrain myself to a great degree. As Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, or non-believers, we may be tempted to scoff at certain points presented because we believe that it's not 'our' particular religion or philosophy being presented. And since it is my intent is to lead *everyone* to a better life – a happier life – by tapping into the *Power of Happiness*, it's a lot more constructive to stay focused on the fundamental things that are necessary for *every one* of us to build upon.

THE POWER OF HAPPINESS

Does Happiness really possess POWER?

The Story of Johnny Muffley:

“Everybody get down on the floor and put your hands on your head, right now!” screamed Johnny Muffley as he rushed through the bank door yielding a pistol in one hand and a grenade in the other. “Any wise guys or heroes are gonna die – and they’re gonna get others killed too,” yelled Johnny. “I’m not screwing around! Get down on the floor...NOW!”

About 40 stunned customers and 15 employees did exactly as they were told. In less than a minute, the bank lobby was full of people – many sobbing – lying all over the floor. “Who the hell is in charge of the money?” shouted Johnny. “Tell me, who the hell is in charge of the money here?” he yelled impatiently. “I am,” said the bank manager, nervously. “I’ll do anything you want, but please, don’t shoot anybody,” he pleaded. “Just do exactly as I say and everyone will be fine. But if you get cute, or I see a cop, you’re a dead man – along with the rest of these people,” shouted Johnny. “Fill these bags with cash – you have two minutes – and no dye packs or funny money, or you’re dead,” screamed Johnny. “Ok, ok, just give me the bags and I’ll give you your money,” replied the terrified manager.

Johnny stood in the middle of the bank lobby shaking and sweating... he was at the end of his rope. The local parish priest, Father Murphy, lay right beneath him and sensed that Johnny was going to do something drastic at any second. “Why don’t you think about this, son? You really don’t want to hurt anybody or ruin your future, do you?” asked the scared priest. “Just shut the hell up – and I’m not your son,” screamed Johnny. “And don’t give me that Jesus crap. If Jesus was God, he should be able to make other Jesus’. And I’ve never found another Jesus. So, just shut up,” yelled Johnny.

In fact, Johnny had never known a day of peace in his life. His mother left when he was a baby and his father used him as a punching bag every day of his short life. To Johnny, the ‘future’ wasn’t worth it if it meant living like he had in the past. The gun and the grenade were all that Johnny could visualize at the moment.

Right at that moment, Emily Conrad stood up and looked at Johnny. “Johnny,” she said gently. “Do you remember coming to my house last December around Christmas, with my son, Mitch?” she asked. “Yeah, Mrs. Conrad, I remember. Now just get back on the floor and you won’t get hurt,” responded Johnny. “Oh, but I can’t Johnny, my arthritis is killing me, and I want to make you an offer,” she said calmly. “I want to take you home with me,” she said.

Johnny was shocked. He remembered delivering a sofa and chair with the help of her son, Mitch, six months before. Johnny’s part time job often took him into the homes of many families. And he was particularly impressed with how Mrs. Conrad had

welcomed him – a stranger – into her home and how kind she was while serving him a snack after he had delivered the two pieces of furniture.

“What are you talking about Mrs. Conrad, I’m robbing this bank. Now please, go sit over there and leave me alone,” sobbed Johnny. “Oh Johnny, you don’t want to do this,” she persisted. “I’ll tell you what, you give me the gun and the grenade and we’ll all forget this ever happened. I’ll fix it with the bank and the police. And I promise you’ll not get into any trouble. Come home with me... and we’ll make things right together,” she promised.

Johnny started to weep bitterly. “They’ll send me to prison and there’s nothing you can do,” he said. “No they won’t,” she quickly responded. “I swear to you that I’ll fix everything and you can come live with me today. We’ll have steak and potatoes for dinner – I promise”, she said assuredly. “Do you promise?” asked the trembling 16-year-old. “I promise,” Mrs. Conrad responded. “Now, please give me that gun and grenade before you get hurt.”

To everyone’s surprise, Johnny handed over the gun and the grenade and he fell into Mrs. Conrad’s arms weeping like a child. To her credit, Mrs. Conrad cleared everything with the authorities and took Johnny home for his steak dinner – and gave him a home.

Eleven years after the incident, Johnny walked up to the podium to address his graduating medical school class. “The best medicine,” he said with tears in his eyes, “that we can give to each other is the joy and love, which we all need to function as people. Whatever you do, be sure to infuse hope, love and some joy into the hearts of your patients,” he continued. “It’s the best medicine in the world... and it’s free!”

Does Happiness Really Possess Power?

Is the pursuit of happiness something that can significantly alter the way we live? Does the *Power of Happiness* actually have an influence on us as well as the people we meet each and every day?

Well, if anyone would doubt that the ***Power of Happiness*** exists, and that it really does have an enormous influence in everyone’s life, you really should ask Johnny Muffley – or anyone for that matter – who has experienced the ***Power of Happiness*** in their lives.

If you were to ask ***every*** person on earth if they could have one wish granted to them, you would surely have a number of different responses. Some would ask for money, others loving relationships, while many of us would immediately blurt out an endless list of our most favorite things like a new house, a new car, or world peace.

In fact, chances are that few would limit themselves to just one wish. Or maybe the one wish would be that we’d be granted a million more wishes. In any event, the smiles on our faces would seemingly never cease if we could obtain these things that

would somehow really make us happy. Wouldn't it be unbelievable to have the ability to have our wish or wishes granted?

If we were lonely, we could ask for the love of our life. If we were poor, we could ask for endless riches. And if we aspired to do great things, we could build great institutions to help the poor and the less fortunate. What wouldn't anybody do in order to be able to unlock the key to this world...this *Power of Happiness*?

Because Happiness does possess POWER! Every one of us has a natural desire to live a life of joy. And this yearning has nothing to do with a selfish or frivolous attitude. The trouble is not that we are looking for true joy, but rather it's *HOW WE GO ABOUT THE PROCESS*.

True happiness is first and foremost a gift – and it's not for sale. Unfortunately, there's no special pill or formula to mix-up that we can instantly inject into our hearts and minds. If such a product existed, someone would be a very wealthy person. In fact, that's why drug dealers are so busy. They have a product line that does a great (and deceptive) job of making people feel happy and free. And while drugs are one of the terrible plagues and destroyers of our culture, it is clear that people will go to great lengths to feel better. *Happiness really does have POWER!*

But perhaps we're not convinced. It may be that this *Power of Happiness* is really a lot of rubbish ... something that people dream up to make others a bit confused? Perhaps a life of happiness is really overrated and not really important?

But did you ever stop to think of why you get up in the morning? Why do you get up out of bed, take a shower (hopefully), and go do the things that you do? You may say it's out of habit, or the kids like to eat, or you like when the heat works in the winter, and you have to pay the heating bill. But if you thought about it for a few moments, why do you do the things you do each and every day? I'd stand to wager that after talking to you for 15 minutes, that I would trace it back to the fact that you want to be happy.

We go to work to make sure that our family is cared for properly. Or we may go to school with the hope that we can land a better paying position in a few years. Or we train for hours and hours with the hope of winning that gold medal we've been dreaming about for years. *The bottom line is that each one of us wants to live a life of joy.* We want our love ones to be happy and we want to avoid the many hardships of life with all of the pain that comes with them. If this pursuit – or this *Power of Happiness* – doesn't have a grip on us, then I don't know what does.

Did you ever stop to think why are jails are so full? Could it be that people want to take some shortcuts (i.e. burglary, kidnapping, extortion, etc...) to a happy life? Do you believe that Mother Theresa would have ever taken a moment of her time to care for a dying child in the streets if she wasn't filled with joy? Do you really think that you would struggle and work hard for your family to live a better life if you didn't think that it would somehow make you, and them, a bit happier? And do you think that many of the

problems would exist as they do today (i.e. drug abuse, infidelity, racism, deception, depression, crime, etc...) if those people involved could tap into at least a little happiness?

The Power of Happiness most definitely affects each of our lives. We can cooperate with it, so that it can help us to achieve greatness and allow us to be the person we were destined to become. Or, depending on our particular inclination, it can lead us around and do anything it wants with us. It can lead us astray (if we allow it to) by unleashing the passions and such a way that is actually very bad for us.

Some people go through life with a constant smile on their face and can seemingly conquer the world with their plans and influence, while others live in quiet desperation and struggle to get through each day. Other people pursue their dreams and never look back, while many can't find out how to get on track. Yes, the *Power of Happiness* is one of the most – if not the most – influential forces in our lives. And we really ought to think of a way to make the connection and work with it in the proper way to ensure our personal happiness. In the final analysis, it's not that we are looking for happiness; that's natural for each one of us. Rather, it's often times how we go about the process.

ATTITUDE

ATTITUDE isn't the only thing...it's EVERYTHING!

Consider the life story of Dave Talbert:

Dave was one of a kind in his hometown; a gentleman and a favorite of everyone he came in contact with each day. Everybody loved to see him at the diner or at town gatherings. But he wasn't always such a good citizen. In fact, you could say that, for a long time, he was a bitter man who often thought about killing himself because of all of the pain in his life.

Actually, Dave had real reasons to complain. In his high school days, he was a football and baseball star. And all the girls had Dave at the top of their 'wish list'. Dave was also great in the classroom and had aspirations to become a trial lawyer one-day. But then came the Vietnam War.

Dave was caught in an ambush 3 months after he arrived, and he could never remember the sound of the mortar fire that took away his legs from him. Unfortunately, he could never forget the pain. Oh, the pain! Yet, for Dave, it wasn't the physical pain that he couldn't forget; it was everything else: the humiliation, the loss of his legs, the feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, the fear of a life of continuous obstacles, and more. Some 22 years later, he still couldn't find a day of peace in his life.

Alcohol and drugs clouded the pain, but never took it away completely. And after years of battling and fighting with everyone around him, even his family steered clear of him. Everyone, that is, except for his younger sister, Laura. She would come to see him at his trailer 3 times a week. And even when he vented his anger and frustration on her, she would always tell him how much she loved him. Even though Dave was blinded with bitterness and pain, he recognized – even if only a little bit – that Laura was someone he could rely on and trust.

And then came the second round of ‘mortar fire’ in Dave’s life. Laura told him that she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Laura opened the trailer door early that dreadful Sunday morning with a look of horrific fear on her face. Tears were pouring down her cheeks. Immediately, Dave asked, “What’s wrong Laura, why are you crying?” After an hour of explanation, Laura explained how she had been diagnosed, and how the doctors gave her only 6 months to live. Once again, the rage filled within Dave to an uncontrollable fury in which he cursed the doctors, the government, and especially God. Laura remained calm all the time. Knowing Dave, she let him vent his anger, and she waited patiently until his tantrum was over. She then sat up, stared him in the eyes, and patted him on the shoulder and said, “I need you to do me a favor, Dave!” “Anything Laura,” he replied, “you know I’ll do anything for you.”

“Well, that’s great, Dave. I’m going to need you to come with me to the hospital and to some of the hospice classes – because I’m going to get real sick towards the end,” cried Laura. “Anything, Laura – you can count on me, I’m your big brother,” replied Dave. “I’ll come....” “Wait a minute, Dave,” said Laura. “That’s not the big favor I was talking about, Dave. Please listen to me for a minute, this is really important.” Seeing how desperate Laura looked, Dave calmed down a bit and said, “OK, tell me what you want.”

“Dave,” sobbed Laura, “I want you to smile again. I want you to laugh with me while I’m still around. I want you to go with me into town and smile when you greet people at the diner and around the hospital. And I want to see the man I knew so long ago – a man with joy and hope in his heart. Dave, I need you to smile!”

It took only seconds, but after years of frustration and pain – and now seeing his little sister in the fight of her life trying desperately to bring joy to his life – Dave broke down and cried like a baby. And he couldn’t stop crying. Laura just hugged him and kept begging him to just smile once again...just for her. Dave agreed, but he knew it wasn’t going to be easy. On trips to the hospital with Laura, Dave would smile at the staff and even tell a few old jokes to some of the nurses. But he was still very sad that Laura was dying...and there was nothing he could do about it.

Three days before she died, Laura grabbed Dave by the hand and begged him to keep one promise to her when she was gone. With a smile, Dave told her that he would “do anything Laura, anything for you.” She leaned over from her bed, and whispered in

Dave's ear, "SMILE, Dave. Greet each day like the blessing it really is. Do your best everyday and try your best to be good to everybody you meet, it's better than all the pain you endure living your life with a constant frown."

Six months later, Dave lost the town mayor race by 137 votes. With a smile on his face, and a new sense of vitality in his voice, he gave his short concession speech from his new wheelchair saying, "Thank you to everyone who voted for me, and even for those of you that didn't. I did my best and I'll be around next time, you can count on that. But before we all go home please get those frowns off your faces right now. Put on a smile. It doesn't cost anything, except maybe years of pain and frustration. Smiling can be a lot more fun."

Amidst all the cheers and the backslapping, Dave reached into his coat pocket and pulled out his favorite picture of his beloved Laura. With a smile on his face, and a little chuckle in his voice, he joked with her for a moment saying, "what are you looking at little sister?" But Dave knew – they both knew – she was looking at a new man...a man with a new ATTITUDE!

ATTITUDE...is it really that important?

A good and properly formed attitude is **probably the single most important thing necessary for someone to experience and live a happy life**. There are many things that contribute to a good attitude, and we'll discuss and build upon them as we move on, but it is absolutely necessary to form a good attitude in your life if you ever wish to be happy.

There is NO SUBSTITUTE for a good attitude ... NOTHING!

And we've heard this before, haven't we? The motivational speakers have a long list of slogans and one-liners to try to get us pumped-up in life. And we'd be smart if we sought these people out and asked their views and opinions a bit more. Yet, so often we tend to get cynical about too many things. And we forget the very basics of life. Well, please, please, please, don't forget this one:

WITH A GOOD ATTITUDE YOU CAN DO ANYTHING, ACHIEVE ANYTHING, AND BE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BE. WITH A POOR ATTITUDE, YOU DON'T HAVE A CHANCE IN HELL OF ACHIEVING ANYTHING...EXCEPT A LOT OF PAIN IN YOUR LIFE.

First, it's important to understand that **attitude is a choice**. It's a mindset that only we can control, and only we can change. Nobody else can make or break our attitude. When each one of us wakes up in the morning, we all have the same choice, regardless of our apparent lot in life. We can make a conscious decision to either do our very best, to try to make the day a good day as best we can, and to bring as much joy to those around us. Or, we can curse the day, try to dodge anything that doesn't please us in some way, and treat everybody anyway we feel like it. We make this choice every day that we awake.

With Laura's help, Dave chose to change his life – to change his attitude. And he became a much happier man because of that choice. Every one of us has the same opportunity as Dave. We can *win* in life by making the right choices. And choosing the right attitude is the first – and the most important – step in the process.

With this in mind, it becomes apparent that *attitude is also a matter of making peace with your closest and most intimate friend in the world*. And every person on earth has the same closest friend...*our own thoughts*. You've heard the popular phrases, 'to thine own self be true', and 'you have to like yourself first', but you probably never considered your thoughts as being your closest friend. And even though you may have a great spouse, great parents, great children, and great friends, you will never, ever, have a closer friend in the world than your own thoughts

Because having a vibrant and healthy attitude is also *dependent upon choosing* the many other things – like trying to live an honest life, trying to consistently overcome our shortcomings, trying to be truly good and full of hope – so that we can look in the mirror and smile at ourselves. Later on, we'll talk about goodness, the world of value, hope, self-image, relationships, money, and more, throughout this journey. But we should never lose sight of the fact that we can strive and achieve things in our lives – and be happy along the way – as long as we base our lives on the cornerstone of trying to develop a healthy attitude in order to live a life...of greatness!

What this means is that we need to re-focus our attitude and tune in to the life that we were meant to live. *And that life is a life of greatness*. It doesn't mean that we have to make \$20 billion dollars, or discover the cure for cancer, or score more points than anyone else in history. A call to greatness means that we cooperate with every opportunity – and setback – in life to aspire to be the very best person that we can be. Ultimately, by living this way, we become the person we want to become; someone we are proud to 'hang-out' with each day. So, instead of trying to just get by, or just get along, we greet each day with true hope and a jump in our step, and we try our very best not to settle for mediocrity in anything that we do.

One of the most fantastic reasons – and at the same time one of the most beautiful side-effects – of having a great attitude, is that it is a *key determining element in our ability to achieve our goals in life*. Whether we are talking about relationships, our work, or our 'hot buttons' that we want more than anything else (everybody has them), a great attitude allows us to put things in the proper perspective and gives us the energy to overcome the inevitable obstacles that show up at everyone's doorstep. It recognizes that everything isn't perfect, that things don't always go our way, and that the best of plans get fouled-up at times. But, more importantly, a healthy attitude affords us the opportunity to look beyond all the 'junk' so that we can keep our eye on the goal...in order to succeed!

And don't we all *feel a lot better* when we succeed at our relationships, when we do well in our work by giving it our very best, and by challenging ourselves to

accomplish those ‘hot button’ items in our lives? Again, it’s not a question of achieving or getting everything that we want, but it’s everything about how we go about the process. Just ask any person who has ever played in an exciting, extremely intense, championship game in sports. Naturally, the winner is happy. But anyone fortunate enough to have played in such a contest – regardless of whether they won or lost the game – will tell you that it was a great experience and they’d love the opportunity to do it again.

Deep down inside, ***we all want to succeed***. None of us wants to consider ourselves a failure. We never want to look in the mirror and put our head down thinking that we are a ‘loser’ in some way. That’s why it’s essential to remember one vitally important thing: A failure is not someone who tried something and didn’t succeed. Rather a true failure is someone who never tried anything, and succeeded (at doing nothing). On the other hand, a true success is someone who does their ABSOLUTE BEST, and gives it their all in everything that they do in life. There is a big difference between a failure and a success...a big difference.

A good attitude also ***allows us to be open to the beautiful things in life***. It makes us want to hold a newborn baby in our arms, it lets us cheer for our team when they win or lose the big game, and it helps us to carry-on when things don’t exactly go our way. However, when our attitude stinks, we often become skeptical and cynical in our lives. We can’t truly appreciate things because we are closed-up in ourselves; and nothing seems to matter. Each one of us needs to be constantly aware that bitterness and despair are always on the attack against our attitude – every day.

And ***these attacks by all of the negative things*** (i.e. despair, disappointment, discouragement, etc...) in our lives ***is natural***. We have to recognize them – and practice at moving beyond them – in order to keep our attitude healthy, vibrant, and alive. Please don’t forget: EVERYBODY HAS UPS AND DOWNS IN LIFE. And everyone gets ‘beat up’ to varying degrees every day. But like they say in football, ‘the best offense is usually a good defense’. Instead of constantly trying to ‘force’ a good attitude into our hearts and minds, maybe it would be a better idea to build up our defenses – or a strong character – in order to fend off the negative things that could adversely affect anyone’s good attitude on any given day?

Our approach to each day and our outlook on life (our attitude) is profoundly important regarding our ability to deal with all of the complexity that surrounds us. We need to always be ‘on guard’ and be aware that we often times – in our minds – make things a lot more negative than what they truly are; and we actually tend to produce (bad) things in our minds, and blow many minor things way out of proportion. This type of approach can often get the best of us if we let it. And it can keep us from developing a healthy and happy attitude. Often times, it’s just a case of relaxing a bit, sitting back, and asking how much the situation REALLY means to us.

Actually, we need to be big enough to admit ***that we don’t really have all the answers all of the time***. We must accept the fact that we really don’t know what will

happen in 5 years – or even tomorrow for that matter. And we need to take to heart the reality that we can only greet the day properly – and be open to all of the beauty and splendor that life has to offer – when our attitude is formed properly and our heads and hearts are in the right place.

Yet, the \$15 million dollar question always arises: ***How do we form a good and healthy attitude?*** Well, it doesn't happen overnight...but in a way it does. Building a great attitude is a conscious decision that each one of us makes – a definite choice on our part – to cooperate and actively pursue greatness. In reality, a properly formed attitude is based on how we bend and mold our free will to **GOODNESS**. It is how we consciously position ourselves and approach the World of Value (we'll talk about this soon) in an honest and unselfish manner.

Attitude isn't the only thing...it's EVERYTHING. Just ask Dave or anyone else you know who has overcome some personal tragedy in their lives. They never want to go back to living a life with a bad attitude – a life of desperation. Good attitudes can only be developed with a lot of work and can never be bought or replaced with some cheap imitation. It really depends on **HOW** each of us approaches and cooperates with the World of Value. It's a choice we all make; and we can only be happy by making the right choice.

HUMOR

It's still the world's BEST MEDICINE ...and it's free!

A few jokes to tell your friends.

***For your co-workers: How do you confuse your boss?
You don't ... he's/she's already confused!***

Some of the many most notable blunders by men:

When your wife or girlfriend asks you if she looks like she gained some weight, and you respond by saying:

“No, honey you really don't look that fat” or,

“Heck no, honey, you've always been that heavy” or,

“Don't worry, I love you that way anyway honey, there's more of you to love” or,

“Boy, you are really packing it on, maybe you should ask my new secretary how she stays so trim” or,

“What's wrong with your face honey, you seem to have more chins (Chen) than a Chinese phonebook”

A great joke: Patrick McDonough and Father Murphy in Ireland

Patrick McDonough had a beautiful golden retriever (dog) named Lucky. And the 2 of them were inseparable. Every day Patrick went to and from the market, and every day

his best friend, Lucky, went with him. For 15 years the 2 were bosom buddies; until one rainy day in late April, poor Lucky was struck by a delivery van and was killed.

A distressed Patrick, wrought with grief, ran to the local parish priest, Father Murphy, sobbing and cursing the driver about the loss of his poor friend Lucky. After explaining the incident for over an hour, Patrick finally asked, "Father, you know Lucky and I were inseparable every day of his beautiful life. Why everyone knows, the dog was more of a friend than most humans. Not a day went by that the creature didn't try to make my day a little brighter. I'll surely miss him."

"Yes, my son, Patrick, I'm so sorry to hear of the loss of our poor Lucky. He was good dog and I know you will miss him dearly. He was a fine friend, a wonderful animal, and it pains me to see this happen to the both of you. You have my deepest sympathies," answered Father Murphy.

"Father, do you think that you could hold a funeral for Lucky, him being my best friend and all," begged Patrick. "Well, Patrick", replied Father Murphy, "you know that I can't have a funeral service for a dog – even if he was an exceptional animal – the Catholic church will just not allow it."

At that, Patrick looked and felt totally dejected. He put his head in his hands, and started to cry again uncontrollably. "Patrick, Patrick, Patrick, please don't cry," begged Father Murphy. "I'll tell you what, a new eastern mythology congregation just opened down the street. Maybe if you go down and ask them, maybe they can do a simple ceremony or something to try to comfort you with this loss of Lucky."

Immediately, Patrick rose to his feet, wiped the tears from his face, and hugged Father Murphy saying, "Thank you Father, thank you very, very much...I knew you would help me with the situation. That's a fine bit of advice, it is." I'm going to do exactly as you say – and I'm going to go down right now!"

"Father", asked an uncertain Patrick. "Do you think that \$2,000 is enough of a donation to pay for such a service?" A startled and confused Father Murphy jumped to his feet, grabbed both hands of his newfound best friend Patrick and shouted, "Good God man, why didn't you tell me that Lucky was a Catholic?"

Humor ... You can't live without it!

It's great to laugh. It's great the way we feel when we laugh, isn't it? Doesn't it just feel so darn good when we have a great, uncontrollable laugh? Stop and think for a minute. Isn't it fantastic to laugh until it hurts? Is there anything more enjoyable than sitting down with a dear friend and laughing to the point where you just can't stop?

When was the last time you had a really good laugh? If you're like most people, you probably can't remember. And even if you did remember, you probably (I hope I'm wrong) can't remember a 2nd time – or a time before your last laugh – that you laughed

uncontrollably? Whatever your response, just be sure to add laughter to your day from now on...for the rest of your life!

You can do this in a number of ways. And I suggest that you do them all! Go out and buy a joke book. Read it thoroughly and pass it on to a friend. Call them up and joke with them. You'll be surprised how it makes you feel. Second, buy as many joke-related items as possible. Buy a small calendar of jokes for your desk or car so you can tell yourself a joke every morning. Or buy any number of things (i.e. cards, funny alarm clocks, wild talking slippers, and more) that will bring a smile to your face when you're around them. Most importantly, make sure you associate with people who are funny and have a good attitude. Call them up to meet them for coffee once a week or visit them over lunch. But be sure to include happy and motivated people in your life... it's contagious. And we all need humor – lots of humor – in our lives. So don't be stingy.

Humor is more important for our attitudes, minds, and hearts, than practically any vitamin supplement that we can buy. Studies show that happy people are healthier people. It's a fact that people who laugh a lot are less likely to contract illnesses, are more productive at work, and are less likely to have family and personal problems. The list goes on and on about the benefits of humor in our lives.

But we don't need any study to tell us this, do we? Isn't it apparent that our lives take on a whole different meaning when there's laughter in the home or the work place? Isn't there less tension, less stress, and less problems when laughter is plentiful? If you don't agree with me, I hope you have a really good reason for saying that, because I can't think of any reason to ration laughter in our lives.

Humor is a fantastic stress reliever. It allows us to relieve ourselves of the burdens and stress that affect us all, even if it's only momentary. Humor has its way of diffusing a tense time by lifting our hearts when we're having difficulty or when something appears a little too much to handle on our own. And it helps us to put things in the right perspective...all free of charge.

Humor often allows honesty to shine through when we're too proud to admit that we don't truly understand or grasp something. For example, I was entertaining customers one time in a super box at Veteran's Stadium for a Phillies game one summer night some years back. And none of the woman could see the baseball after the batter hit the ball. My wife, feeling a little dumb, appealed to the other ladies saying, "*I wish I could see better, because I can't see the stupid ball once he hits it. Can somebody help me please.*" At that, all of the woman laughed and said "*Thank God for Rosi, we couldn't see the darn ball either...and we were too proud to say anything.*" And they all proceeded to the dining area, and had a wonderful time joking and exchanging laughs all night long.

Humor is the natural expression of the heart when it is filled with joy. When are hearts are happy, or even when they are a bit burdened, laughter has its way of making us feel GREAT! Regardless of your religious persuasion, I challenge anybody to

tell me that God does not truly enjoy when we laugh uncontrollably. Because if you believe that God wants us to be serious all of the time, or to be gloomy in our fasts and sacrifices, I think you have a very warped sense of the loving God who created us all!

Laugh a lot. Seek out people who like to laugh. Never feel guilty or weird if you feel like laughing (as long as you're not laughing at somebody or being naughty). Seek out people who have great attitudes and who like to laugh. And never, ever, be ashamed to say you make humor (laughter) a part of your day. We were meant to laugh; there's more than enough time to cry. Make sure that you make laughter part of your day. And you'll be surprised at the way it changes your life and makes you feel happy!

HAPPINESS ... a starting point.

I have come so they might have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Everybody wants to be happy...**EVERYBODY!** If you meet someone who tells you differently, please watch out. Or rather, ask them why they don't want to be happy. If they tell you that they'd rather be happy in the next life or that they really aren't concerned with their own happiness, well...OK. But if they tell you that the stars aren't aligned for them, or their karma will never permit them to be happy or that they'd rather cause pain to themselves (masochism), then please, please, please run for the hills!

That's because everything that we do – *every human act* – is done for some purpose or END in sight. We work hard, we study, or we train vigorously for athletics all with the hope that these actions will lead us to something good. There may be no apparent motive for the things that our FREE WILL directs (as many things are not good or evil in themselves) EXCEPT that they lead to some final good.

But there remains the great question of whether or not there is one subjective ultimate end to all of our acts? Is there one over – riding motive – or fuel – that dictates what we do? Many people would say that there isn't. If we look at all of the different types of people in the world and their respective actions, it appears that everyone is looking for many different things and many different answers.

Yet in reality, all acts are done with one ultimate end – and the end is happiness.

The confusion begins, however, because each of us tends to place our happiness in different things. Yet, whether it is in the service of others, the accumulation of money, gambling, or a continuous flow of pleasurable encounters, each of us seeks our own special way because we *think* that it will somehow make us happy.

So, while each of us does all things for happiness, ***WE DO NOT ALL PLACE OUR HAPPINESS IN THE SAME THING.***

This doesn't mean that we think of happiness in everything that we do. None of us runs around saying "I want to be happy, I want to be happy" every moment of the day. When I drive to my office I don't think of my destination at every turn even though each mile takes me closer to it. Yet, if we convince a person that a particular act will not be well for them – that it will not further their happiness in some way – they will surely not do the act.

One major obstacle that each one of us needs to overcome, is to try to understand how we tend to spoil our happiness at times by continuously tampering with it. Because many of us – without a thought – tend to replace true joy with counterfeit substitutes that will never be able to supply a true and lasting joy.

For example, a person may go about their work to provide for themselves and/or their family. Somewhere along the way, work becomes a life in itself, and more money for the sake of more money – at all costs. So, a worthy endeavor (work) becomes a diversion from our initial goal of providing for our loved ones. So in many cases, there is a tendency to elevate what should only be a MEANS to an END, into the end itself.

Simply put, our means of happiness, by being habitually pursued, often comes to be a major part of our happiness. The habit becomes second nature and we indulge the habit as we gratify our appetites. Unfortunately, we become slaves of habit and do many things *simply because we get used to doing them*. These tendencies also lead to our ruin because – by their very nature – they are perversions of the normal operations of our free will. ***Bottom line: Many of us get 'stuck' pursuing things that we thought would make us happy...and sometimes they don't!***

So, what does all of this mean? Real simply: ***we should be truly concerned about where our focus is in life and where our heart rests.*** We should continuously (and honestly) evaluate if our will is bent on true happiness or irrationally tied to some MEANS that we (some where along the way) substituted for joy. We will elaborate on this further when we talk about the power that habits play in our lives. But for now, it's sufficient to accept the fact that the END should not – and cannot – ever be substituted for whatever MEANS we tend to replace it with if we want to be truly happy people.

But wait a minute, we may be tempted to conclude that each person is the measure of his/her own happiness, and that no standard of happiness can be truly defined. This is definitely not so! We are not the measure of our own happiness, any more than we are the measure of our own health. Because just as a particular diet we choose for our health could actually be poison for us, we can look for happiness in some manner and actually find a life of misery.

HAPPINESS – 6 Initial Rules and Requirements of the Game!

1.) In order to be happy, *we must each live up to our intellectual and moral constitution*. In other words, we all have to try to be **GOOD!** Today, this doesn't get much attention. Too often, we don't try hard enough to hold ourselves (or others) accountable – by even the lowest of moral standards – to adhere to a life of intellectual and moral honesty. We tend to forget the many traditions that have been formulated over the years for no other reason other than that they appear to be old-fashioned. Our music, entertainment, literature and other forms of public expressions often fall short of common levels of decency. And this must change.

2.) At its very core, *happiness is an act* and does not exist in having something done to me *but rather entails that I actually do something*. Just as the nature of love itself is diffusive – in other words we need to give love in order to receive and experience it – so too is the case with our actions. It is not simply a matter of being able to do something, but rather actually doing it. Jesus told us that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friend. He did not say that there is no greater love than to think about laying down one's life for a friend. And there is a big difference.

3.) Directly related to the diffusive and active aspect of happiness, is the realization that *happiness is also primarily a gift*. Because each one of us knows that we can labor and pursue any goal – and actually achieve it – without ever experiencing true joy. It is only when this joy is freely bestowed upon us (i.e.: a child's smile, a true love, a dear friendship, an act of forgiveness, etc...) that we can actually 'feel' the loveliness that only true happiness conveys.

4.) As people, we can only be happy by doing what we alone can do, that is, *acting by REASON and UNDERSTANDING*. We cannot rejoice in doing what a tree does. Likewise, we cannot be happy living like a dog by simply having pleasurable or painful sensations, and muscular feeling. Unfortunately, many of us have settled to live the life of a dog. We sometimes sniff and scratch while trying to feed the passions and avoid the painful feelings at all costs. And in doing so, we have not only looked at the act of contemplation (the habit of which is intellectual virtue) as a stupid silly thing, but have reduced many things to a dog's perspective.

5.) *Happiness is bringing about our intellect and will to act – and to habitually mold our behavior – in ways that discern the good that must be done*. This is not an ambiguous statement. There is always a better way, a truthful way, an honest way, a just and fair way, a selfless way, a pure way; you get the point. With ample and frequent contemplation, happiness becomes a habit fueled by frequent moral acts, yielding to reason and understanding, and lifting our minds toward perfect happiness (God). And we upset the process – and ruin our happiness – when we continuously run from virtue just because we're too immature or too lazy to do the right thing.

6.) And most important of all, *we have to uncover our passion (something honorable and good) and pursue it with all of our might*. This 'Hot Button' – something that each one of us has – can be painting, writing, coaching, caring for the sick, or whatever your

particular passion may be. However, it's essential to uncover and pursue your passion, with great intensity – in order to strive for greatness.

Again, there is a vast difference in each person's own interpretation of happiness. Yet, we all want a happiness that will last. We should never substitute fun, contentment, or continuous irrational actions, for true joy. Because even the mere reflections of happiness can only rest in our delusions for so long before becoming visibly apparent problems or surfacing as some treatable ailment in a therapy session. Again, the desire for happiness is natural to each one of us. However, our inability and unwillingness to understand the natural order of happiness can cause many of us to experience problems that tend to spoil most of our joy

Only when we are open and when we cooperate with happiness, can we expect to participate with it and experience it fully. Because we can stand in front of a mirror all day long and senselessly try to convince ourselves that everything is OK or we can begin to challenge ourselves – every moment of every day. Each of us must 'make this call' on our own. When we choose to cooperate with happiness – on its' terms – we make the process a whole lot easier.

Happiness (contrary to popular belief) ***isn't always what we think it is or want it to be.*** Again, we are so often wrong about so many things; this shouldn't sound strange or surprise us? For example, we may have thought that we were choosing the right company for employment, but we found out that it was a terrible place to work. Or, we thought we found the right soul mate, but never envisioned they were actually so terribly self-centered. And we thought a move to warmer a climate would have been good for us only to find that we made the wrong move. ***When we begin to see that happiness is not always what we think it is or thought it would be, we take a giant leap to uncover the Power Of Happiness in our lives.***

Defining happiness is pretty difficult. Trying to explain it, is often ***like trying to explain what water is to wetness or sound is to music.*** It's often easier to uncover the properties or 'stuff' that makes up anything in order to explain it better. But if we stick to the 6 Rules and Requirements for Happiness, and balance them with a lot of other time-tested 'stuff', we have a good foundation to build upon in order to live a happy life.

SELF-IMAGE

A story of two dear friends...and their very different self-image(s).

The Story of Connie Johnson:

Connie hung up the phone laughing hysterically after a 10-minute conversation with her sister back in New York. Southern California was a long way from the Bronx, but she still felt that bond – that unbreakable tie – between her and her baby sibling. And it was so good to hear that everything was fine with her and the rest of the family back east.

She caught hold of herself and realized that she was running a bit late for work. The coffee stain on her blouse cost her a few more minutes to change, and almost cost her to miss the bus. But she dashed and scrambled to her desk, right on time.

At 44, she felt pretty darn good. She was grateful for her job at the real estate firm, even though it was a far cry from the various executive positions she had held in the past. “That’s OK,” she told her friends and family, “I’ve been blessed in so many ways, and I have so many things to be grateful for, there is no reason to complain.” Despite a painful separation from her love of 20 years, and the relocation to the ‘wrong’ job, Connie still had a hectic schedule to keep her busy and fulfilled.

*She mentored a child at a local grammar school, helped out at the battered woman’s clinic on Sunday afternoons, and was a constant source of support for the local middle school girl’s softball program. Above her bed, hung a plaque, with the words of her dearly departed Grandmother, which read: **“Do the best you can, whenever you can, however you can, and to whoever you can, ... and leave the rest up to God!”** Fortunately, Connie applied those words of wisdom to her everyday life...and she was a pretty happy woman.*

The Story of Debbie Ralston:

Debbie’s secretary fumbled with the office door trying to juggle a cup of hot coffee and her note pad. A nervous, but polite Debbie, jumped up, “Let me help you with that Julie, you’re going to burn yourself.” “Thanks, Debbie...did you hear anything yet?” asked Julie. “No Julie, and it’s been over 3 days from when they told me they’d make their decision. I hope, with all my heart, that they choose me for this position. It’s so close I can taste it.” (Actually, Julie was so worried she was coming apart at the seams). “Are you OK, Debbie – you don’t look so good,” commented Julie. “Yes, I’m OK, Julie, thanks. I’ll just be happy when all of this is over with.”

Actually, this was a continuation of years of ups and downs for the very talented and beautiful Debbie Ralston.

That’s because Debbie worked hard – really hard – and nobody denied her talents and contributions to the firm. She was the first attorney hired into the company over 12 years ago. And she had walked away from other career offers due to her loyalty to the founders and her belief that things would work out great for her, as long as she worked hard and performed at her best.

Her name was well respected amidst the other company executives and she liked the challenges of her job. Yet, she knew she was lacking the intensity and drive that she had exhibited in the past. Something was wrong. Even though she gained a few unwanted pounds, that wasn’t it. And her personal life was never anything to really brag about. Even at college she would spend many Saturday nights alone doing her wash or

just watching TV. Although lately, she found herself on edge a lot more than in the past. And she didn't know exactly why she felt that way. She wasn't happy with herself.

She was having difficulty sleeping, and she was canceling any engagement that she didn't feel like attending. Recently, even her boss reminded her that she needed to attend a seminar cross-town. It seemed that others could sense her new habits as well. But there was still this promotion. If she could just land this position with the company, she'd be set. At least until the next promotion possibility came around. Because the next promotion; well, that one was the one that she really wanted ... and the one that would 'really' make her happy.

Feeling the pressure was unbearable, she buzzed Julie for the 3rd time in an hour, asking her to check something seemingly incidental. "Yes, Debbie, I checked that yesterday. Don't worry, Debbie," sensed Julie. "Everything's going to work out, you'll see." Finally, Debbie phoned her dear friend, Connie Johnson. "Connie, it's Debbie, how are you today?" "I'm great, Connie, what's up?" replied Connie.

"Connie, I need you bad. I need to talk to a friend. And I need your help. I'm coming apart at the seams, and I need you," begged Debbie. "No problem, Deb, let's meet for coffee right after work...let's say 6:00 p.m. at Dempsey's," said Connie. "We'll figure it out."

SELF-IMAGE: ... Is it really that important?

Absolutely! In fact, truly knowing yourself and recognizing your strengths, as well as your shortcomings, is a fundamental prerequisite to living a happy life.

Can you remember your mother or your grandmother telling you, "You have to love yourself, **before** you love somebody else"? Well, most everybody would agree with that. The challenge often arises in trying to make sense of it all. Sometimes it's tough to sift through everything that goes on around us, to deal with it properly, and then to formulate a sound character to make sure that we're doing the right thing.

So, since our thoughts are our closest friend – and they'll always be with us – it seems like it would make perfect sense to see how we tend to look at ourselves – and how we **ought** to look at ourselves – in order to live a happy life.

In order to do this somewhat quickly, we'll **take a look at 4 elements** of the **Self-Image** world. First, we'll try to look at who we are vs. who we want to become; it's called The Mirror Test. Second, we'll take a brief look at some people who have influenced **Self-Image** in our lifetime. Third, we'll look at why some people have inferiority complexes. And finally, we'll try to put together some good ground rules in order to develop a sound **Self-Image**.

The Mirror Test

The next time you get 5 minutes alone, take a good look in the mirror and talk to yourself a little bit. Don't worry, you won't go crazy. Experts now say that it's good to talk to yourself.

Just take a few minutes and ask yourself some questions. Do you like what you see? Forget the physical appearance, the wrinkles, or the dark circles that may be under your eyes. Is the person in the mirror someone who you're proud of? Are you a kind soul? Are you a loving and compassionate person? Do you try harder each day to be better than you were yesterday? Are you living the life you want to live? And would anyone out there be proud to call you his/her friend? Are there areas in your life you'd like to improve upon?

Then talk to your closest friend (remember, he/she's your *thoughts* and he/she is with you every minute of every day). What do you think about most of the time? Is it your money situation and your bank account? Is it how you're going to look and get back into good physical shape? Is it your job? Or is it your family and the many relationships in your life? Where is the *focus* in your life? Or better yet, where, and in what, does your heart rest. The Mirror test often tells us a lot about ourselves. And by the way, it's OK to do The Mirror Test as often as you like. It tends to keep us all honest when we to look ourselves in the eyes

Influential People in the world of Self-Image: Ivan P. Pavlov and Abraham Maslow

These two men, Ivan P. Pavlov, the Russian physiologist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1904 and Abraham Maslow, the American psychologist, and the founder of humanistic psychology, have greatly influenced scholastic thought, and tend to tell us a great deal about how we've come to view ourselves, and how many of us formulate our *Self-Image*. Unfortunately, it's not always a really clear picture.

Ivan Pavlov won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1904 for physiology and medicine for his research on digestion and the nervous system. He basically showed how the nerves control the flow of the digestive juices for the stomach and the pancreas. What Pavlov is most remembered for are the infamous Pavlov dogs, whereby he set out to prove (by experimenting on dogs) that by repetitive association, an artificial stimulus (such as a bell or whistle) could substitute for a natural need (food) that could actually cause a reaction (dog salivating and panting).

For over 30 years Pavlov studied the brain functions; *he firmly believed that all of our habits, as well as our highest mental activities, were all a matter of* **CONDITIONED REFLEX**. In other words, chains of conditioned reflexes govern much of our thought processes. Hence, we hear of Pavlov's dogs panting at the sound of bells or whistles. Unfortunately, modern day marketers (i.e. TV, radio, and press) are spending billions each day to prove Pavlov's theories are correct as they try to keep us panting and salivating at the sound of their bells and whistles.

Abraham Maslow basically identified and categorized the various levels of human needs. He created his infamous needs hierarchy pyramid depicting how people must satisfy their most basic needs before they can fulfill the next levels. In other words, he stresses how our most basic physical needs (hunger and shelter) must be satisfied before we look to satisfy safety, social status, ego, or self-actualization – which according to Maslow is the ultimate fulfillment on one's unique potential.

At first glance, both men *appear* to make a lot of sense. But how does this affect our *Self-Image*?

Well, it's actually kind of easy to see how each of us will look to find our daily bread and shelter before we try to write a thesis on molecular structures. However, it is precisely in Maslow's hierarchy – his playing field – that we begin to unveil a rather morbid sense of self-centeredness, as well as a reliance on what society tells us we should naturally feel about ourselves, as we 'mature'.

Because just as the structure narrows as you go further up Maslow's pyramid, so too does our ability to form a healthy self-image narrow when we view self-actualization or 'making it' as our ultimate destiny.

First, it's clear that Maslow's teachings *do not take into consideration the presence of evil in the world*. Also, he doesn't understand that a true response to value (i.e., goodness, truth, hope, etc.) is the only way that we can be truly happy and fulfilled. And joy is what each of us needs and WANTS in our lives...**MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE!** Maslow simply composed what any person – devoid of any response to true value – will look for as he or she matures through certain life-cycle changes.

In other words, once a person gets bread and water, it's off to an obscure sense of safety. After safety is achieved, we look to social acceptance (which, by the way, is actually one of our modern-day plagues). After social acceptance, we look to feed our ego or self-awareness in whatever way we see fit. And last, according to Maslow, we become truly fulfilled when we have made it to the top of any field of endeavor and attain our goals; *regardless of how rotten the dream or endeavor may be*. With this kind of thinking, it isn't hard to understand why the world is so cruel at times.

Because without a true response and adherence to value, we will all tend to look to self-actualization as the new 'god'. And with everything set in place, we tend to pant and salivate like Pavlov's dogs to become more socially acceptable, more important, and ultimately more fulfilled by whatever we deem appropriate. And while a self-assured sense of accomplishment or the attainment of a goal fuels many of us – and is often very good for us – in many cases we are really just responding like a dog on a chain.

Our *Self-Image* is infinitely more important than how we can become 'self-actualized'. And if all of our brain functions are simply a matter of Conditioned Reflex (like dogs) then maybe we ought to 'hang it up' and go live with the animals?

No way, life is too great to settle for a dog's life!

Self-Image and Inferiority Complexes... Where (or do) we fit in?

Be careful here. Try your best not to view inferiority complexes as some sort of ailment that only weak-minded or timid people experience. Or, in other words, everybody else except you.

Many of us tend to (to varying degrees) allow ourselves to be influenced by the unhealthy comparisons that we make about a wide variety of things. And it is precisely in the unnatural and unhealthy comparisons that we make regarding the accomplishments of another (in relation to what we've done) that we sometimes come to feel inferior. At times, we tend (unconsciously) to formulate an immature and self-destructive view of ourselves if someone appears to have outperformed us in one way or another – and we feel inferior.

Actually, there are three 'types' of people who suffer from inferiority complexes, and it's a condition that doesn't limit itself to people who actually believe that they lack something or appear to us that that they feel inferior in some way.

The first type of person suffering feelings of inferiority is one who actually does APPEAR to lack something (at least in relation to others) and finds it difficult to rise above these feelings. Here we're talking about the worker who stutters when speaking to the CEO, the mother who marvels at the successful executive woman next door, and the physically unappealing teenager who wishes she looked like the class beauty. Basically, these people make unhealthy comparisons about the perceived accomplishments or conditions of another and tell themselves that they aren't rich, successful or beautiful – and they feel inferior.

The second type of person who often feels inferior is usually in a constant state of want and anticipation of the best, instead of striving to BE the best in whatever they do. This type of person is generally the type who believes that the only way to feel complete is to obtain as much as possible in order to look good and be respected by people around them. The true barometer for their lives is not how good or selfless they are, but rather how well off (mostly financially) they are with their careers and earthly endeavors.

The third type of person suffering from inferior complexes actually considers himself/herself superior to most everyone else. It's the self-assured, independent, self-made person who spends a lot of time trying to impress themselves and others with their wealth, appearance, independence, career status and more. In reality, these 'superior' people rely almost completely on their 'things', and on what others think of them, in order to form their self-image.

Some examples would be: a wealthy person who lives most moments for his/her money and couldn't bear the thought of being poor, the executive who derives all of his sense of purpose and importance from his position, and the maverick entrepreneur who's sense of independence is tied to her definition of success. Yet, if we were to remove the money, the job, and the independence, we would see a lot of shattered people. That's because their sense of superiority is ATTACHED to the thing or notion that encompasses their self-image.

These seemingly 'superior' people would dismiss this description as untrue, claiming that they really don't care what anyone thinks of them. Unfortunately, many of them are imprisoned by the counterfeit creed of self-actualization, of having made it, and of being independent of the rules (values) that somehow apply to everyone else. And that's the one thing about our *Self-Image*; it often haunts us until we get things right. We can fool ourselves some of the time, but we can't fool ourselves all of the time. There is no substitute for a good *Self-Image*.

6 Ground Rules for Formulating a Healthy Self-Image:

- 1.) In order to develop a strong and healthy *Self-Image*, ***we need to step back and begin to truly RESPECT ourselves***. We need to look at the profound beauty of life, and the gift that it truly is. Because if we can begin to realize that we have been granted and possess an awesome power with our lives, we take the first step toward understanding that we are *totally* complete without the need of the next job promotion, the newest car, or the biggest bank account.
- 2.) In line with #1, ***we need to initiate the process of DEVELOPING A SOUND CHARACTER, by committing ourselves to a life of virtue***. And this one is a little difficult...and a lot more rewarding! We need to adhere to the World of Value (i.e., goodness, truth, charity, forgiveness, etc...) and start to become a person of conviction. So, instead of making up the rules as we go along, or trying to 'just get by', we need to formulate our attitudes and habits so that we can stand up and face anything that the day presents to us.
- 3.) We also need to ***'get to know ourselves' a lot better than we do, and STOP MAKING COMPARISONS based on what we do/don't have***. And while this may sound easy, it's often the most difficult step of the entire process. Because, often times, we evaluate ourselves from other perspectives (i.e., comparing ourselves, thinking something is important because our parents told us it was, etc...) and we aren't sure if we agree. The Mirror Test is a good start, but we really need to evaluate how: money, work, hope, truth, and all the other things that affect us so much, play a vital role in our lives. We need to listen to our best friend (our thoughts) and straighten him/her out when they're out of line. And don't forget Gratitude...we all need to be more grateful.
- 4.) We should also ***try our best to never allow OUTSIDE INFLUENCES (i.e., money, fame, position, and career) to dictate a positive or negative Self-Image on us***. And

this is tough. But if we learn to truly respect ourselves, then initiate a sound character, and work at knowing ourselves better each day – without making comparisons all of the time – we can make this work. Otherwise, we are prime targets for a life of constant longing and ‘never enough’. And we can never be happy living this way.

- 5.) One of the toughest steps in formulating a healthy *Self-Image* is ***rejecting our own self-centeredness***. And this cannot be overlooked. Because the only way to be sure that our *Self-Image* is healthy and good, is to be certain that it ***reflects*** a thing of beauty! We can’t fool ourselves or look in the mirror and really smile, if we know that our total existence is based on a list of nothing but selfish pursuits. Sooner or later, we have to come to terms with our selfish side (we all have one) and we have to strive to control it much more effectively.
- 6.) The most important step to develop a healthy *Self-Image* is ***to recognize that we are all called to a Life of Greatness***...and we all must answer the call! Again, this doesn’t mean that we need to be rich, famous, or find the cure for cancer. But we do need to honestly try to live a life that is trustworthy, self-less, generous, and always focused on adhering to truly good things (regardless of how many times we may fall). By doing so, our *Self-Image* will be an inspiration to ourselves – and every one we meet.

IMAGINATION ... Where our thoughts and dreams are directed.

It’s hard to see clearly with your eyes, when your imagination is out of focus!

-- Mark Twain

The life of Mother Theresa of Calcutta:

Called by many, ‘The saintly little nun of our times,’ Mother Theresa of Calcutta lived a life of constant service. Despite no money, no ‘official’ product line, and little formal business training, she opened dozens of poor houses around the world and devoted her life to care for others and gave dignity and love to the poorest of the poor. For Mother Theresa, the questions of how to handle all of the troubles of the world had only one answer: “UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.”

In fact, Mother Theresa said that there are 2 reasons that we are born: “To love, and to be loved!” And she spent every waking moment of her life focusing on these 2 reasons. She served the ‘poorest of the poor’ and gave dignity to those dying in the streets. Now, that’s a beautiful imagination!

The life of Christopher Columbus:

Columbus' voyage to America ranks among history's most important events. It led to the real exploration of the New World, initiated contact between Europe and America, and opened the seas – and the world – to new discoveries and knowledge. Few people in history warrant our gratitude (notwithstanding his personal faults), as does Christopher Columbus.

But everyone – most everyone, anyway – thought he was wrong. Columbus was not trying to 'prove that the world was round'. He was just trying to find a shorter route to the Indies. Even though he believed he could reach the islands near Japan by sailing 2400 nautical miles west (it's actually about 11,000 nautical miles), Columbus was convinced, despite opposition from every 'learned' seaman of his time, that he would succeed. And he put his life, reputation, and every ounce of his courage into pursuing his dream. Wow, that's one heck of an imagination!

Mark Twain was right: ***It is hard to see with your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.*** It's even harder to think of what the world would be like if people didn't imagine great things – and then ACT on their imaginations – every day.

Did you ever stop to think about if someone hadn't taken the time to develop a vaccine for polio, or work at discovering the computer, or invented the telephone. Just think of life without fairy tales, Daffy Duck, and all the wonderful things that Walt Disney accomplished. Many people have had great imaginations – beliefs that they could do some great thing – and they devoted their total energies so that others would benefit.

Conversely, men like Hitler, Napoleon, Caesar, and others imagined they could conquer the world. And they brought unheard of misery and pain to themselves and to millions of others because of their barbaric imaginations.

IMAGINATION ...What is it really?

Imagination is the ***fullness of our thought processes.*** It's the 'stuff' that dreams are made of, and it fuels our ability to succeed. Most importantly, it is one of the most determining aspects of our development as a person. Bottom line: When our imagination is fashioned and nurtured properly, it affords us the ability to live a truly fulfilled life – and a happy one.

Think of the times when you have ***FELT*** the most gratified. Isn't it those times when your imagination – things that you dreamed of and wanted to accomplish – came true? Your first love, the birth of a child, starting a business, landing that job you always wanted, and signing for your first home. Wow! At one point you imagined those things (or others) happening, you ***ACTED*** in ways to bring them about, and they became a reality.

The focus of understanding our imagination should always be the *direction we choose to take it*. And this is actually pretty simple. We have a choice to direct our thoughts, hopes, and aspirations in whatever direction that we want. We can aspire to do great things, or we can pursue dreams that will, in some way, simply gratify the appetites and passions. The choice is **YOURS ... and YOURS** alone.

Developing our imagination is the *fullest expression of our FREEDOM*. Again, we can direct it any way we choose. But if our imagination becomes a ‘wish list’ (i.e. win the lottery, play all day, acquire more ‘things’ at all costs, etc...) the direction of our imagination will ultimately lead us to a life of pain. Actually, this **FREEDOM** – this choice – must be focused **IN A WAY THAT ALLOWS US TO BE HAPPY**.

And we can only be happy, when our imaginations – our dreams and aspirations – call us to be truly great people. It sounds so simple, but it’s one of the most difficult things to apply to our lives ... *because we tend to fight it, or always leave it for tomorrow*.

Every one of us must grab hold of our imaginations, dream great dreams, and aspire to do great things with our lives. Just imagine how much better we’ll be when we choose to imagine great things – and then **ACT** on those choices!

GRATITUDE

Count your blessings ... they’re yours to count.

The Story of George Bailey:

In the classic Christmas film, “It’s a Wonderful Life”, Jimmy Stewart plays George Bailey, a disgruntled Savings and Loan director during WWII in small town, USA. He dreams (everyday of his life) of traveling all over the world to build bridges and skyscrapers; however, there always seems to be a war, a death, or some legitimate reason that keeps him from leaving.

Instead of building all over the globe, he builds a prison in his own mind and drives himself to despair. And one day when his uncle Billy is robbed of a large deposit by the greedy and twisted bank competitor, Mr. Potter, George goes to the outskirts of town to jump off a bridge into the icy waters to end his misery and leave his beautiful wife and children ‘better off’ without him.

Fortunately, George’s guardian angel intercedes and shows what life would be like in the town if George had never existed. After showing George countless ways that he affected practically everyone in town and made so much of a real difference in people’s lives, George snaps back into time and runs through the streets laughing and realizing that he really has had a wonderful life. He runs to hug his wife and children and joyously greets the bank examiners at his house who are there to arrest him due to the Saving’s and Loan’s insolvency. The movie ends with all of George’s friends and

customers coming to his home, dumping their money into a basket to rescue George and thank him for a lifetime of aid to them.

The Story of Ebenezer Scrooge:

Similarly, in another classic, “A Christmas Carol”, Ebenezer Scrooge exemplifies the greedy, ambitious businessman who has time for nothing in his life except the pursuit of money. We all know the story of how the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future visit Ebenezer on Christmas Eve and show him the fruits of his wretchedness and the emptiness of his very existence. Upon awaking on Christmas morning, Ebenezer arises a new man, ready to live and love – and to give himself totally and completely for the rest of his days.

One of the ***primary prerequisites for happiness*** is for us to be able to respond to, acknowledge, and enjoy our life. We may have loving relationships, great health, a highly formed value system, and more, but if we’re not open to the richness in our lives, all of the beauty that these things convey may have no affect on us at all. In fact, it is precisely in an act of gratitude that we actually come to ***EXPERIENCE and FEEL*** the loveliness and ‘good stuff’ that life offers to each one of us.

Contrary to our natural tendencies and busy schedules, gratitude should be prevalent in our lives, and should also serve as a consistent and constant motivator for us – every moment of every day. ***We should never link gratitude exclusively to the attainment of a goal***, even though it is natural to be more grateful when we achieve some good thing or are fortunate enough to have beautiful experiences. However, if we allow ourselves to shut-off gratitude except for the favorable outcome of certain events, we become hard pressed to live a life that is not centered in a constant state of want. And in this state, gratitude inevitably becomes a natural conditioned response based on the outcome of a specific event; we will never be happy living this way.

In other words, if we get the new job we’re thankful only for the moment, if not, we wonder what’s wrong with us. Likewise, if our dearest friend can make it home for the holidays, they’re the greatest; if they can’t, well – they probably didn’t try hard enough or value our friendship as much as we do. If we truly come to understand the nature of gratitude, we will surely be more charitable, more generous, more loving, more successful, and more ‘alive’. This is because we become an active player in life when we are grateful. We no longer look for the next goodie to fill the void in our lives – because there is no void.

Do you remember Connie and Debbie (our Self-Image people)? Connie was a lot more grateful (and happier) even though she had experienced some real setbacks. She was at peace with herself, despite the changes in her life; changes that would give good reason for any of us to be a bit angry and cynical.

Gratitude is a mature reflection on the loveliness that we have in our lives at the PRESENT moment. It is unspoiled by childish comparisons, tainted promises, or about

what awaits us tomorrow. In relationships, we are grateful in the love we give and are given in the simple conversations at a family meal. In business, it gives us the ability to focus on the most important aspects of our work – both for the present and the future – without being caught up each day in a perpetual frenzied state of ‘more’ at all costs.

Gratitude allows us to think more clearly in all aspects of our lives as it subdues the anxiety and stress that cause us to act foolishly and impetuously in so many ways.

All of us realize that *we’ll be a lot happier when we cooperate with gratitude.* Yet sometimes, our response is often times so one-dimensional. We aren’t grateful for our daily bread because we attempt to compare our condition to that of a starving young child in Bangladesh – and we can’t make the connection. We have difficulty appreciating our own small home when we drive through the section of town where the new mansions are being built. And we look at our own marriage as something ‘old’ when we listen to other couples tell their cocktail tales of job promotions and proposed business expansions.

In effect, we often reduce everything to functionality or social status and we give ourselves a grade. The problem is that we all tend to start feeling like slackers after awhile because we just don’t measure up all of the time.

As a society, we sort of have a pre-conditioned understanding of gratitude. We remember our parents telling us to say thank you and to be grateful for what we have: the use of our faculties, the mind we have been given, a warm house and more. And we should be grateful for these things. In fact, we are disgusted when we see young children throwing tantrums in public over a pair of shoes or a certain style of jacket that they desperately want. It totally rubs us the wrong way when we view such ingratitude and immaturity.

It’s the same when we read a good book or see a great movie; we find often find ourselves confused by a particular character because he/she just doesn’t get it. We wonder what’s wrong with them. They appear to have everything, yet they are so miserable and ungrateful despite all the things they have right in front of their faces.

It’s easy for us to see how Ebenezer should have been better all along and how George Bailey should have realized how much he had as well. They both were hurting themselves, as well as the others around them, because they failed to respond to gratitude. *They were so blinded by their busy lives and ambitions because they would not maturely reflect and respond to the loveliness within their grasp.* Many of us are brought to tears not so much because of Tiny Tim’s good fortune or because George’s family will still have a father, but because Ebenezer Scrooge and George Bailey have been set free – of themselves!

In fact, we all should start to ask ourselves the right questions. We should ask why we are, and why we’re not, grateful. Why aren’t many of us truly grateful? How can

we begin to be more grateful? And why do we overlook the loveliest things in our lives as if they don't exist or as if they have no bearing on our happiness?

INGRATITUDE ... the 4 main reasons.

First, it has been said so many times that Americans are very spoiled, and it's true. This has nothing to do with immaturity or a childish approach to life. ***We simply have so much of everything that we tend to take many things for granted*** – and that's normal. What's not normal is the fact that we don't focus enough on the beauty in our lives. We check the paper every day to see how our stocks are doing, or we may call the bank to verify our account balance, but we never seem to commit enough time to the important parts of our lives. And a major reason for this, which stems from being spoiled, is that we all expect 'a lot'...because there's 'a lot' around us. We expect the best cars, the best careers, the best homes, the best vacations – the best of what the world (supposedly) has to offer, and we think it's normal to have them.

Second, many of us tend to confuse gratitude with contentment. And this truly concerns those of us who aspire to achievement and greatness. Yet, it shouldn't scare us at all. In fact, the truly gracious person responds to value in ways that opens doors that are locked to the self-centered and cautious person. In relationships, the grateful person takes risks to break out of their own little world in order to develop true and lasting friendships. In business, they do everything in their power – and risk all of their fortune – in order to help family and friends instead of telling false stories about how hard it was for them, or offering some kind of 'fishing pole instead of a fish' story to excuse themselves from helping. Successful people are usually fueled by their gratitude.

The third issue or cause of our ingratitude is due to the insane amount of marketing messages that we receive on a continuous basis. Experts claim that the average person is subjected to over 4,000 sales advertisements a day. Is it any wonder why it's hard to feel grateful? We're not even given a chance to breathe deeply without someone trying to make us *want* something. Because the marketer's number one goal (24 hours a day) is to create a starving crowd, and they have gone out of their way to make us *want* more and more. They give the honest sales person a bad name.

So, we should try to learn how to turn them off. We need to say 'no' much more often and we need to become better at turning the world off long enough so that we can hear ourselves think. We should try to fill our moments with the simplest acts of kindness towards our families and our neighbors – selfless instead of selfish acts – and allow our hearts and minds the peace they need to be set free from the constant onslaught of marketing madness. Failure to do so will keep us in the frenzied state of being in a hurry to go nowhere.

The fourth cause of our ingratitude – and the focal point of our conscious journey back to a grateful life – ***is to recognize the fact that we are often times childish in our response to value.*** We're often so busy chasing the next 'goodie' that we miss what is right in front of us. In many aspects of our lives, we tend to make immature

comparisons about so many things and look at ourselves as slackers if we don't measure up to scale. It then seems as if we live each moment, in anticipation of the next moment; constantly hoping, scheming and striving to do something 'really important' tomorrow.

GRATITUDE ... the answer!

Gratitude challenges us to reckon with ourselves. It calls us to understand that goals and aspirations need not be fulfilled before we can appreciate the lovely moments in our lives. It's not conditional – depending on the outcome of a certain event – nor is it a never-ending list of comparisons whereby we either have more or less than our neighbor.

Gratitude is primarily a response in which we pattern our thoughts in the present, *and reflect on the beauty that we have been able to participate with and receive.* The gracious and loving person wants to give of themselves completely and without limits precisely because of the goodness that they have encountered. And since the very nature of goodness and love is diffusive, gratitude (happiness) becomes a never-ending cycle of 'give and receive' that enriches and challenges us in all aspects of our lives. So, instead of filling our barns with interest and dividends, we begin to fill our lives with investments in people; and we are all the better for it.

That's why our songs should be sung to and from vacation, our congratulations should be the same after the win or the loss, and the words "I love you" should ring out as easily on a drive home from the market as they do on Christmas day while exchanging gifts.

Gratitude is the thanks that we give back to God for life itself; for the ability to encounter each other and all creation that was made for us. If we consciously step back and consistently count our blessings every day, we'll find that there are lots of things to be truly thankful for.

We have been blessed in countless ways, and it's only when we begin to understand this – and reflect on it – that we will become more grateful (and happier). Try your best to always remember that *gratitude is not a response to a thing or an event – or senseless expectations of achieving more.* We can begin to uncover true gratitude when we see it as much more than being glad that we received something.

Gratitude is something we need to condition into our lives; the same way we need to condition our attitudes, our habits, and our responses to the challenges of every day. It's up to us to sit-up, choose to be grateful, and answer the call.

MONEY ... What an invention!

“Nothing’s sweeter than the smell of cold hard cash!” – Thomas Williams

“Money can’t buy you love” – The Beatles

“Anyone who tells you that money doesn’t matter, has never been poor”.
– John Chu

“The only thing good about having money, is that you can tell anybody you want to go to hell!” – Humphrey Bogart

“Time is Money!” – Age-Old Saying

“You can’t take it with you!” – Every Grandmom

The Story of Vanessa Thompson

It was 11:20 p.m., and Vanessa stared at the ceiling after a hard day of work. She was too tired and too worried to check on the kids. A single mom of 3 small children, she was working 2 jobs in South Los Angeles; and she needed her rest. Startled by her youngest daughter asking for a glass of water, Vanessa snapped back, “It’s late Marci, you should be in bed.” Five minutes later, Vanessa was back to her ceiling – and her worries – once again.

Her man had been gone for some time, but she was OK with that. After years of emotional (and sometimes physical) abuse, he left one night – never even stopping to say goodbye. At first, she was terrified at the thought of being alone with all of the responsibilities of the children. Yet, she was happy that she didn’t have to deal with his abuse anymore. The ceiling had enough worries of its own. And as she lay there looking up, she was at least a little happy that she didn’t have a no-good man around to add to her troubles.

She kept worrying about the same old things. How was she going to pay the rent AND pay for the food AND everything else at the same time? She was tired of choosing. Little Jessica needed new shoes and a new dress for a dance recital at school. Where was she going to get the \$60? The pressure from it all seemed almost unbearable. So, she got up, and turned on the TV; and fell asleep after a late night re-run of Seinfeld.

Three weeks later, she found herself having panic attacks, and a friend suggested that she attend a single-mom’s workshop once a week. But that was a ½ hour away, and she didn’t have time to iron her clothes, let alone give up a night each week to talk with strangers. Besides, what good would it do? Nobody there was going to solve her money problems. Instead, she decided to call Pastor Mike to talk things over and to get some advice as to how to make sense of it all. They agreed on a time late in the week, and Vanessa was a little relieved at the tone of his voice and his reassuring words, “We’ll work something out together, Vanessa.” At least, she worried a little less for the next few days.

After 2 minutes of catching up on some old times, Vanessa started pouring out her heart. “I can’t take it anymore Pastor Mike, I don’t know what do. I work hard, I try to take care of my children, but I’m tired – I’m so tired – of worrying, working, and never really getting anywhere.” Pastor Mike jumped in, “OK, OK calm down a little Vanessa. Let’s try to come up with a plan to deal with this.” After 45 more minutes of pouring her heart out, Pastor Mike patiently and methodically gave her some great ideas.

He told her that she needed to start taking care of herself a lot better...and she knew that he was right. Vanessa needed to make time once a week to totally relax and pamper herself. She also needed to seek moral support from other single moms. Pastor Mike and Vanessa had many more meetings, and put a resume together to give to fellow parishioners in order to find a better job. She also found two other single moms, and they planned on sharing the expenses on a big old house close by that needed a little face-lift.

Best of all, Vanessa worked with a counselor to budget her money a bit better and plan on how to handle her expenses and the unexpected things that always seemed to get her down. Things were definitely ‘looking up’ for Vanessa. For the first time in years, she stopped ‘looking up’ at the ceiling each night, worrying about her money problems. She was planning on how she was going to handle it all. “God Bless Pastor Mike,” she said to herself, before she fell asleep. “I’ll get our finances (money) in order, and we’ll make it just fine. I’m not worrying about money anymore.”

MONEY...Cash...Pisto...Dinero...Rubles....Mula...Dough...Pesos....Money

MONEY...is there anything else in the world that is more pursued – or more coveted – than ***MONEY***?

If you interviewed a million people, and asked them what 3 things would really make them happy, money – **LOTS OF MONEY** – would probably be on 99% of their lists. And that’s OK, money is good. You can do great things with money; and we all need it to survive. There’s nothing wrong with money. It’s not the root of all evil, as some might suggest. Remember, St. Paul tell us that *the love of money* is the root of all evil...not money itself.

But it seems clear, that every one of us should ***come to terms with MONEY***, and understand how we ***FEEL*** about it, in order to try to come to some basic understanding of what money ***means*** to us...personally. More importantly, we need to come to grips with how we view money, so that we can see how it either *adds to* or *decreases* our personal happiness.

And everybody is different. Some people smile and say, “Everything is OK, I have enough.” Others will let it bother them because they are struggling (regardless if they are poor or not). Like everybody else, the wealthy can be the best people with money, just OK, or downright idiots with their money.

Again, it depends on the individual and how they view money. But one of the most fascinating things about money is that few people really try to explore **WHY** or **WHAT** it is that makes money so darn important to all of us.

At this point you're probably saying, "Hey, Paul, the answer is easy ... we *need* money to survive. We need it to eat, to buy clothes, to have a place to live, and to be able to care for ourselves. If you don't have money you can't survive."

And you're right, we do need money to feed, clothe, and house ourselves. So, we've answered the **WHY** part...at least a little bit of it. Actually, it's **WHAT** makes money so important to us, **WHY** we put the emphasis we do on it, and then **HOW WE FEEL** about those decisions, that should be our total focus.

MONEY: *WHAT makes it so important to us ...and WHY?*

The reason that money is so important to us is because, with it, we get what we **WANT!** Wow, that's prophetic! That's unbelievable! That's incredible! That's a major breakthrough in human knowledge! It's the new secret of life!

Seriously, think about it.

If you won \$20 million dollars tomorrow in the lottery, you wouldn't be happy because you could put thin green pieces of paper with dead President's pictures on them (bills) all over your room. Or, if you lost your entire fortune in the worst stock market crash to ever to hit the planet, you wouldn't be sad because you missed seeing your multi-colored statement every month from your brokerage house.

No, by winning the lottery or losing your fortune, *it would affect how you get what you WANT.*

If you won \$20 million dollars, you could travel the world, buy new homes and cars, work at anything you wanted, donate more to your favorite charity, do your favorite thing(s) whenever you wanted to, and more. *I'm not saying that this would make you happy*, it's just that money affords people the opportunity to do a lot of different things that hard-working people don't always get a chance to do. People with money often get to do what they **WANT**. *Whether they should do it is an entirely different question.*

Conversely, if we lost our fortune in the market or by some other type of misfortune, we'd be more limited in terms of what we could actually spend our time doing. We would still want to belong to the Country Club, golf 3 times a week, or eat out every other night. But what we **WANT** to do would be limited by our ability to pay for it.

And this is the key point to understanding money, how we feel about it, and how we can cooperate with it, in order to live a happy life. When we focus on our **WANTS**, we can come to better terms with how we deal with money.

Because people *think* they dream about MONEY. Many people *think* they work their tails off for MONEY. Others *think* they spend a lot of time worrying about MONEY. The fact is, we dream and work and worry about ...**OUR WANTS**. Money is just a vehicle that either allows us, or deters us, from getting a lot of what we **WANT**.

And this is not something to disregard as unimportant. Our **WANTS**: what we want, why we want them, and how we feel about it if we are, or are not, able to obtain them, is probably one of the most important points to ponder in our lives.

MONEY ... Is it just a matter of how much?

Could we just say that with a lot of money, we'd really be happy? Would it be safe to say, that if we had a lot of money, and could get what we wanted, that everything would be OK? Wouldn't every one of us like the 'worries' of having a lot of money?

The simple truth is, that most of us (me included) **WANT** more money. It's natural. We'd like more money in order to do what we **WANT**, buy what we **WANT**, whenever we **WANT**. And all of us (that's OK) tend to believe that more – of everything – is what is good for us. But there are a lot of philosophies that are stuck in our minds about money.

According to Plato, wondering is the beginning of all true knowledge. In fact, Plato also said that, "The rich person is he/she with *few WANTS*". Many eastern religions talk about the inner peace associated with the simple life – again, *few WANTS* – as the way to happiness. And Jesus told us of the rich man – the parable of the 13th Apostle – who Jesus invited to 'leave all and follow Me', but the rich man went away sad. We've also heard of the parable how it is "Easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven". And finally, Jesus warned us that "You cannot serve two masters, God and money".

It's essential to understand that our happiness (or sadness) regarding money has very little to do with how much money we have. Our happiness (or sadness) in relation to our money (not our overall happiness – just our relation to money) has everything to do with how many (and how expensive) our **WANTS** are, and how we deal with those **WANTS**. But we still get a little confused. Should we want a lot of money?

Actually, it's not confusing at all. Finding happiness with our particular situation is a basic, yet difficult, two-step process.

First, we really need to grasp that we would never have money problems if we were able to perfectly *match* our **WANTS** with the money that we have, along with our earning ability. Simply put, when we are able to live peacefully, and **WANT** what we are capable of paying for, we really won't have too many money problems. And we relieve a lot of stress in our lives when we make this perfect match.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of room for trouble here, for a number of reasons. There are so many outside factors that affect us, as well as the one's we tend to create all by ourselves, that this *match* doesn't always hold up. Our spouse or significant other may disagree with our **WANTS**. We may over-buy in relation to our income. Our **WANTS** list can grow faster than our ability to pay, and we can't always pay for everything that we **WANT**. We can – and do – often develop **NEW WANTS**, our incomes can be cut/discontinued, and more.

This is why 'money problems' are considered the #1 reason for divorce. This is also why our prisons are overcrowded. And this is why a lot of people suffer through a lot of sleepless nights worrying about money. In reality, it's not a money problem. It's a problem with a lot of things, (i.e. not adhering to The World of Value, laziness, deception, our insatiable desire for more things, and more). The real underlying problem is that our **WANTS** and our money supply don't match... and we don't like it!

And this doesn't just apply to poor people or people who feel that they don't have enough money. It pertains to everybody. Many wealthy people have problems with money, problems matching their **WANTS**, and problems in dealing with **NEVER** being able to satisfy all of their appetites – no matter how much money they have.

Remember, we're talking about **WHY** and **WHAT** makes money so important to us, and **HOW WE FEEL** about money. Our happiness, regardless of how much money we have, is a totally different story. Bottom line: we must try to match our **WANTS** with our ability to pay for them. This involves some basic calculations, obvious spending rules, and a back-up plan to deal with “mis-matches” of our **WANTS** vs. our money supply.

The 2nd step in finding happiness with your particular money situation is to totally re-evaluate **HOW YOU FEEL** about money – and then try to come to a peaceful understanding. And every one of us needs to make this re-evaluation in order to ensure that we can live a happy life – in relation to our **MONEY**.

This step is even much more difficult than the 1st step (matching wants and money), because it entails questioning the *need* for a lot of the **WANTS** that we have. It involves trying to understand what it is that compels us, or lures us, into **WANTING** all that we do.

It asks us to sit up and take notice; to ask ourselves if what we want is **GOOD** for us, or if it's tied to some irrational and **THOUGHTLESS** pursuit that we were somehow convinced we really needed. What it really does, is it allows us to truly determine if a lot of the things on our **WANTS** list are things that we really **NEED**, or things that we **HAVE CONVINCED** ourselves that we somehow have to have ... **JUST BECAUSE**. And there is a big difference.

It's crucial not to view this step as a burden or something that will somehow cause us a lot of pain. Actually, this can be *one of the most liberating steps in the process of cooperating with, and being receptive to*, The Power of Happiness.

The key focus is to show ourselves a list of what our wants are, and to honestly evaluate if they're what we really need. Because what we want and what we need – more than anything else – is to live a life of joy. And if, somewhere along the road, we forgot to figure our personal happiness into the equation, **HOW WE FEEL** about money could have taken on a whole new meaning.

In other words, it's important to find out *where our hearts rest*. Is our personal list of wants a long list? Is it what we truly need? Are there things in there that are driving us to joy, or to an early grave?

This is why many of the well-known philosophers – from various views and religions – propose the simple life. Or, a life with few wants. Their reasoning is that when we have a lot of wants, it is extremely difficult – some say almost impossible – to focus on the truly important things in life...because we're too concerned about our money (or our wants).

That is why Jesus told us about Lazarus (the rich man) in hell, of the 13th Apostle who declined Jesus' invitation because he was too attached to his wants (money), and of the lesson of the camel and the eye of the needle. Jesus lived a life of poverty – of few wants. And He wanted to make sure that His followers understood that riches often lead people to ruin.

Why? *Because often people are consumed by their riches*. Their heart rests in their riches. Their dreams and aspirations encompass their riches. Their sense of being and purpose is attached to their riches. Their riches determine everything about them. And often, they tend to neglect the important things in life – both for themselves and for others.

More than anything else, an extensive WANTS list leaves our hearts restless. Why? Again, because our purpose in life is to live a life of greatness! And our hearts will only rest, when we replace the pursuit of a long list of pleasurable encounters – or the pursuit of fulfilling the appetites – with trying to live a life of greatness. And a life of greatness has everything to do with charity, and forgiveness, a life of self-lessness, and more. A life a greatness has nothing to do with filling our barns with more money, or a never-ending list of **WANTS**.

Money is a good thing. Many people do a lot of good with their money. And it can afford people the opportunity to live a life of greatness. We can build great institutions, create jobs, care for our families, invest in our future, and more.

Money is also probably the most misunderstood thing on the planet because of how it affects us all so differently. But when we come to terms with money, and begin to cooperate with it, we take a giant leap closer towards uncovering The Power of Happiness in our lives. And by trying – really trying – *to match our WANTS with our money, and by evaluating our list of WANTS in life*, we begin a journey that can only bring us closer to a life of joy.

YOUR FAVORITE THING ... Everybody has one!

Some great bumper stickers:

- I'd rather be fishing (or golfing, or sky diving, or flying, etc..)
- GOD is my co-pilot
- Proud parents (or grand parents) of Central High Honor Student

The Story of John Dougherty:

There was nobody happier in the world than John Dougherty. No matter what troubles seemed to come his way, John always had a smile on his face and a hop in his step. And most everyone in town saw that 'hop in his step', as John waived and quickly greeted everyone as he ran by them for his customary 5-mile morning run.

*John loved to run – it was in his blood. He loved the smell of the streets, the way he felt sprinting through the parks, and most of all how he felt (his body was in excellent shape) after a good run. Running was clearly John's **FAVORITE THING TO DO**.*

And then came the great job promotion he had patiently waited for – for 3 years!

It took him out of town a few nights a week. And it was exciting! But after about 4 months, John started feeling irritated by little things. And he didn't know what was happening. He didn't mind waking up for the early flights; he was accustomed to getting up early. But it just seemed that he was always 'running' after his new job. He felt a little troubled.

After another 2 months of boosting sales and saving 2 key accounts, John walked into his boss' office and closed the door. "We have to talk Ron," said John nervously. "I'm not enjoying this the way I thought that I would. In fact, I was thinking last night about coming in here today to tell you that I'm resigning," said John. "But John, you're doing a great job," answered a startled Ron. "What's going on, you love the challenge and you were waiting for this opportunity for 3 years ... you're performing great! What's the matter?" asked a concerned Ron. "I don't know, but for the first time ever, I don't know what's going on with me," replied John. "Forget that I said anything, Ron, I'll get through this. How about lunch today over at Charlie's Place at noon?"

YOUR FAVORITE THING ... It's important to YOU. And that's all that counts!

Every one of us has a ***FAVORITE THING, a hot button, or a passion in life.*** We may not fully realize what it is, or how important it actually is for our personal happiness, but we all have one – or even possibly more than one.

And it's very important to realize what our ***FAVORITE THING*** is – or what our ***passion*** is – in order to understand ourselves a little more ... and what makes us tick! More importantly, we should pay attention and nurture our ***FAVORITE THING*** – so that we don't neglect what contributes to our joy.

John loved to run...it was his passion. And it was good for him as well. But the minute his ***FAVORITE THING*** was taken away from him to some degree, it affected him terribly. In fact, it affected him so much (and he didn't even truly realize it) that he almost quit a great job because of how he ***FELT*** without it (running). And this should teach all of us some valuable lessons about what ***FAVORITE THING*** is and how we should cooperate with it...because it can affect us all so differently.

First, it's a real mistake to treat our FAVORITE THING – or our passion in life – as something that's an added bonus for us. In other words, once work is done, and the bills are paid, and all of our obligations are out of the way, we'll somehow squeeze in some time for our ***FAVORITE THING***. As long as our ***FAVORITE THING*** isn't immoral or obscene, we should always make it a priority in our lives! This doesn't mean that we have to do it all day, or every day. It's just that we need to make time for our ***hot button*** – so we don't grow cold.

Second, never apologize to anyone about your FAVORITE THING. Again, as long as it's not bad for you, try not to make excuses or apologies to anyone about your passion. We're all different. Some people like fishing, others golf, some love to coach, others love to serve and help out in some way. But whatever it is, try to understand that your ***FAVORITE THING*** is what makes YOU TICK – it gives you the spark that allows you to grow and mature – and you need it in your life.

Third, try your best not to over-analyze why your FAVORITE THING is so important to you. The answer is obvious: You feel great when you're pursuing your passion! Some women love to go for drives on the weekends, others love to stay home and read. Some men like to build businesses, others prefer to go camping. Again, we're all so very different. We don't have to have a reason for being 'turned-on' by our particular hot button.

Just try your best not to be confused. Pursuing a passion is not the same as a person always looking for ONE MORE THING in order to keep them happy. We need our ***FAVORITE THING*** to empower us – or to fuel us – to face our every day challenges. The #1 reason for 'burn-out' in any occupation is not being over-worked. It's due to not having a diversion – something we really enjoy doing – to 'fuel' us to meet the challenges and problems of the day.

Similarly, don't be confused to think that your **FAVORITE THING** or our hot button is *the* thing that will make you happy. Adhering to the world of value and pursuing greatness unleashes the Power of Happiness in our lives. But we must always give enough time for our hearts and minds to enjoy those things that delight us – so that we can move on to bigger and better things.

Our **FAVORITE THING** can help us to develop as a person, even if it appears that it doesn't have real redeeming value in itself. Often times, our **FAVORITE THING** is the key element in our lives that soothes our souls and gives us the 'fuel' to conquer other – often times more difficult – parts of our lives.

Great leaders have loved to fish, great writers have loved the sea, and great thinkers have listened to great music – all being fueled by their respective **FAVORITE THING**. And we all need to recognize how our **FAVORITE THING** – big or small – can often help us develop our character and lead us to a life of joy. It's what makes us tick!

WORK ... *"I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go."*

- Modern-Day Saying

"God sells us all things at the price of labor."

- Leonardo da Vinci

"It is far better to show a man how to make a place for himself, than to put him in one that someone else has made for him."

- Ancient Chinese Proverb

The Story of Two Workers...and their approach to Work:

The Story of Jonathan Richards:

Jonathan was a hard working person and a model employee. He always had an encouraging word for everyone and he was very capable at his technical job with a Fortune 500 company. Yet, this was his last day on the job...he was moving on with his life.

Five years earlier, at the age of 37, he decided to go back to school and get his Masters Degree in Finance, to compliment his undergraduate degree. He also mentored and tutored high school kids with their business class projects 2 nights a week. His plans to teach and administrate at the high school level would become a reality in the fall. First, he wanted a month off to take a vacation in San Diego, California with his friends.

“Well, Dad, I finally listened to you,” said Jonathan on the phone during his lunch break. “You always told me to do what would make me happy, and I finally listened. That’s the best advice you ever gave to me. It’s a shame I took so long trying to figure things out the hard way,” explained Jonathan. “Well, I’m glad for you son,” said Jonathan’s dad. “I know you’re going to make the best high school principal that California has ever seen. Work hard, and try to make a positive influence in the lives of your students. Your mom and I will be down to see you soon.”

That night, Jonathan reminisced about his journey. He had come a long way. After fumbling at a few things right out of school, and then fumbling some more with large companies, he found a ‘pretty good’ job. Yet, he still wasn’t happy with his work. He wanted something different. He wasn’t exactly sure what it was, but he knew it wasn’t the technical job that he was doing. So, he took someone’s advice – along with his Dad’s – and thought about what he really wanted to do. After that, despite the long hours and the studying, it seemed kind of easy. He needed to go back to school get his Masters Degree, and pursue his dream job. And that’s exactly what he did!

The Story of Don Harpen:

“Don’t worry about it Frank, I’ll make sure it gets out on Friday,” said Don. “And I’ll be out to see you in a few weeks, just to make sure everything is OK.” As Don hung up the phone with one of his biggest accounts, he thought for a moment, that he might be able to catch the end of his 10-year olds baseball game. “Hey Don,” yelled his foreman from the plant, “Do you think you can come over and help real quick, we’re having a major problem with these new drums?” “I’m coming, hang in there,” yelled Don. “So much for little Mark’s baseball game,” he thought to himself. Maybe next time.”

At 47, Don had a nice job. He was in charge of 52 people and the family he worked for had been in the business for over 20 years. They liked Don the moment they hired him 14 years earlier. In fact, he was known to be fair and well liked by most everyone at the plant. His official title sort of confused everyone because he was more of a boss than the actual President was. Whenever there was a problem, he was the one that everybody came to. In fact, he was the glue for the entire business. Employees came to him for answers. Customers asked him for his input and advice. And Don put in twice the hours as anyone else at the company; and that included the owners. He was literally consumed with his work.

Then one day he accidentally overheard a short conversation by the President with some people in his office. Normally, Don would be invited in on every conversation, but not this one. When he asked what was going on, both the secretary and the President were rather tight-lipped, and offered no explanation. Two weeks later, Don found out that the owners were selling the company. And nobody was in the moving plans to Denver, Colorado. Don was devastated, depressed, and really mad.

After a month of anger, frustration, panic, and depression, Don finally started getting himself together. He went in to talk to the owners and told them that he was aware of

their plans to sell. Being informed of the truth, he was told that he would have to tell the employees and work with out- placement for them. At first he was furious, but he then remembered his loyalty to the people he had worked with for so long. He decided to help in any way he could, and began his personal search for a new job. He'd have to make his next job his job – and not his life. As he sat at little Mark's baseball game, he caught himself wondering about if his 'dream job' existed. "I don't know," he said to himself sheepishly. "But I guess NOW is as good a time to find out as any. But no matter what, no more missing Mark's – or any of the other kid's functions – no matter what the cost."

WORK ...Is it really that important?

One of the most important things in our lives involves the way we work and provide for ourselves. And before we talk about work and how it affects us all so differently, it's important to say that ***work is a GOOD thing for all of us***. It's a good thing to labor, to pursue ways in which to add to the common good, to challenge ourselves in all of our endeavors, and to do our very best. To do otherwise would be a surrender to laziness or mediocrity which is unacceptable. People who strive for greatness and want to utilize all of their talents to the fullest find that work provides them with an extremely good and wholesome outlet for their natural aspirations. ***It also is an exceptionable way that we can respond to value.***

In our work, we can show our neighbor how we approach goodness, kindness, generosity, truth, and all the other values that make life worth living. These are real reasons why work is so good for all of us. Not only does it fill our idle moments and, very basically, keep us out of trouble, it allows us to direct our energies and focus our thoughts in ways that will benefit others and ourselves.

At work, we have the opportunity to enter into relationships with people and combine our efforts to achieve a common goal. ***We have the ability to serve others*** by producing certain goods and perform tasks that benefit us all. Building roads, insuring people, serving food and caring for children are just some of the many ways that we all can make a difference by our efforts. This is not to infer that those who haven't the ability or capacity to work are somehow inadequate; it is common sense that tells us otherwise. Yet, we should point out that avoiding work or giving the least effort possible reveals a great deal about a person's approach to life in general, his disregard for duty, and his disrespect for himself and his neighbor.

Work is a GOOD thing for all of us. To work hard, as long as the work is legitimate, is a way that we can truly give of ourselves. It is also an area of profound importance in our lives. Simply by the sheer number of hours that we spend at work, it is an area that we should all really think about how it can add to or reduce our happiness.

We should never disregard the affect that work has in our lives. And it goes far beyond yielding an outcome, fulfilling some erroneous notion of achievement, or providing some sort of specific economic status. A lawyer, mother, waiter and teacher spend hours each day utilizing their respective talents and devoting their energies in order

to complete a task. Yet, each person does so with varied degrees of enthusiasm, satisfaction, and hope for payment.

The most important thing that we need to do is to focus on the way we FEEL about work and how WORK makes us feel. Because it's precisely how we feel about work and how work makes us feel that we come to live happily or unhappily in whatever type of work we perform. Actually, we need to grasp the whole notion of what work CAN and CANNOT do to us – and for us – in order to properly respond to it...and be happy.

KEY (POSITIVE) DISTINCTIONS ABOUT WORK

“It takes less time to do something right, than to explain why you did it wrong.”

-- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

First, it's a serious obstacle to our happiness to view work – regardless of how important it may appear to be – as the serious or more important part of our lives, and family life and our relationships as types of relaxation. Recognizing this key distinction between work and 'life' is a key starting point for us as we begin to evaluate our approach to work, our attitudes toward it, and the importance we place upon it. And regardless of how easy it is for us to say that work is not nearly as important as our 'real life', we truly need to take this principle to heart if we ever want to be totally happy. Because we live in a world where work often tends to represent much of what we do (accomplishment) and a good deal of who we are.

We should all strive to work hard and with great determination in all that we do. And we should never diminish the efforts or accomplishments that each one of us labors tirelessly to bring about in our lives through our work. Quite the contrary, work has a profound affect on our lives. Laziness, running from responsibility, and stealing from our employer by not giving 100% while receiving payment from them, is paramount to living a lie. Yet, we must try to understand that the sum total of our lives weighs infinitely greater than the accomplishments and failures we experience through our work.

Second, we were not born to work even though it is our responsibility to do so. In other words, we were born to love and to be loved, to serve and to be served, to care for and to be cared for. We have been created to SPEND ourselves for others; to become living examples of kindness, generosity, loveliness, compassion, goodness, and all the other things that make life worth living. Work is one way that we can responsibly contribute to the world; however, it is only – *one way*. If we allow our work to alter our lives and personalities to the point that it encompasses most of our moments, it is an act of sheer insanity; and an abdication of our personal freedom.

As people, we are not meant to live a life centered on bottom lines, stock prices, a monthly production goal, or an increase in sales. None of us, on our deathbed, will not

regret having no more time to spend at the office or work place making more money or ‘producing’. In fact, quite often we find that traumatic experiences such as impending death or accidents will allow people to finally see what life is all about; or at least what many things – such as work – could never really substitute for the ‘real’ things that we regret having not done.

Third, any type of work can make us happy. In other words, we can be a happy individual doing any type of work. We don’t have to be a doctor, actor, lawyer or professional athlete to live a happy life. In fact, it would be safe to say that many of these seemingly glamorous jobs contain some extremely unhappy people. And while the argument that those who love their work tend to live happier lives can certainly be found true in many cases, it is a notion that is vastly overrated if we begin to look at people as persons instead of mere business achievers or producers.

We should never allow our work to envelope our personality and dictate a self-appraised sense of success or accomplishment. There is no doubt that catching a pass in the Super Bowl or rescuing a child from a burning building is ‘felt’ as more rewarding than digging ditches in the rain or agonizing over a conveyor belt of work in an office or the factory line. It would be dishonest to say that all tasks offer the same amount of challenge and sense of accomplishment as others. Yet, it is equally erroneous to adopt a philosophy that says you are what you do. And this leads us right into the heart of coming to understand our ***negative feelings*** about work and its affect on us; ***namely the realities of functionality and stress.***

KEY (NEGATIVE) DISTINCTIONS ABOUT WORK ***(FUNCTIONALITY, SOCIAL STATUS, UNCERTAINTY AND STRESS)***

FUNCTIONALITY

Perhaps the most important concept of work that we need to thoroughly evaluate is the role that ***FUNCTIONALITY*** plays in our lives. Because it’s actually a sickness that we all need to address and overcome if we are ever to be truly happy people. Very basically, functionality simply refers to the ‘branding’ of people according to their function or type of work that they perform. ***And functionality is one of the greatest forms of prejudice and discrimination that exists in America today.*** It is a plague that it is out of control.

Think for a moment, if you will, of the conversations that you have with people on an every day basis. Whether they are family, friends, customers, or first time acquaintances, it really doesn’t matter. Isn’t it uncanny how most of our questions center around our function or what we do? When we greet a person for the first time, our function in life – or our job – is often spouted out in the same breath with our names. You’ve heard the introduction: “I’m John Roberts and I am an attorney at Jones, Roberts & Kelly Law Firm”, or “Hi, I am Ron Johnson, and I am a lender for Chemical Bank”. It’s as if the person doesn’t rate without their function attached to their name – they seem somehow incomplete all by themselves.

Yet, functionality is more than a mere bad habit in conversations or an oversight on our part. For just as it is terribly wrong to judge a person merely by the color of their skin, their economic status, or some apparent physical challenge, so to it is to judge or rate a person by what they do or produce in life. And we are all guilty of this.

It is precisely when we brand ourselves and other people according to the function they perform that we begin to smother and demoralize the very dignity of a person. When all that we are centers around a twisted sense of success and failure based on our ability to produce something or achieve some goal at work, don't our lives tend to become cynical and meaningless? The problem with **FUNCTIONALITY** is that it measures our importance based on what we produce.

And when a person is rated and given a grade based on accomplishments or failures at work, they are, in reality, dehumanized. If we measure our personal self-worth based on production or on efficiency and effectiveness in delivering a profit, than we become producers instead of people. And society suffers from this no matter how hard we try to convince ourselves otherwise.

We should never overlook the importance and problems that functionality serves in our lives if we ever wish to be truly happy.. Because if we are honest with ourselves, we are all guilty of adhering to – if only subconsciously – this deception. For example, when we hear the title, Chief Executive Officer, we all immediately conjure up thoughts of a 'successful' person. But when we think of certain types of laborers or lower paying occupations, we tend to think of someone who is just alright, but nothing great.

And when we apply these titles to actual people that we know and come in contact with, we often tend to judge a person based solely on what they do. This is one of the main reasons why people keep asking themselves why they can't seem to put it all together or figure out what life is all about; or why they feel so incomplete. The barometer we sometimes use to measure our own sense of self-worth is so tainted with functionality and its by-products, that we start to become producers instead of people; which will naturally make anyone feel disillusioned **REGARDLESS OF HOW 'SUCCESSFUL' WE MAY APPEAR TO BE.**

SOCIAL STATUS

Today, society places a great deal of emphasis on how we 'fit in' and 'appear to be'; as well as what we do to earn a living. Many people tend to place an inordinate amount of emphasis on their work – or their function – and we often overlook who we really are. Some people in their 40's and 50's will laugh in discussions and say they don't know what they want to be when they grow up, or they will fight with themselves saying that they are engineers or attorneys in a man's or woman's body.

Actually, the exact opposite is the case! We are all real people trapped in an accountant's, salesperson's or laborer's mentality when we consider the effects of

functionality. We have, to some degree, been smothered by society's branding and prejudices because work DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY – IN ITSELF to lead us to a happy life.

Living our lives by caring what society thinks of us, is also a plague which some of us must come to grips with. Society tends to have an agenda and a pre-conceived notion of what's "OK" and what is not "OK". And this has nothing to do with the real standards – or codes of conduct that adhere to the world of value – that any civilized society should strive to support for the advancement of its people. Rather, it applies to the SUB-STANDARDS that surface as the prevailing mindsets that we 'ought to' adhere to in order to appear 'cool' in the eyes of society.

Unfortunately, *some of these sub-standards include*: the possible need to work like fools and to attain all kind of things, at the expense of properly raising our children and caring for our parents. It may entail working at something that is morally offensive and foreign to our personalities, just because the money is good. It could infer a silly notion that one child, two cars, and a nice home will make any family completely happy. And it will *always* be when we violate the world of value by accepting greed, deception, and selfishness as 'good' for us. It's basically the tone that allows us all to revert deeper into the world of imagery and shallowness where everything APPEARS to be just fine...when it really isn't.

Actually, by adhering to these SUB-STANDARDS, we give in to all what life really has to offer, and we subsequently abdicate our own personal freedom – and happiness. We often focus an inordinate amount of time on lukewarm issues precisely because we know that it is all society will accept from us if we don't want to be labeled as being radical in some way. Amidst all of the joking, the discussions on diversity, and the apparent open-mindedness; this world of compromise and mediocrity often surfaces as the tone being set for society. *In other words, we sacrifice our personal happiness for the silly notion of APPEARING happy – and fitting in..*

That is often why the deeply religious person is considered a bit radical or too conservative; the couple with more than 3 children are insane and in desperate need of a TV, and the woman in top management who chooses to leave for a family is not committed. That is why a carpenter is not really a 'successful' man in society's eyes (FUNCTIONALISM) or a mother has been reduced to someone who simply 'stays home with the kids'. And the list goes on and on. We find it hard to be ourselves – totally and without reservations – because society may not be ready for that.

Society in general, and our work in particular, often times demands that we give in or give away a little of ourselves in order to 'fit in'. Yet, it is precisely when we give in, that we tend to abdicate our very selves. We may put on a happy face, but in reality, we could feel trapped in a job or a function. And, if this is the case, this must all change.

UNCERTAINTY ... How to deal with it?

The stress that every job entails tends to make us all a bit weary at times. There are deadlines, demanding customers, personal responsibilities and our need to ‘live’ beyond our work. Also, functionality and adhering to a socially accepted agenda can apply added pressure on us to succeed and produce. And when we add in the **UNCERTAINTY** associated with our work and lives, we begin to see why some of us get truly ‘stressed out’.

Hardly a day goes by where a national magazine or newspaper doesn’t touch on the immense amount of competitive pressures and constantly changing technologies that literally wipe out industries and people’s livelihoods. ***And whether we realize it or not, it affects us.*** Change experts tell us to keep up to date, our eyes wide-open, our nose to the grindstone and our attitudes ‘positive’. And all that they say is truly good advice; especially keeping physically fit and trying not to worry. Yet, the simple reality is that many of us are looking in the mirror and asking ourselves if we could ‘get off the train and relax for a while.’

The whole problem of the UNCERTAINTY at work can perhaps be one of our greatest causes of anticipatory anxiety or despair. For when we view a potential outcome as uncertain – especially something as important as our livelihood – we could begin to drive ourselves into a panic. The thought of losing our jobs or not performing properly can cause us real concern. The feeling that we may **LACK CONTROL** also adds to our anxiety to a great degree. Yet, there are real solutions to living and working happily amidst a lot of uncertainty.

First, we must try to understand that uncertainty is associated with everything that we hope for in life. It is the flip side of every joyful longing that we have and is often one of the major causes of our depression; because we fail to maturely confront it. If nothing else, we should try to grasp that we often times have no control over what will occur. A lost contract, a great customer filing bankruptcy, layoffs at the plant, mergers that cause downsizing, and more, are things that can affect us all.

Second, we need to deeply evaluate the specific things that we can do (besides worrying) that will better ensure our chances of being unaffected by **UNCERTAINTY**. Training, education, adding more value to our employer or customer, and taking on tasks that others shy away from, are just some of the things that we can do to lessen the uncertainty levels. Any motivational or change expert should have dozens of other things that we can do to help in this area.

Third, we should try to focus all of our energies on dealing with the specific things (uncertainties) that cause us so much anxiety. Here we need to spend a great amount of time developing a plan of action that states exactly what we’re going to do if the uncertainties should occur. In other words, we need to develop a back-up plan, as well as real life-changing plans, if necessary, to grab hold of the uncertainty and regain our sanity levels – and our happiness.

For example, if there is a possibility that your job is being eliminated, you need to focus every ounce of your energies on networking with people, sending resumes to everyone you know, and obtaining the necessary skills to become employed as quickly as possible. If you can no longer bear the pressure at your work, you need to actively look for another job. If you cannot live a life based on a monthly commission, you need to obtain a salaried one. If you can't pay your bills from your present line of work, you need to thoroughly evaluate your options, including: a reduction in spending, an additional part time job, or a change in employment.

But we can't afford to panic, entertain bad habits and wallow in our own misfortune. To do so would be to open the doors to despair and its' ruining affects. We have to decide how to deal with the realities of the uncertainties; and choosing a real plan is always the best choice to make. In fact, ***taking control of our lives***, – when we apparently have little control – ***by developing and EXECUTING a specific plan of action***, is a major step in controlling the uncertainty levels in our lives.

Finally, the only way to truly approach uncertainty in our minds is for all of us to deal – WITH CERTAINTY – in all that we do. This can happen when we stop picking and choosing *when* or *if* we want to be truthful, selfless, trustworthy, hard working, and good. Through the rejection of our old ways, we begin to live a consistent life, thereby replacing our own timid responses with a life of **CONVICTION** that can weather any storm that comes our way. And this is not easy. Because it's usually when we experience uncertainty and a lack of control that we tend to revert back to our bad habits; which tend to ultimately cause our downfall. Yet, it is an area where we cannot overlook if we truly want to live a happy life.

DEALING WITH STRESS

Very basically, stress can be defined as ***the strain and tension that we FEEL***. It is the force and pressures of circumstances that weigh on our hearts and minds -- to varying degrees – that makes us weary. And we cannot overlook the positive or negative aspects of stress if we want to be truly happy. That's because stress has the capacity to either aid us in our quest for true greatness, or literally destroy us. And there are many exterior causes of stress: deadlines, quotes, and customer defections, to name just a few. But we need to understand that we, all by ourselves, are the greatest producers of stress; if only we'd be honest with ourselves and admit it.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things for many of us to do, regardless of the type of work we perform, ***is to properly deal with stress***. And, if we're honest, most of us are better 'talkers' than 'doers' when it comes to applying techniques to reduce stress in our lives. That's because stress has a way of ruining the good moments we experience based on the amount of pressure it places upon us. So, rather than deal with it, we often try to dance around it and avoid any real confrontation with it until the pain goes away.

Unfortunately, trying to avoid stress is like trying to avoid raindrops during a torrential downpour; it's going to get you no matter what you do. Stress at work comes to us in so many ways: deadlines, phone calls, demanding bosses, increased sales quotas, customer defections, personal problems and more. If you add in the worry of downsizing, mergers, layoffs, and possible JOB UNCERTAINTY, it appears that many of us are capable of becoming a bit stressed. And if we then subject ourselves to a mindset governed by functionality and a false notion of social acceptance, we begin to understand why a lot of people are totally stressed out.

Initially, we need to look at how stress is good for us in many ways. It helps us to utilize our natural energies and allows us to work hard to achieve an objective. Stress helps us to formulate a sense of urgency, and makes us achievers instead of dreamers. It often times forces us to overcome our fears; to live a life where we aspire to, and work towards, great things instead of just trying to get by. It would truly be great if we could all understand that ***stress can often be our best friend in life.*** It can literally force us out of our comfort zone to encounter many things which we would never aspire to if we didn't feel a little pressure to do so.

But what do we most often FEEL when we are stressed? It would be easy to say that we are simply pressured or tense; and this is true. Yet, all of our stress can be broken down into three distinct areas. And we should try our best to focus our attention on evaluating stress according to these three different aspects, so that we may better identify stress and how to deal with it.

First, as mentioned previously, along with the tension and pressure that is present in our lives, ***there is usually a great deal of uncertainty that lingers with stress.*** As mentioned previously, stress carries a weight with it that can make us weary. It is a pressure that results from the realities of our situation or circumstances that demands something from us. For example, our every day life has tasks or duties that we must address and these challenge us, to say the least. We write, read, labor, make decisions, answer questions, interact with people, deal with personal issues and much more. If we add in demanding bosses, changing work environments, fierce competition, customers and all of the new things to learn and contend with, we all understand stress all too well because we feel it – OFTEN.

And a major thing that has a grip on us ***is the uncertainty that lingers*** with so many things. Did we make the proper decision? Are we able to continue working this hard and retain our job? Where will our company be in a year? Will we be able to keep our jobs if we make the wrong decisions? Will our customer(s) go with another supplier tomorrow? Will our boss ever give us some positive feedback and relieve us of some of our daily burdens? Will this big deal come through this year? Also, we can never forget the uncertainties that affect our personal lives. At times, it seems that the list of uncertainties is seemingly endless. Or is it? Can you see that uncertainty has a lot in common with worrying?

The *second aspect of stress is that we tend to be fabulous producers of it* in all that we do. In other words, we don't need any help from exterior forces; we can produce a lot of stress all by ourselves. And if we're honest with ourselves, this is often times due to bad choices that we make about a lot of things if we abandon the call to true value. We need to realize that we produce more stress for ourselves than all the exterior forms of stress combined. And this goes far beyond looking at things in a positive or negative manner.

How? Well, if we fail to be truthful, honest, hard working, diligent, kind, compassionate, and a lover of all that is good, we have a hard time being motivated or responding to the world in a way that will make us happy. This call to true value has little to do with optimism or positivism – which are very important – but in themselves are simply traits of our disposition. Rather, it's when we maturely respond to even the seemingly most mundane and repetitious of tasks that we break out of our own short-sighted apathy. When we accept the task at hand and build upon it like the farmer plants his fields, or the carpenter methodically assembles his table and chair, we begin to reduce the stress in our lives.

Living a life whereby we adhere to value is the most difficult thing to do (because we tend to fight it); however, it's precisely when we choose to do otherwise that we tend to create and add a great deal of stress in our lives. When we procrastinate in doing certain tasks or functions, we immediately create the stress that forces us to rush in order to get the job done. When we clam up and fail to forgive or be forgiven, we shut out our love ones and our ability to encounter each other's loveliness. When we are lazy, we accept situations in our lives that cause us to feel trapped and defeated. And when we fail to take risks and move beyond ourselves – in relationships, in our work, in our spiritual life, and more – we then often settle for mediocrity and view true greatness as if it is an unattainable dream.

Again, *we actually create – all by ourselves – a great deal of stress in our lives.* Procrastination, small deceptions, inconsistent behavior, laziness, dishonesty, selfishness, greed, and more, knock on each of our doors every day. The problem is that we often let them in and entertain them. We somehow believe that by being lazy or dishonest or by procrastinating in some matter that we are getting away with something and thereby being good to ourselves. *But it's only when we challenge ourselves that we truly begin to remove much of the stress in our lives.*

The third aspect of stress – that we rarely consider – is the foolish way that we subject ourselves to more of it than we need to; as we apply an engineer's definition of stress to our lives. And this is different than the uncertainty associated with stress or producing it on our own. Instead, we do ... nothing. It's as if we are a bridge that has been designed to bear a certain maximum amount of weight (stress) and we simply allow life's traffic to run all over us.

And some of us are guilty of this in different ways. We may want lasting relationships, but do nothing to initiate or cultivate them. We claim that we want to lose

weight, yet we spend a lot of time devouring bags of potato chips. And we may desperately want to start a business; however, we do absolutely nothing to start the process.

This NO-ACTION approach to life goes far beyond procrastination or even our mortal enemy – laziness. It is a sense of nothingness; a mindset that claims that all we must do is exist and get through each passing day. In it, we tend to somehow subconsciously convince ourselves that life is going to beat us up; and the best thing that we can do is simply grin and bear it. Unfortunately, this love affair with nothingness ultimately can destroy us because it simply wears us out.

Each of us – by our birth-right -- is destined for greatness! Again, this doesn't mean we were born to be rich, famous, or 'successful' by the world's standards. No, we are all called to true loveliness so that we may enter the real arena of life. Because it's only in the world of value – and our mature responses to it – that we can truly be satisfied. To live a life 'on pause', or to pursue a life of relaxation, is paramount to living a life as a spectator. And we can never be happy living this way.

SEVEN (7) STEPS TO REDUCE STRESS (AT WORK).

In order to deal with stress, we need to apply specific techniques that will help us each day in a practical manner. Here are seven solid techniques:

1.) LIVE YOUR LIFE!

Quite often, we work so hard that we fail to encounter others and live outside the domain of our function. And this has to change. We need to set aside time to read great literature, listen to magnificent music, develop a sound spiritual life, and take the risks that will allow our relationships to flourish. Instead of merely stepping back and occasionally observing life outside of work, we need to enter the arena whereby we consistently place more emphasis and more energy on 'living' than on working.

2.) CHANGE YOUR HABITS.

A wise woman once said, "It takes a lifetime to build good habits and only a day to break them". Yet, the same principle applies to bad habits. Procrastination, laziness, and overall poor work habits can be corrected by an act of our free will. If we need to make some changes, NOW is the best time to make them! Specifically, we need to correct the bad habits that impede our ability to encounter true loveliness in our lives. ***NO ONE ELSE CAN CHANGE YOUR BAD HABITS – EXCEPT YOU!***

3.) EVALUATE WHAT CAUSES YOU THE MOST STRESS.

Whether it is deadlines, mundane work, commission-only income, demanding bosses or fickle customers, we have to evaluate what (SPECIFICALLY) causes us the most stress in our lives in order to deal with it. It's simply a matter of writing the word "stress" across a blank sheet of paper and then jotting the words down

that cause the most stress for us. It is an incredible easy task, and one that we must perform if we are ever to address, and overcome, the stress that we feel.

4.) EXERCISE AND EAT RIGHT.

Keeping fit and eating properly are two of the most important things that we can do to alleviate stress. When we exercise, we relieve a great deal of tension, while improving our health and our overall energy level. By eating properly, we give our mind and body the fuel they need to operate at optimum capacity. Often times, when stress presents itself, we abuse our bodies by over-eating and laziness. In doing so, we increase the likelihood of intensifying the stress levels precisely because of these immature responses. For many people, a disciplined exercise schedule along with a balanced diet are the only real things needed to properly deal with the normal stress levels in their lives.

5.) IF POSSIBLE, FIND SOMETHING YOU LIKE TO DO.

Most people dream about changing jobs or of performing a certain type of work. And we all have an ideal job that we'd love to do. While we may not be able to obtain the perfect position, we do have the ability to search out and perform the type of work that we desire. Once again, we need to focus on **EXACTLY** what we want to do, evaluate our options, and then simply devise a plan that will afford us the opportunity to work at something we enjoy doing. Other people do it, so can you.

6.) STOP THE CONSTANT COMPARISONS AND STOP GIVING UP

As previously mentioned when discussing gratitude and self-image, we all tend to manufacture a great deal of stress because we beat ourselves up and make immature comparisons about so many things, including work. We need to stop comparing and simply strive to be the best in all that we do. We need to make a conscious effort to **STOP the crazy comparisons** that we make about a lot of things.

7.) MAKE LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS..... NOW!

One of the hardest things to do for all of us it to make decisions THAT CHANGE OUR LIVES. It's easy to see what our neighbors should do or how our co-workers would benefit if they'd simply alter their lives in some capacity. Yet, looking at ourselves...is an entirely different story. The problem is that we must stop looking from the inside-out and start objectively looking at ourselves from the outside-in (take an objective look, or better yet, ask a dear friend) in order to make the changes that we know have to be made. Again the best time is NOW!

WORK AND HAPPINESS ... Yes, they can and should go together!

Work can – and should be – a fantastic challenge to us. With our work, we can utilize our talents and really make a difference. We need to put in its proper place and never allow it to become more important than our real lives. We should also never allow

work to drag us down by adhering to functionality, social status, or allowing stress to beat us up.

The simple truth is that *we all need to spend much more of our free time to clearly and honestly focus on what our work can and can't do for us*. And we should try to evaluate how our work either adds to, or takes away from, our personal happiness

Asking ourselves questions is usually the best technique to use. For example: Do we like our work? Do we have a sufficient amount of aspirations and goals outside of work? Do we respond and give of ourselves in intimate relationships, or is our life and all of its activities formed around our work? Do we obtain satisfaction from our work? Are there specific things that we could do to improve our approach (i.e. exercise, diet, change habits, stop whining, prioritizing more?) to work? Does the type of work we perform violate the world of value and subsequently disturb our consciences? Do we work for a company where the dignity of people is truly respected? Is our job being out-sourced or eliminated based on technology or managerial decisions that we have no control over?

So often, it seems that we *expect* work to supply us with some unknown magical sense of fulfillment and satisfaction; and, at times, work can be very fulfilling and give us a sense of true accomplishment. Unfortunately, if we place everything we are at the doorstep of our work, we become – mere producers.

Work can contribute to our happiness; however, it cannot substitute for the many other things that truly make life worth living. It cannot be blamed for all our problems either, nor can it be credited with all of our successes. It can become a part of our joy or initiate a lot of pain. It can control our moods positively, or it can drive us to despair, if we let it. Working hard and utilizing our talents; however, can truly supply some of the fuel that allows us to feel free and happy.

The key of evaluating work and its effect on us, is to be totally honest with ourselves. We should try our best to sift through our concerns and focus on ways to deal with each one of them. We need to celebrate the little victories much more often and try to overcome the pitfalls much more quickly. Being honest with ourselves, trying to accurately evaluate our strengths and our weaknesses regarding work, and honestly evaluating how it affects us, is the only mature solution available. This is especially true, when our goal is to fashion our work into our lives so that we can live more happily.

THE WORLD OF VALUE ... A world open to us all!

Great Value: 3 pairs for only \$5.00!

“We value your business ... we really do!”

“What ever happened to good old-fashioned values?”

Understanding the *World of Value* is a prerequisite for our ability to live a happy life. Because in the course of every day, we are all called upon to make literally thousands of decisions that either adhere to, or violate, the *World of Value*. And it is

precisely in our **RESPONSES** that we cooperate with the *World of Value* ... and, in effect, our happiness.

Yet, what do we mean when we speak of the *World of Value*? How should we respond? Why should we care about Natural, Cultural, or Moral Values?

Initially, we may be confused by the whole notion of **VALUE**. To some it may mean a religious affiliation, to others a set of rules to live by, while many of us may simply think of our own net worth in dollars and cents. It's clear that we have to 'add value' and 'have good values'. But often times there are so many different things being presented to us, that we are at times confused about this *World Of Value*.

In our conversations with friends and co-workers we may speak of the declining social value or the lack of cultural values. We will also talk about natural values and our use and misuse of the great gift of creation. And we think about the world of moral values and attempt to infuse them to some degree into the minds of our children, our corporate vision statements, and our school systems.

Bottom line: Most of us try to live a life whereby we adhere to certain values, and we generally trying to do the "right" thing. (None of us is perfect; we don't get it right all of the time). ***But the whole notion of VALUE implicitly infers a standard – an ESSENCE in and of itself*** – that we must ***all*** approach with total respect, if we are ever going to be able to answer its call.

In order to grasp and succinctly define what **VALUE** is, as well as what it means (and should mean) to each of us, we should know that our measure of happiness is directly related to how we allow **Value** to reign in our lives. More importantly, our total focus should center on our responses to the *World of Value*. All too often, many of us tend to "shoot from the hip" when dealing with questions that demand mature responses from us. Truth, goodness, love, charity, respect, hope ... all call out to us for a response – the proper response – each and every day. And our happiness depends on how we consistently respond to them.

First, we need to understand that **VALUE infers the worth of a thing**. With money, it's clear that \$100 buys us a lot more than \$5 – its worth is easily discernable. In our relationships, VALUE is generally divided up to those who mean the most to us (i.e. parents, spouses, brothers and sisters, and friends). And in our approach to life, we all tend to VALUE – or cherish if you will – certain things like our jobs, our health, our faith and so on. Yet, the overriding aspect of the 1st component of the world of VALUE is the emphasis that the "worth" of it exists on its own – all by itself.

Our first task in our journey to understand the *World of Value* should be to read the great thinkers and to realize what value truly is and what it has in store for us. (A few hours of reading Sacred Scripture would clear things up). One of the major problems of our day is that our minds (intellects) are starving for truth and real knowledge. The great works of Plato, Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, Aristotle and others fill volumes that feed

the soul. All of these men uncover the *World Of Value* for us to the point where we can stop wondering what “it’s” all about.

In order to uncover and respond to this *World of Value* we need to try to break it up into three parts: Natural Values, Cultural Values, and Personal Moral Values. In doing so, we’ll be able to more quickly define it, and move on to the most relevant aspect; namely, *uncovering its importance in our lives by properly RESPONDING!*

NATURAL VALUE

The world of natural value is most easily understood *when we recognize the VALUE of the object in question – simply for its inherent essence or ‘being’*. The value of nature, the loveliness of a setting sun, a brilliant mind, a beautiful smiling face, and the uncontrollable laughter of a child are just some of the infinite number of wonders that have been bestowed upon us. In short, it is the beauty and majesty of all creation. And as people, we are the perfection of all created (natural) value, as we have been chosen as the caretakers and over-seers of all that we see and encounter. We are equipped with an intellect, the ability to reason, a free will, an immortal soul, and the ability to encounter and – LOVE.

This world of natural value can be neatly summed up *as that which has been created*. And, to varying degrees, our response to these things greatly influences our ability to live a happy life. The use of our minds to create great works of art, to make great discoveries, to build and produce, can all be seen as our contribution or cooperation with the world of natural value. Hence, all of our every day efforts become interwoven in the world of natural value and become extensions of it.

It is vital that we recognize the world of natural value and the importance that it plays in our lives. All of the beauty of creation affords us the opportunity to work with and develop ourselves in ways that will enhance our lives in so many ways. In short, our minds and bodies are “unlocked” as we are able to participate in and cooperate with the whole world of natural value. The beauty of a child’s face, a brilliant mind, the use of our senses, along with all of creation, are given to us to write great books of science, to explore new territories, to build great civilizations.

This area of natural value *demands the proper response – a reverent response* – from each of us. Specifically, we all need to learn how to **RESPECT** the world of natural value a great deal more than we do now. We must formulate a respect for life, for the dignity of every human person, for the world in which we live, for our faculties, our neighbors ... the list is seemingly endless. Our ability to succeed, to legitimately attain great things in life, is dependent upon our proper responses to the *World of Value*.

Only when we learn to thoroughly respect the world of natural value ON ITS TERMS AND BY REASON ON ITS OWN INHERENT IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE will we be able to initiate the process of responding properly to it and, in turn, deriving joy from it.

CULTURAL VALUE

In its most general sense, ***cultural value*** – or social value – can best be described ***as the tone of a society***. It is the emphasis that a given culture places on an infinite number of things; and acts as the barometer to measure the extent to which society adheres to or violates the ***World of Value***. For example, in America we place a great deal of emphasis on independence, the dignity of the human person, a stable and representative system of government, a sound judicial system, money and material goods, and more. And within the overall American culture, we have many sub-cultures (religious, political, ethnic, etc...) that each contributes to the cultural values of our society. All of these cultural values are reflections of the individual moral values of the people in a given society.

While we may not agree with the tone or the values that surface as the predominant cultural representations, they affect us to a great degree in countless ways. Our emphasis on a sound judicial system, or our desire for justice, protects many of us from being unjustly imprisoned and persecuted. Notwithstanding the imperfections of our court system, our culture values the right to a fair trial and the need for sufficient proof in order to find someone guilty of a crime. Similarly, our emphasis on the right to free speech is instilled in us from an early age and is valued by each and every American.

Cultural values are really a conglomeration of the aspirations and desires of the people; and are made up of many personal (moral and immoral) value judgements and individual preferences. It is uncanny how each culture differs in its formation and application of cultural values. For example, the American and Vietnamese people view the family in very different ways. In Vietnam, the elderly are given a great deal of respect and prominence in the family structure. They most always live in the same house with their children and grandchildren, and are very influential in the decision making process. The thought of moving to a nursing home rarely enters into the minds of any Vietnamese parents. In America, we know this is different.

In fact, it is interesting to compare the ***Cultural Values*** of the East and West. We often times find a stark contrast in so many things: family, money and possessions, freedom, government, fashions, levels of decency, crime and punishment, the arts, and much more. Again, all of these cultural values include decisions on the part of people in society that translate into laws, expressions (i.e. music, art, literature), policies, and traditions. Thus, the ***Cultural Values***, as well as everything that they subsequently affect in a society, are constantly challenged by people – either individually or collectively – to create a tone or standard which is part of their agenda. One of the major problems associated with cultural value is that they can change (sometimes for the worse) when left ‘unchecked’ by adherence to the world of ***Personal Moral Values***.

This is often why we hear of the ‘changing moral/cultural values’ of a society. And we often succumb to the notion that just because something changes, it does so for the better.

This is precisely why our American society has undergone (and continues to undergo) such a radical change over the past 30 years. There are simply so many diverse groups pressing their agenda to the social arena that it appears that every tradition or expression has been altered or challenged in some way. At times, it appears that nothing is sacred; or in other words, nothing is safe from the winds of change that consistently challenges the *Cultural Values* in our society.

This cannot be immediately deemed as good or bad for our society because we need to evaluate all of the changes individually and approach them with the call to real value forever in our minds. For example, the strides we are attempting to make in correcting racism, abuse of all kinds, discrimination, and more, *are real advances* from the perspective of cultural development. Unfortunately, greed, materialism, deception, the slaughter of the innocent, and the many current forms of dehumanization, are sad expressions of our *changing social value system*.

Another important aspect of cultural or social value is that it is always initiated by the activity (and inactivity) of individual members of a society. In other words, certain cultural values will develop as mainstream or acceptable expressions of society in large part because someone pushed their individual agenda while another failed to put up a fight.

This is best understood *when we recognize that evil exists when good men and women do nothing*. If we look at slavery, this notion becomes all too real. For the unconscionable and outrageous act of slavery gives us a real picture of man's inhumanity to man. Yet, slavery was clearly accepted in America for decades. And it wasn't until good men and women stepped up to challenge and overcome this evil that we were able to break its bonds as a socially acceptable condition and, in turn, abolish slavery.

This reality that evil can be overcome should be a real reminder to those of us who claim that we cannot do any real good in the world because we don't make a difference. Quite the contrary, *our acceptance or rejection of good and evil – on an individual basis – is literally our response to the World of Value*. And it is in this response that we contribute either actively or passively, to the social or cultural agenda.

PERSONAL (MORAL) VALUE

This brings us right into the world of Personal Value – or Moral Value. And it is here that the real world of value comes alive. *That's because our response to the world of personal values formulates everything about ourselves: our personality, our attitudes, our approach to life, and our ability to encounter one another*. And when we either adhere to or disregard the call to the world of personal moral values, we unleash, as it were, our very selves.

Yet, for far too long, we have all been terribly confused about the need to adhere to the *World of Personal Moral Value*. Worse yet, we have conjured up all kinds of

substitutes for true value. We expect people to be motivated, to have a positive attitude, and to achieve, without helping them to recognize how they must first and foremost formulate a personal value system that is not bent on the next selfish endeavor.

In fact, the formation of a true personal value system *is primarily a rejection and renouncement of our immoral ways*. If we grasp nothing else, we need to realize that in order to be truly happy, we must initially reckon with ourselves by renouncing all traces of deception, selfishness, greed – and vice. We should all start out by adhering to goodness and rejecting evil. Because all of our aspirations and actions must be governed by a personal value system that affords us the opportunity to become great people! Instead of sounding the call for everyone to ‘come as they are’, we need to encourage people to consistently strive to be the best they can possibly be – in every aspect of their lives.

We need to stop being afraid of moral value. Most often the word ‘morals’ or ‘values’ tend to concern us, and the demands that they supposedly present to us. However, we must fully take to heart the reality that only by living a morally good life, or in other words, making the proper responses to the calls of value, can we expect to live a life full of happiness. We can run from this reality as much as we like – as we often times do – but we can never hide from the consequences that occur due to our immaturity and selfishness. We should also put to rest the notion that only Christians or believers need to live a morally good life. Because while God is the foundation of all goodness and author of the moral code, the world of moral value calls out to each and every one of us – even if you don’t realize it yet.

Truth, goodness, hope and love along with all of the other moral values that we are called to properly respond to, are what each of us needs in order to approach the *Power of Happiness*. And we need to approach the *World of Value* in very specific ways and grasp that there are roadblocks, as well as fundamental prerequisites, necessary for us to adhere to. Specifically, we need to evaluate Goodness (the essence of all values), the importance of good habits, truth, love, hope...and a lot more!

GOODNESS ... The target we all shoot for!

Of all of the moral values, Goodness ranks first! This is not to infer that truth, hope, respect, and the many other moral values are inferior to goodness; it simply means that *goodness exudes the most inherent expression of the character of all morality*. Therefore, to attempt to uncover happiness without explaining what is good, and what constitutes a good act, is like trying to describe music without sound or art without sight. Because goodness embodies the entire sphere of morality – and happiness!

And by now, it should be readily apparent that in order to be happy, you must first and foremost look to be **GOOD**. The entire focal point of this book centers on our response to value. Truly then, **GOODNESS** offers us the *clearest target* to which we can aim our sights at and pursue, in our quest to experience true joy. Goodness truly is the essence of all value.

But what do we mean by goodness? *What do we mean when we say that a particular person exudes goodness?* And what are the key determinants of a (good) moral act – or any given action for that matter? Because understanding what goodness is (and is not) is key to our development as people. For if we truly want to aspire to greatness – to be the best that we can possibly be – we need to understand what constitutes goodness, and how we should respond and participate with it.

Basically, *three things determine the morality (GOODNESS) of any given act:* the **END** in sight, the **MEANS** taken to attain the **END**, and the **CIRCUMSTANCES** associated with the **MEANS** taken. These three factors will help anyone evaluate the morality of any given action. This doesn't mean that anyone will be able to discern the right or wrong of any given acts; it simply means that a person will understand how to go about the process.

The first thing to understand in any given action is that which a person **WILLS** to do – in the **END**. Basically, we are concerned here with what someone ultimately **INTENDS** to do; it is the thing that is nearest to one's heart. If a man should lie in order to embezzle large sums of money, he is more of a thief than he is a liar. Likewise, if I steal a car in order to murder my neighbor, I am more of a murderer than a thief – even though I am guilty of both crimes.

The MEANS taken in any given act basically refers to what I do – the actual ACTS – and they are also to be heavily considered in the moral character of any act. Remember that the **END** does not justify the means. It is immoral to increase the profitability of a company to a certain level (**END**) by firing all of the Irish employees in the company. Similarly, it's wrong to sell child pornography simply to provide a living for my family.

Finally, CIRCUMSTANCES usually play a role in determining the relevancy of any given act – even those that may not affect the morality of the means taken. With circumstances (be they aggravating or extenuating) we generally look at how reasonable and relevant the circumstances are in any particular act.

After this very brief description, you might quickly say that understanding the **ENDS**, the **MEANS**, and the **CIRCUMSTANCES** has little to do with understanding goodness. Well, this depends greatly on how you approach the process. All too often, people today really don't care what they do (**END**), how they do it (**MEANS**), or who gets affected along the way (**CIRCUMSTANCES**); as long as they achieve the desired result. Yet, every thought, word and deed is vitally important to the inherent Goodness and dignity of every human being.

GOODNESS then, can be seen as the embodiment of our response to all values. When we obey, when we bend our wills to do the right thing, when we forgive, when we show compassion, when we consider the ramifications of our actions (and forego them) and the negative affect they may have on others, when we consistently chose the better

path – only then do we begin to understand what goodness is and how it manifests itself in people.

GOODNESS, like every other virtue, is a total response of our entire personality; and it is much more than appearing to be ‘good-natured’. For there are too many fakes and shallow people trying to pass themselves off as ‘good guys’ who actually have very little traces of goodness in their character.

A woman does not exude goodness because she decides to forgive or show compassion once a year. A woman may do a wicked thing and not be VICIOUS, or a good action and not be VIRTUOUS. To be virtuous, a woman must perform many acts of virtue. In effect, the virtuous acts (habits) must become part of her personality – like a flowing river compared to a stagnant puddle. ***In its purest sense, GOODNESS is both the reflection and manifestation of true love.*** I refer to this in more detail in RELATIONSHIPS; however, for now we can say that goodness is to love what moisture is to water.

GOODNESS is the reflection of the World of Values in a person. It is also the essence of the moral life; the target we shoot for when we wish to do ‘better’. Goodness is the embodiment of all the other values. It is the very breadth of God (love) and the true resting-place of every soul. And it is precisely when our souls are restless – WHEN WE FAIL TO ADHERE TO GOODNESS – that we start to create most of the problems in our lives.

In contrast to the truly good person, there are certain types of people who contradict the very essence of goodness. And it’s far easier to understand GOODNESS (and the lack of it) by referring to the good ... and the bad. Instead of talking ABOUT GOODNESS, we can often relate much better by recognizing how it is present (and lacking) in a person. More importantly, we can (hopefully) see ourselves to varying degrees and look to make a change, if necessary. We can summarize these types of people into five categories. The Lukewarm Person, the Selfish Person, the Intellectual Silly Person, the Malicious Person ... and The GOOD Person.

THE LUKEWARM OR SHALLOW PERSON

The lukewarm person often ‘flirts’ with goodness; and this flirtatious attitude spills over into all aspects of their inconsistent character. Here we find the ‘good-natured’ man who allows the winds of change and the signs of the times to affect most of his decisions in life. The lukewarm person is often the picture of a dull kind of contentment who really doesn’t stand for anything except the maintenance of his seemingly ‘good-natured’ and friendly demeanor. And it is the part of each one of us that we need to overcome if we are really ever to live a truly good (happy) life.

The lukewarm person is, generally speaking, a person of commitment (usually to himself) but not of conviction. His friendly attitude, which wavers when contention or challenging situations arise, is completely different from the unrelenting certitude

exhibited at all times by the truly good woman. Much of his time is spent as an appeaser, a person who takes things as they come and who rarely rocks the boat – regardless of the gravity of the circumstances in progress.

The lukewarm person lacks the strength to resist, to give of himself freely, and to ‘leap’ beyond his timid inclinations. Amidst the many compromises that he entertains, the lukewarm person generally wallows in a desperate and shallow existence; and he is rarely happy living this way.

THE SELFISH PERSON

Far more dangerous, and in direct opposition to the good person, is the selfish and self-centered man. What pours forth from him is first and foremost very narrow – both intellectually and actively. His total existence is focused on a life of ‘how much’ and ‘how many’ – FOR ME.

Inherent in the selfish man is a total lack of respect for other people. To him, the entire world is a stage for him to play out his quest for the next little pleasurable thrill. He rarely responds to the needs of others unless it profits him in some way or raises his opinion of himself in some obscure manner.

The selfish man is often imprisoned in himself, a brutal individualist bent on achieving or obtaining at the cost of everything. Forgiveness, generosity, truthfulness are values that he sometimes ‘uses’ as a means to an end. But the selfish man lives to enjoy – not to serve. And this selfishness manifests itself in his ‘use’ of everything: money, power, family, relationships – everything. Ultimately, it is clear that ***the selfish man is the supreme CYNIC who knows the PRICE OF EVERYTHING AND THE VALUE OF NOTHING.***

THE INTELLECTUALLY SILLY PERSON

The third type of person is what can be described as the intellectually silly man. We do not refer to the good man who may be slow in thought and/or limited in intellectual abilities. ***Rather, this refers to the stupid and narrow man who has been mis-educated and is too proud and narrow to break free from his silly premises.*** Here we find the pig-headed and stubborn man, the scholar void of any allegiance to goodness and truth, the self-made man enveloped in his pursuits, and THE MANY OF US THAT ADHERE TO A MINDSET THAT HAS BEEN HANDED TO US ON A PLATE FROM SOCIETY.

In this category, a man finds himself confused by a great many things specifically because he actually makes an attempt (even if only half-heartedly) to rise above his initial selfish inclinations. He can actually feel the pain of others, he is shocked by injustice, and even comes to the aid of other people at times. Yet, due to the limits of the baseless creeds in which he builds his life upon, he has great difficulty in breaking through – and of living a truly good life.

Of all the things that prevent him from moving forward, **COMPROMISE** in thought (and ultimately in deed) constantly surfaces as the overriding challenge to his lack of development. To the silly man: greed is good at certain times, purity is optional, fun is **VITAL**, truth is not always worth defending, and honor is for someone in the military. In this arena, there are too many things that are ‘open for discussion’ and never truly developed in his character.

Much of this can be attributed to a poor philosophy of life **that in the end is often GOD-LESS**. Hence, his understanding of so many things (i.e. love, suffering, self-esteem, goodness, etc...) often takes on an somewhat twisted view, that rarely adheres to reason and rationality. Instead, he clings to his silly and base-less creeds that he must unlearn if he wishes to live a happy life.

THE MALICIOUS PERSON

The malicious and cold-hearted person is one who not only does evil ... but also loves evil. The movies do a fantastic job of depicting such villains as someone who is way out of line and needs to be thrown in jail – usually by the hero in the ending scene. All of us cheer as the ‘bad guy’ is somehow stopped and the lives of countless people are saved. If only it were that simple in real life.

The malicious person understands what goodness is and rejects it for a life governed by his every whim. He is much more dangerous than the lukewarm man, the selfish man, and the intellectually silly man. Here we find the hedonist, the total egotist, and the proud man bent on achieving and satisfying himself regardless of the consequences involved. He is utterly selfish in most every act; and he makes no real attempt to ever question his selfish motives – for he is king of his Godless life. He is also the picture of pride; everything in life centers around him and his ability to obtain, to achieve (in some obscure way), to raise his importance or pleasure regardless of the circumstances.

In this person, we find no warmth, no charity, and no justice. Unlike the good woman who seeks always to help and build-up other people, the malicious person shows an icy indifference toward others and a lack of respect for almost everything except his own pleasure.

Unfortunately, these people are not in prison. For a prisoner may commit a crime and be imprisoned because of a bad mistake. The malicious man, however, often walks amongst us. He is in our neighborhoods. He pimps young women on the street corner and brutalizes them if he feels like it. He writes dirty material and spreads it in our book stores, on our television sets – and in our schools. And he performs many selfish and dirty deeds whenever it fits his fancy to do so.

We could go on and on to further explain how the lack of goodness as well as the characteristics associated with living a good life manifest themselves in people. At this

point, it should be much clearer as to what constitutes a good woman and what qualities continuously surface in her. Similarly, we need to be on guard so as not to allow ourselves to flirt with the tendencies of the lukewarm, selfish, intellectually silly or malicious man.

Most importantly, we need to examine our lives and honestly assess the times that we exemplify the traits inherent in a person that lacks any goodness ***IN ORDER TO MAKE A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER***. The greatest gift that we can give to ourselves is becoming the person we were created to be – by adhering to goodness; not some by-product of the ‘ME’ generation. When we constantly strive (despite how many times we fall) to be the very best that we can be, only then do we uncover our true characters and begin our journey towards greatness.

THE GOOD PERSON ... Who is she?

The woman who exudes goodness is not PERFECT. She never was and never will be. Rather, ***she strives for a perfection in character*** precisely because she understands that her soul can only truly rest (and be happy) when it is nourished by Goodness. To her, any alternative would be living a perpetual lie. Such is the same for you and me.

GOODNESS embodies and envelops the entire character of a person. A woman illuminates Goodness when the ***TOTALITY*** of her character is covered with truly lovely and truthful things. She is kind in all she does, forgiving to those who offend her, generous beyond her means, selfless in her daily approach, humble in her demeanor, and always interested in being truly just. She is never cold or indifferent.

The true manifestation of Goodness in a person shines forth in all of its beauty and splendor – ***and we know it when we see it.*** The features of goodness are easily recognizable. The very breath of God (goodness/love) echoes from the actions of a woman who exudes goodness. Her attitude towards others is always a sincere respect, and her response to others possesses a genuineness, which is lacking with the superficial person.

A woman who irradiates Goodness is one who is always inclined to help; she is never selfish or narrow. She forgives easily, loves intensely, and exudes compassion and kindness in all of her actions. She is meek in her demeanor; yet her goodness is more powerful than any force on earth. She is always modest and truthful, a pillar of honesty in word and deed.

The good woman is a person of true conviction. She is also open to the call of every other value. Her responses are not accidental, but a part of her character, an attitude of total consistency, a loveliness that manifests itself by means of a *Power* unknown to the immature and weak woman.

Goodness, then is the target at which we aim our every thought, word, and deed.
It is not one of the options – it is the only option. Take aim...and set your sites on goodness in all that you do. Being good: It's the only way to live a happy life!

HABITS ... Making the Connection!

The Story of Maria Gonzalez:

Maria pushed aside her dinner plate and coaxed her tired body towards the door. After a long day cleaning homes in the West End of Pittsburgh, PA, she still had her 'good deed' to perform before the day was done. Even though it was 7:30 at night, she instinctively walked the 3 blocks to the Holly Green Apartments. And with her, she had a 'little left over' from her dinner for her invalid friend of 3 years, 82-year old Richard Nelson.

She had first met Richard 3 years before, when he spent a few days at a local hospital where Maria had volunteered once a week. Maria made it seem like she knew Mr. Nelson all of her life. Actually, it was her loveliness that opened up the life of a cranky old man.

Once a week for 2 months after Richard had been discharged, Maria would call and wish him well; and ask if he needed anything. Maria felt that he was very lonely and poor – and that he had no one to care for him. So, Maria did as her mother always said, "Do something good for someone else – every day – no matter how big or small it may seem." With this as her motto, she made it a habit to keep in constant contact with a lot of the forgotten folk – people who didn't really have anybody. She truly was a good woman.

Then one day, in late June, she received an emergency phone call at 11:45 at night. It was the hospital, and Richard was having congestive heart failure. He gave Maria's name as the next-of-kin on the emergency sheet, and begged the nurse to call her. As usual, Maria ran out the door in a flash!

"Maria, thank God you're here," said a relieved Mr. Nelson. "I didn't want to die tonight without first seeing, to thank you for being so wonderful to an old crank like me. I will truly miss you," he said, as a flood of tears ran down his worn cheeks. "You're going to be just fine, Richard," said Maria. "You're just a little tired." Richard jumped in, "No way, Maria, my time is up. But God Bless you for calling and coming to see me so often. You're an angel and the one person in this world I'm truly going to miss." "Rest, Richard – I'll check in on you before I go to work tomorrow," said Maria. "Please try to get some sleep, Richard."

But Richard didn't make it through the night. Two days later, Maria was the only attendant at the brief funeral service that Maria put together. There were no relatives,

no friends, nobody. Two weeks went by, and Maria stopped by her apartment to quickly change on the way to visit her sick aunt across town.

Much to her surprise, was a large UPS cardboard box waiting for her, with her name neatly written all over it. At first, she thought it was the new set of kitchen pans she had ordered. But as she opened the box, she found some small items belonging to Mr. Nelson with a note from his attorney. Inside the box was a note that read: "Dear Maria, Please contact my office immediately. I have been trying to reach you for 2 weeks. You are the sole beneficiary of Mr. Richard Nelson's estate, valued at more than \$23 million dollars. THIS IS NO JOKE! We need to make arrangements as soon as possible to settle the matter." To say the least, Mr. Nelson had fooled everybody. And Maria's habitual visits had truly paid off!

HABITS ... Are they really important?

One of the most vital aspects of our approach to happiness is to understand the connection that habits play in our daily lives.

A habit is a quality that is difficult to change. It is disposed easily and readily at will to follow a particular course of action. Habit is one of ***THE*** most determinant powers in our lives. For example, I have the power to walk, but I have the habit of running and playing basketball. You have the power (and the choice) to selfishly dwell on ways that you can continuously satisfy yourself, yet you may have the habit of always thinking and choosing God's laws – and serving others.

Habit differs from disposition, as disposition is a quality that can be easily changed. A person who may be in a humorous mood may or may not be disposed to also be kind. Thus, habit is a part of our character, disposition is a passing fancy. Think, for a moment, of the most moody soul that you know, as well as the biggest two-faced witch you've ever met, and you will begin to grasp the kind of person we all become (to varying degrees) with the absence of virtuous habits in our lives.

A habit is a KEY thing in life, belonging to our will, essentially usable at will, and brought into play and ***controlled by our FREE CHOICE.*** So our old notion of a habit – or an act that we've traditionally viewed as something we've just gotten used to doing automatically and on a regular basis "just because", has less of the character of a true habit.

A thing that we simply tend to do automatically passes more out of morality and into the realm of a panting dog with arms and legs. For example, bad habits or VICES to which we become slaves to (against our better judgement) should actually be considered more of bad tendencies than actual habits. That's because as bad habits are formed (acts of: drunkenness, greed, lust, pride, etc...) they do not so much depend on our act of willing or choosing something – even though we succumb to the temptation – but rather are simply dragged by our will in the bad habit's wake.

For example, a person may have the occasion to stop at the corner bar after work each payday. Subsequently, his family finds him drunk at 8:00 PM each Thursday evening. The habit passes more out of morality into the realm of physics. Namely, stopping at the bar on payday may result in this particular man drinking until he gets drunk. In others words, he failed miserably in avoiding the occasion of getting drunk.

That's because habit is a living thing that grows and must be fed. It grows on acts, and acts are the food that sustains it. Without exercise, we all know what happens to our bodies: they become fat and weak. Such is the case with our habits. When we fail to (act) exercise good habits, corruption sets in and the moral fabric of our lives disintegrates. For example, you may have had the habit of thinking of God often during each day and dwelled on ways to consistently do good deeds. For some reason, you may have stopped doing so and have distracted yourself with silly things, which have REPLACED your focus in life. In short, your old (virtuous) habit has been ruined.

This is why continuously establishing good habits is so important when we think of children – as well as those of us who recognize our many weaknesses and the need to start fresh every day of our lives. ***Because habits are the channels where our energies flow, and are KEY DETERMINANTS of our capacity for doing good or evil.*** Thus, our habits, and the permanence or constancy associated with freely directing our actions in a particular direction, are vital aspects of our character.

We cannot expect our children to establish habits in their lives if we habitually show them – by our poor habits – a life that is void of virtuous acts. Many of us will respond that we try to be good people and that we try to do the best that we can. Yet, we all need to realize that the world has blinded us in so many ways in the formation of our habits.

But why don't we just make up the rules as we go along and try to do some good along the way? Why do we need to establish good habits? Actually there are 3 very good reasons.

First, you may have heard the phrase that “many battles are won before the fight?” Well, ***the formation of good (virtuous) habits is where a great many battles of life are won or lost.*** There are countless examples of people who freely chose specific directions (to act in certain ways) which ultimately cause their ruin. Also, making up the rules as you go along is a lazy approach – both intellectually and morally – often resulting in a baseless creed bent on doing what we want, when we want, just because we want to.

Second, habits are acquired by acts; and a person is guilty or innocent according to their acts. ***When we begin to act in certain ways, we establish the habits that form our character.*** If we shoot and kill a man we are guilty of the act of murder. Likewise, the act of telling the truth can free a wrongfully accused man from the penalties of a crime that he did not commit. Our habit of speech (being truthful) is not in question nor

is our habit of being an avid hunter in question. What matters is how we act. But the question always remains; what came first: the habit or the act (the chicken or the egg)?

The answer is easy. We obtain a habit in 2 ways: 1) either from instruction – from a parent or a teacher, and/or 2) from acts preceding – completely independent from the habit. This is why it is so vitally important to be on our guard not to violate the innocence of little children. None of us wants to be responsible for the formation of a bad habit in any child.

Third, people are said to be creatures of habits. In other words, we tend to do things just because we get used to doing them. This is all the more reason to focus our energies on establishing good habits. Because as we form good habits, IN OUR WILLS, it saves us the need to continually make up our mind as to how we are going to act in any particular circumstance. ***When we merge our wills, our intellects, and our actions into habits, we develop qualities of our personality that are difficult to change.*** And in doing so, we become the type of person that we've always wanted to be. We trust and are easily trusted, we are open to the truth, we are quick to forgive, full of compassion, and much more. In short, we begin to live up to our moral and intellectual constitution – and we begin to tap into a life worth living.

Each of us acquires good and bad habits in our lives to varying degrees. And it's obvious that each of us takes on different habits based on a number of influences and circumstances. Yet, we know that we should try to formulate the many good habits that will build a character that anyone would be proud of. Because it's by the acts of our wills that we become either gluttons or saints. And since we are flesh and blood with inclinations that lead us to often do what we often should not, formulating good habits lifts us to **ACT** in ways that make us REAL men and women. And that's what life is really all about, right?

TRUTH

“Tell me the truth, honey” – Your Mother

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...so help you God. – Oath before testifying in a Court of Law.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident” – U.S. Constitution

The Story of Janice Fleming:

Every one at the conference table felt the tension in the air. They were 7 of the top managers in their respective divisions and each of one of them knew that the national sales manager's job was open. They also knew that their annual presentations that day, reporting on their results, would weigh heavily on the decision for the job. They were all equally surprised – and a little nervous – to see that the President of the company, Tom Bowers, was spending the entire day 'sitting in' on their presentations.

Each of them had some pretty good years, and most of them also knew that it was more a matter of style and personal preference that would determine the national sales manager's job. Janice, like the rest of them, was hoping that she wouldn't have to go first. Everybody wanted to learn something from the first presentation's key points, as well as the mistake(s) to avoid in their presentations.

"Janice, why don't you go first," said Tom Bowers. "OK, Tom, but I would have rather learned from everyone else how to do this right," laughed Janice. "I'll do my best." Halfway through her presentation, Tom threw her a 'curve-ball' question. "Janice, what do you have planned in the event that Briggs Sanitation pulls its account with us this year? They represent about 15% of your division's revenues, and they've been dissatisfied with us since we didn't submit to their pricing demands last year. What are you going to do if they leave?" asked an interested boss.

"First, Tom, I pray that they don't leave," answered Janice quickly. "I've done my best over the last year, on numerous occasions, to prove our commitment to them and I plan on doing a lot of the same this year," explained Janice. "But like any of us in this room, we'd be hard-pressed to replace one of our key accounts overnight. We'd have to quickly re-evaluate the time we spent on retaining Briggs' business and re-direct our calling efforts on acquiring new business much more aggressively," said Janice. "It would be very much in line with the activities I plan to implement to increase revenues by 7% next year, but on a much more intensive focus," finished Janice. Tom Bowers nodded and asked her to continue.

Throughout the day, the other 6 made their respective presentations, and Tom Bowers threw each of them a 'curve-ball' question, similar to the one he posed to Janice. Without exception, each of them came up with a real polished answer (BS), but none of them answered as honestly and truthfully as Janice did. That Friday, Janice had a follow-up, one-on-one, meeting with Tom Bowers at his office in Chicago. A nervous Janice, sat waiting for 15 minutes as Tom Bowers finished up on an important phone call. "Janice, forgive me, but Dobbs' Corp's CEO, Wayne Johnson, wouldn't get off the line. Come on in," said Tom.

After some formalities, Tom got right to the point. "Janice, after a lot of thought and consideration, I've decided to give Jeff Edwards the national sales manager's job. Ron is a fabulous sales manager, and I strongly believe he'll do a great job for us nationally," said Tom. Janice nodded and answered, "Well, I'd like to be the first to congratulate Jeff. He's done an outstanding job, and he really does deserve it," said a sincere, but somewhat disappointed, Janice. "I was really hoping to be the next national sales manager – you know that, Tom," added Janice.

"I know, but wait a minute Janice, I want to talk to you about something really important," said Tom anxiously. Janice replied, "Sure, Tom, fire away." Actually, she was doing her best to hide the disappointment and pay attention despite the letdown. "Janice, of all the presentations last week, yours impressed me the most – by far," said

Tom. “One thing that impressed me, and has always impressed me about you, Janice, is your truthfulness and honesty.

“A lot of good that did for me for the national sales manger job,” Janice thought to herself. “Thanks, Tom I appreciate you saying that – that’s very kind of you to say,” replied Janice. “ And Janice, because of that, and your outstanding performance with us over the past 5 years, I’d like you to seriously consider joining the executive team here in Chicago by taking the position of Executive Vice President, in charge of all Sales and Operations for the company. Harry’s retiring in September, and we both thought – actually the whole executive management team thought – that you’d be perfect for the job. I want to work with people with integrity, talent, and honesty. And you’d be perfect for the job. What do you say, Janice?” Janice jumped out of her chair and said, “Absolutely, Tom!” Her truthfulness had surely paid off!

TRUTH ... does it really matter?

Is there anything more beautiful than a truthful person? Can you think of anything that is more rewarding than having someone you can trust, because of how honest and trustworthy they are? It would be senseless to try to form a sound character – and to try to tap into the **Power of Happiness** – if we don’t talk about the truth. And unfortunately today, the **TRUTH** is often replaced with convenience.

It doesn’t appear to matter what’s true anymore. Often, the only apparent thing that matters is how we feel the truth to be at the time – for us – regarding the situation at hand. And it’s precisely this belief that **‘my opinion is as good as yours’** that has fueled the decline of truth and has caused more unhappiness than many of us will dare to admit.

Initially, we need to very briefly talk about the reality of objective truth and its worst enemy – **IMMANENCE**. And immanence simply means that we create or make-up the truth regarding something ..**just because we say so**.

When we hear the words ‘objective truth’ we all tend to cringe a bit and begin to worry about the many demands it supposedly makes upon us. It seems much easier to simply take life as it comes and decide for ourselves how we should feel about certain matters; especially those matters that we tend to fight with ourselves about each day. Or, is it really easier? In speaking of objective truth, we do so in large part to simply acknowledge the validity and essence of the object. Let’s make seven (7) objectively truthful statements to help us better understand what we mean:

(1) We were all born. (2) We all have blood pumping through our body. (3) We will all die. (4) My car is blue. (5) The plane arrived in Philadelphia at 10:05. (6) There is no effect without a commensurate cause. (7) Only the rational human mind can judge between good and evil.

A dog can approximate but cannot judge between good and evil. If you disagree, please show me a dog that has ever gone on a hunger strike. Likewise, what angry lion,

impelled by instinct and not reason, does not pounce on and devour a little gazelle when it is hungry? In short, in order to grasp objective truth you simply need to realize that the thing or object in question does not have its origin in you.

In other words, the fact or object *has nothing to do with how we feel* about the matter: *it is valid or true by its very nature or occurrence*. We form the idea of something when our rational selves take an object and forms the idea. Yet, the whole notion of an idea is senseless unless we understand that it is an idea of something else: an object. We come to know something by our ability to abstract things. And we are irrational, and come to false conclusions about so many things, when we attempt to make truth what we want it to be by conjuring up all sorts of insane and immature conclusions `just because we say so'. *And immanence is the plague of "just because I say so"*.

Immanence is the present-day scourge whereby we reduce truth to what we feel about the matter in question. It is relativism in its every form: intellectual, moral, political, racial and more. It is a silly notion opposed to realism, which claims that everything has its origin in me. The immanent person is trapped in his or her own little world in which they truly believe that whatever they know is just stuck in them, and it is true just because of that. They are the stubborn and proud ones; basing every decision on their own insight or feelings, regardless of the actual truthfulness of the matter. It is the present day 'my opinion is just as good as yours' syndrome no matter how valid (true) or absurd (false) the opinion may be. The immanent person believes that their decision is correct, and that, IN ITSELF, makes it so.

In immanence, the will of the individual is deemed the very source of right and wrong. It's therefore easy to see how a recent study found that 50% of college freshman would rape a woman if they knew they could get away with it. Similarly, it is no longer absurd for many to actively promote white supremacy, fetal experimentation, child pornography and more. For when we attempt to make the truth a matter of FEELING, we actually denigrate and erode the very essence of truth.

More specifically, *we find in immanence a pure egotism and a total disregard for value and people.* All the immanent person cares about is what *they* think the truth is, and ultimately what the object has in store for them. For the immanent man, the world is not a call to value, it is an arena to please his every whim – a means to an end.

Immanence is, in reality, the conclusion of half-wits. It is the irrational and immature response from the selfish person who has, quite literally, replaced truth with whatever response feels good at the time. This whole absurd perception of "what I perceive the truth to be is the truth" *literally gave the world such horrors as slavery and the holocaust.*

However, *this doesn't affect our ability to form opinions of things.* We can say that something 'SEEMS to be true' after respectful research and the submission to value. Yet, it is much different than saying that something 'is true for me', while disregarding truth and thus becoming our own gods. The spoils of such a mentality can run so deep

that the average person begins to feel as if truth is some kind of old fashioned, mysterious, man-made set of traditions that have been created to keep people in line.

And this is what's going on in society today. We find that so many people, especially the young, are convinced that we cannot agree on what is true or not. They say that there are simply too many opinions, cultures, and religions; and that we cannot say that anything is really true. However, this insipid mentality must change if we are ever to be happy people. In fact, if we wish to continue to live as a society, we must all begin to heed the call to the truth in our lives. For if we fail to re-establish some basic truths that we can all strive to live by, we will continue the present downward spiral that society has taken precisely because we have accepted the silly and dangerous notion that 'anything goes'. There will not be enough police to patrol the streets and schools, enough courts to hear all the cases, or enough prisons to hold all the criminals, if we don't address – and respond to – the need to live truthful lives.

Basically, *we abdicate our freedom* and any hope of maintaining a society as we know it (to flourish or even exist for that matter) *when we fail to accept truth on its terms*. The present day scourges of drug abuse, broken families, crime, greed, rampant impurity, selfishness, corruption, and more, will not go away with more government allocated funds. Rather, they will only be subdued by a return to the truth and a rejection of our own immature and deceptive ways.

Our constitution tells us that our Creator endows us, with certain inalienable rights: namely, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet even if we differ on the reality of a Creator or the notion of happiness as meant by the writers, each one of us believes that we have rights as people. We recognize the right to live without being murdered or violated. We recognize the right of free speech and to privacy. We recognize our right to a fair trial, the right to own property and not to have it stolen, and to worship God without being persecuted. The list of rights that we cling to goes on and on.

It is precisely in the many rights that we adhere to, that we come to understand a great deal about truth – on its terms. In other words, we don't need another person to tell us that it's wrong to go into a home, murder a person, and rob them of all of their possessions. Our rights did not originate from some Senator stating that some acts are acceptable (good) while others are not (bad). That's because truth is the same today, tomorrow, and for years to come; it has been bestowed upon us by God to lead us to a life of joy. Our rights – and the truths that govern them – will be in effect in 1,000 years. It is our insane and silly interpretation of the truth that will alter how the truth reigns in our lives, and ultimately in society.

Unfortunately, we only need to listen to each other in order to actively violate the world of truth. Bigotry, hatred, prejudice, and pride in all its forms, are negative values that are *CAUGHT* not *TAUGHT*. We need someone else to show us how to hate another person because of skin color, nationality, or religious conviction. We learn from each other how to deceive, abuse, and to steal. We need each other to convince ourselves that

it's OK to rape a woman as long as we get away with it. And we need each other to rationalize that our acts of greed and selfishness are 'good' for us, regardless of how people are affected. It is therefore absolutely imperative that each of us becomes models of truth to emulate and imitate; so that we can begin our journey back to some semblance of sanity – and happiness.

The recognition of objective truth by no means takes the fun out of life. Quite the contrary, it allows us to respond to value as well as the essence of the object without our irrational and proud interference. Objectivity (regarding truth), in its truest and most concise meaning, is primarily AN ACTIVE SUBMISSION OF OUR REASON AND WILL to the World of Value. In the pursuit of truth as it IS, we come to understand the beauty of things – as they ARE. Our response is not a cold and indifferent one, but rather one of total respect for the obvious truth at hand. And ultimately, this kind of approach removes the silly pride that many of us exhibit when we act so unreasonable at different times in our lives.

A LIFE GOVERNED BY TRUTH ... Is it worth it?

Having briefly reviewed the difference between truth and many of our personal (immanent) feelings towards it, we can begin to see how truth plays a major role in our personal happiness. Because if we have learned anything from our present day, it has been that running and hiding from the truth can cause us all an immense amount of pain and unhappiness. Drug abuse, infidelity, corruption, murder, unbridled greed, racism and more, are irrational, and in most cases, immanent (insane) responses to true value.

The drug addict has no respect for his life and violates himself (and others) with each fix. The cheating husband lies to his wife and breaks the bonds of marriage simply because it feels good when he does so. The corrupt man deceives and steals in order to gain importance and power. The murderer lies to himself and the victim when he steals the life of another to satisfy some form of pride. The greedy man abandons all true value in a constant search for more, allowing the fixation to feed off itself; usually at the expense of others. And the racist lays claim to insanity and hatred simply because of the color of another person's skin.

We could go on and on with examples of how we violate the truth. Yet, these aberrations are precisely why we have to evaluate how truth, as well as the violation of it, plays such a vital role in our happiness. To look beyond its scope and attempt to lessen its importance is paramount to absconding our duty and forfeiting any hope of a happy life.

The Story of St. Thomas More...his response to the truth!

In the academy award winning movie, A Man For All Seasons, (written by a non-Catholic writer) we witness the true story of St. Thomas More, the chancellor of England during the reign of Henry the VIII. Here we find a striking example of a man who proves that allegiance to the truth need not be bargained away in light of the times.

Thomas was an honest man and was loved by the King to a great degree because of his adherence to the truth. Like today's corporate bosses weary of being surrounded by so many jesters, the King loved the moments he spent with him. It seemed that Thomas was the only honest one to be found in the royal court and would always tell the King the truth about the matters of his kingdom.

Unfortunately, the King did not imitate Thomas' honesty. The central theme of the movie focuses on the King's plans to divorce his wife and marry another; something that Thomas, a true Catholic, would never agree to. As the plot thickens, pressure is placed upon Thomas to consent to the marriage, and to sign a proclamation that states that Henry is the Supreme Head of the Church of England. As a lawyer, Thomas looks to see if he can sign the proclamation due to some technicality or vague language; however, the message is clear and Thomas realizes he would violate the law of God (the truth) and his very self if he signed the document, consenting to the marriage.

Thomas feels that the King will let him go if he simply says nothing. He is pressured by the King's royal mob as well as his family and friends to sign the proclamation, yet he refuses to do so. In explaining to his own daughter, Thomas tells her that when a man takes an oath, he holds his very self in his own hands – like water. But if he opens his fingers, or in other words lies and allows the water to disperse, then he would be hard pressed to find himself again.

And to his dear friend Norfolk, who begs him to sign the proclamation for friendship's sake, Thomas responds by asking Norfolk that if, when they both die, he should go to heaven for following his conscience and Thomas should go to hell for following his, would Norfolk accompany him to hell simply for friendship's sake? Of course, Norfolk has no reply.

Eventually, Thomas is imprisoned and charged with high treason. In the ending scene in the courtroom, Thomas defends himself and shames his accusers and their unjust verdict. He points out the basis of his argument and tells them that he is the King's loyal servant, but God's first. Nevertheless, they conspire against him, find him guilty as charged, and sentence him to be beheaded. To Thomas, there was no substitute for his allegiance to the truth!

But what does Thomas More's truthfulness tell us about truth and how it should affect a person? The cynical and skeptical person would say that Thomas simply lost his head for no reason. However, to those of us who aspire to truth and greatness, we can only marvel and hope that we too will live a life as honestly and honorably as St. Thomas More. He did not give in when it would have been easy to do so, nor did he worry about losing his position or what others would think of him. He responded to truth in the King's case the same way that he responded to it in the rest of his life: ***totally and unconditionally.***

TRUTH: Three (3) kinds or types of people. Where do we fit in?

First, a truthful person grasps that truth or truthfulness ‘envelopes’ our entire selves. The truthful person is consistent in their response to all value and does not pick and choose when to be honest, true and good. A truthful woman is the one who loves deeply, displays total respect for the world of value, and allows all facets of her life to be open to, and governed by, ***GOODNESS***. She is the one who we trust more than anyone else, a friend to whom we dare to be ourselves. More importantly, she lives a life filled with the essence of truly good things, free from the anxieties of the shallow person who is governed by the world of imagery. Her life is a total submission to the world of goodness; and this respect ***POURS OVER INTO ALL OTHER FACETS OF HER LIFE***. Far from being driven by her inner most feelings, she maturely responds to the world of truthfulness precisely because she views any alternative to be a violation of it and her chance to reckon with herself.

Conversely, the DECEIVER usually surrenders to the world of immanence and to what feels good at the time. Like the truthful person, his deception pours into all other aspects of his life. Here we find little respect for the world of value and even less for the deceiver himself. By means of his deceptions, the dishonest man creates his own pitiful world with himself as supreme judge and jury. In this world, he makes all that he thinks and does the center of his every moment. He is shielded from the world of value and cannot share in its wonder and beauty because he chooses to make up the rules as he goes along.

Although less dangerous than the outright liar, the deceiver creates a warped sense of truth by flirting with it when he sees fit and responding to it in whatever way benefits him at the time. The deceiver is the lukewarm person, afraid to take a stand even when he knows that the truth calls him to do so. It is the part of us all that we know – in our hearts – we must improve upon. Instead, we too often tend to offer silly antidotes or excuses for the deceptions that we succumb to conveniently.

It is the glutton who must stop overeating, the timid man who must actually begin to take risks, and the greedy man who must defer certain deals instead of being bent on improving the bottom line regardless of its effect on the people involved. To deceive is to fool ourselves and ultimately plunge our lives deeper into the world of imagery – and despair. It is precisely in this world of ‘make believe’ where we all waste such an immense amount of valuable time trying to get it right. The deceiver must take the time to evaluate his life more deeply and stop brushing aside the call to truthfulness in favor of his momentary deceptions.

Third, the LIAR is the one who recognizes and understands the truth, yet deliberately chooses to violate it simply because he wants to satisfy his every urge and desire. The liar outranks and outmaneuvers the deceiver by means of his absolute rejection of all that is good and true. It is not a matter of flirting with value, but rather an abhorrence and total rejection of it. But the liar is also the ultimate deceiver, void of any true peace or joy. The liar is, quite literally, his own worst enemy. By means of his lies,

he gives away a little more of himself with each deception, which forces him to play catch-up in his pursuit of a happy life.

His days are much different than those lived by the truthful person who is governed by compassion, generosity, and kindness – and a total submission to the truth. Instead of giving himself totally and unconditionally, the liar gives away a little more of himself each time he chooses to reject truth. And he can never be complete (happy), or regain that portion of himself, without a complete rejection of his dishonest ways.

TRUTH ... The only answer.

It's actually real simple. A call to truth is a call to happiness. It's a mature and honest reflection on that which IS, and not that which we want the truth to be in order for us to benefit at the time. It is a conscious and ever-present openness to reality and reason – on their terms – precisely because ignoring them would be paramount to living a lie.

Truth is by no means something mysterious or indiscernible. Rather, it's a way of life. And our response to the truth plays a vital role in our happiness. In fact, abandoning the truth is, in actuality, an abandonment of value and of any real hope of true happiness. By adhering to it, we are, in fact, being (true) to our real selves. The Golden Rule here is simple: ***Be truthful at all times and you will be a truly happy person.***

HOPE ... Can't live without it!

The story of Roberto Benitez:

*Roberto Benitez is an inspiration...to life! His hope serves as an example to each of us that our hopes and dreams – regardless of how irregular or out-of-the-ordinary they may seem – do indeed **mean** something. And we need to cling to our hopes and aspirations; they are the fuel that keep us going.*

You see, Roberto was born in a desperately poor town in the poor country of the Dominican Republic. His family was also quite poor and even the most basic of necessities was in constant short supply. It seemed that Roberto had some real hurdles to overcome in his life. And anyone, who has ever worked with the poor, is amazed at how the poor survive, their resiliency, and the very tough life that they lead.

But Roberto had another main hurdle as well. He had been born with severely deformed legs. And when they completely developed, they were basically so deformed, that they were worthless to Roberto. His legs were so anatomically disfigured, that even the best surgeons and doctors from around the world, couldn't find a way to help him utilize his legs in some way. And that was OK with Roberto.

There was just one thing that Roberto hoped for. It wasn't a million dollars, or a nice car, or even a miracle to help cure his badly deformed legs. Ever since Roberto was

able to remember, he spent most of his days crawling around on his hands, dragging his torso and legs around with him. As he'd pass his neighbors, and stop to speak with people, he wanted one thing more than anything else. Despite his problems, despite the struggling just to get a glass of water, and despite the mean-nature of some nasty people, Roberto was tired of looking into the eyes of dogs in the neighborhood. All he wanted was to be able to stand up and look into the eyes of another man or woman. That's it. To Roberto, this **almost** seemed impossible. Yet he still hoped for it ...with all of his might.

After being unofficially adopted by a concerned doctor from Santa Domingo, and being examined by dozens of surgeons, the suggestion was made to Roberto to have his legs amputated above the knees, so that he could be fitted for prosthetic (artificial) legs and – look people in the eyes! “Let's do it,” replied a happy Roberto. “If the doctors will help me, let's do it now!” And so, the surgery was done, his new artificial legs were fitted, and now Roberto looks people – not dogs – in the eyes when he travels around town. His hope – that one day he'd be able to look into the eyes of people instead of the eyes of dogs – was finally realized. And he's a happy young man because that was finally achieved.

HOPE ... What is it really?

Hope is the fuel that feeds our souls. It is the key ingredient necessary for us to be able to function properly with our aspirations and dreams. Hope is that part of us that yearns for something truly good to happen. And when we truly hope, we possess a great gift that we'll never trade for anything else in the world.

A life filled with genuine hope **is a prerequisite for a life of joy.** When our hearts and minds are filled with true hope, we look beyond ourselves and begin to **ACT** in ways that afford us the opportunity to live a happy life.

In its purest sense, **the essence of HOPE is a hope IN something.** We hope that the day will be a good one. We hope that we will be able to obtain a good position or that a loved one will recover from a serious illness. And in a very general sense, we hope that we will always be happy. This constant longing on our part is natural and a fundamental characteristic of all that we do as people. It's a leap by our thoughts towards something out of us and IN something good.

And, once again, **it's a response – a surrender – to VALUE.** When we truly HOPE, we step away from ourselves and approach HOPE on its terms. In doing so, we fuel the great traits usually associated with Optimism and Positivism. And we also uncover some of the problems of both (Optimism and Positivism) when they are without true HOPE. If we overlook the true power of HOPE in our lives, we will be hard-pressed to find happiness.

We may have doubts about a lot of things: our jobs, our loved ones, our health, and more. But **HOPE calls out to us**, asks us to approach things maturely and

respectfully, and invites us *to move beyond the doubts by having FAITH that good things can (and hopefully will) occur.*

More than anything else, **HOPE** clearly recognizes the **REALITY** involved with **situations**. And, armed with the other values (i.e. truth, love, goodness, respect, faith, etc...) HOPE approaches each situation and HOPES that something good will occur. **HOPE doesn't attempt to pre-determine the outcome** (like in Optimism and Positivism) of any given situation. Rather, **HOPE** faithfully anticipates – while constantly battling the potential uncertainty and worry associated with any situation – and anticipates some good to occur.

OPTIMISM ... Vital part of our attitudes...but be careful!

Optimistic people are great to be around! People that are optimistic always try to look on the bright side of things. They look for the rose amidst the thorns, the diamond in the rough, and they usually work at trying to bring joy to other people's lives.

An optimist is seldom surprised by troubles. They realize that things can go wrong and they look for solutions rather than dwelling on the problem. Optimists are very generous with compliments and constantly look to build loving relationships into their lives. Everybody, (including me) likes to be considered an optimistic and hopeful person...because upbeat and happy people are lots of fun to be around! But there is a potential danger with Optimism. Namely, ***if*** it's separated from true HOPE, it can actually be something value-less and empty.

First, it's necessary to point out that Optimism is **SOLELY A TRAIT OF OUR DISPOSTION** – which can change. And this get-up-and-go mentality (which I like) CAN be blinded to the World of Value.

Optimism is also just a frame of mind. It can often be 'adopted' if for no other reason than not to appear melancholy. At times, we optimists will attempt to be 'upbeat' about everything, because we don't want to deal with a particular reality we're experiencing. In doing so, we may try to create this upbeat mindset as a substitute for true hope.

Another problem with optimism ***is that with it, we rarely encounter the essence of anything.*** Instead, we tend to approach only the good side of things that appear to please us. While an optimist usually recognizes Value when we see it, at times we tend to shy away from it – or pick and choose what we want to do, and how we want to do it – because it may demand too much of us.

We optimists (again, without true hope) ***can also display intellectual, moral, and spiritual neutrality too often.*** We are sometimes reluctant to speak intimately about many things, because we don't want to rock the boat or appear divisive or exclusive in any way. In trying to always be upbeat and pleasant, we may avoid meaningful dialogue

– which could induce possible friction or differences of opinion. And we may bite our tongue and hold back what we really feel.

This is not to say that we shouldn't be happy at all times, nor is it an attempt to negatively brand all of us as fakes. ***Rather, it's more of a 'heads-up' warning to realize that optimism is solely a trait of our disposition – which can change.*** We must merge our optimistic personalities with true hope; otherwise we're in trouble. All of us should try to be enthusiastic in our endeavors (and be optimistic/hopeful), and work with a constant hop in our step. But we should never replace optimism for true hope – never!

POSITIVISM ... Fantastic approach to life, but be really careful here!

Like the optimist, ***a positive person is great to be around.*** They are energetic, full of life, and they always want their attitudes to be in the right place. A positive person will look at the bright side of things, and always encourage other people to do the same. They usually work diligently and with a commitment to do things right the first time. And they always look at the glass as half-full; and they want others to know that they'll do their very best to make the day a good one.

We could all learn a lot by witnessing how a positive person goes about their day. They recognize that problems arise every day, and their response is 'no problem'. They also tend to focus a great deal of energy on finding solutions, rather than dwelling on the unpleasant surprises. And they have an uncanny way of finding a good lesson to learn from even the worst of occurrences. We'd all do well to spend some time with some positive people...to try to pick up some of their good traits. But we want to be real careful with positivism...real careful.

Positivism is ***actually a form of relativism;*** which claims that everything is fantastic just because the positivist says so, or because they may look at it that way. And, in reality, everything is not fantastic. Like optimism, IT IS SIMPLY A TRAIT OF OUR DISPOSITION...that can change. Yet, unlike optimism, which approaches situations in an upbeat manner, ***positivism attempts to define the outcome of everything*** and is fixated on the accomplishment. And in this fixation, a positive person usually does not respond to the gift of true hope. A person, who truly hopes, understands that the essence of hope is a longing (not a fixation) for the good things that are yet to be seen. More importantly, it is a consistent approach to all aspects of our aspirations that are welded together by our adherence to goodness.

Instead, ***positivism often attempts to define the goodness of everything based on it only having one possible outcome.*** It is often blinded to REALITY because of this one-dimensional approach. This is precisely why a positive person may put on a happy face and tell you that they feel great, even though they are experiencing personal tragedy in their lives. The positive person is in trouble when she stands in front of a mirror and attempts to convince herself that she is happy – regardless if she is or not.

The real danger with positivism is its inherent shallowness. And if you've ever witnessed a positive person in tragic circumstances, you'll understand this fully. While they are often the first to offer a word of encouragement to the person affected, their involvement usually ends there. Suffering, death, tragedy, illness and more, often confuse a positive person. Why? Because the creed of always looking on the bright side of things doesn't apply when the outcome is not a good one. Good and evil, health and sickness, happiness and sadness, are all REALITIES of life. And it's impossible to approach true hope without recognizing this...every day.

Once again, ***we all want to be optimistic and positive in our approach to life.*** We want to be enthusiastic in all that we do. But positivism, like optimism is solely a trait of our disposition. And we need to be certain to merge positive traits of our disposition with true hope – and fully respond to the World of Value.

DEPRESSION ... The flip-side of Hope.

A letter from a Depressed Soul, Dominic Martinelli.

Hi, my name is Dominic Martinelli, I'm a 32-year old bachelor. I've suffered from dysthymia, a 'mild' form of depression, for most of my life. I'm not ashamed to say that anymore. A few years ago, I finally realized, regardless of how many times I'd been told, that depression was not personal weakness, or something that I could just 'wish away.' I'd been asked many times to try to 'pull myself together' and awoke each day praying that my depression would somehow just disappear. But it never did.

To anyone who believes that depression is a passing thing, or is simply 'the blues', let me tell you...it isn't. Depression infects every part of a person. It ravages our bodies, our moods, our thoughts, and most of our behavior. To anyone who even remotely thinks that they have symptoms of depression, SEEK professional medical help...NOW! To those who think that they know someone who has depression, SEEK help...to help them...again, NOW!

Depression is an imbalance of certain chemicals that carry signals from the brain to other parts of the body. It 'seems' that my problem is that my brain doesn't properly circulate the neurotransmitter serotonin...so I take a drug to help block serotonin from fouling up my brain. Nobody really knows for sure what caused this imbalance in the first place. I just know that depression is real. My depression can kick-in for any number of reasons: stress, trauma, or dozens of other reasons. Therapy has helped me immeasurably in identifying some of the reasons and has helped me to overcome some of them, but that takes continued perseverance, and a lot of ...money.

One thing is really important. I have hope in my life again. My concentration level is better. My memory has improved. And the more I become informed and face my depression, the more in control I feel about either 'beating it' or 'minimizing' it in a way that I can live happily.

For those who've lived in depression's dark shadows, we realize that our journey out of the abyss of pain and suffering is a hard journey. I have lapsed in and out of depression – to varying degrees – during most of my life. At one point, four years ago, I was even suicidal for a while. Yet, I am getting better. It's good to know that I'm not crazy or less of a man because I've been depressed a lot. I'm coming out of the darkness and, with God's (and a lot of good people) help, I hope to stay out of the dark shadows of depression for a long time.

Those of us, who are getting better, want to give hope to those who are still in the 'dark shadows' of depression. "Keep going, keep trying...there is light at the end of your dark tunnel." Many have traveled down this lonely road before, but without the help (medication and information) that we are blessed with today. Just like the diabetic needs insulin, we too need help to treat our minds and our bodies. More than anything else, we need to treat our depression seriously, and with the hope that we can, and will, live a life of joy. And as a depressed person knows better than anyone else; a life of joy is what really makes life worth living? Good luck and God Bless!

DEPRESSION ... Did you know?

- That depression costs the nation \$43 billion a year for lost work/school days, medication and professional care.
- Each year, tens of thousands of depressed people attempt suicide – around 16,000 SUCCEED!
- More than 5% of Americans (15 million people) suffer CLINICAL DEPRESSION at any given moment.
- At least 1 in 6 people experience a SERIOUS or MAJOR episode of depression in life.
- Depression is very treatable – up to 98% of diagnosed depressed people are completely cured – WHEN treated.

Depression is often as common as – the common cold. Every one of us feels 'truly saddened' or 'really down' at any given time in our life ... and for any given reason. It's as natural as any other aspect of our human nature.

Depression is not moral weakness. While our responses to many tragedies and disappointments in life may need an attitude adjustment, it's clear that depression greets us all at one point or another in our lives. Some of us may experience it more easily, while others may become naturally depressed more often; but we're all susceptible to it – to varying degrees. Yet, nobody knows exactly what causes depression. Some factors; however, have been identified in the process.

First, there are chemical disorders in the brain. These are often treatable with care and medication. There are also a number of other things that can cause depression, which include: genetics, heredity, upbringing, traumatic experiences in early life, and more. Second, there is a link in your social environment, where and how you live, and the tone of your childhood. And third, your age, your work life, and your state in life,

play a great role in determining who is more at risk of depression. The most important elements of depression are RECOGNIZING IT, TREATING IT, and OVERCOMING IT.

One of the most effective ways of dealing with depression is to first become informed about it. Whether it is your neighbor, co-worker, friend, family member – whoever – you owe it to yourself to become aware of depression. You'll find that there is a fantastic amount of information available, as well as many understanding people willing to help with any of your questions on the subject. Seek help in your community and in your family.

Depression is very common *and there is still a stigma attached to it* that claims 'you're weak' or 'your childish' when you have it. We need to dispel these silly notions and recognize that depression is a serious mental health problem that can be treated just like a heart problem or a broken arm. We need to sit up and take notice. We also need to dispel the many myths about depression.

DEPRESSION: 5 Myths to Dispel about it:

- 1.) Again, we are ***NOT weak*** people if we are depressed.
- 2.) Men are just as susceptible (although they hide it more) to depression as women. ***Everybody gets depressed*** and we're all different in the degrees to which we feel depressed.
- 3.) Being alone, grieving the loss of a loved one, or actually ***anything, can cause anyone*** to be depressed. ***You don't need an earth-shattering event*** to cause you to feel depressed. And you are not alone.
- 4.) ***We are not solely responsible (accountable) if we are depressed.*** It isn't a case of just 'snapping out of it' when we're asked to, or when we want to. There are many contributing factors (i.e. war, poverty, disease, loss of a loved one, abuse, etc...) that naturally can cause us to "feel" depressed. In addition, the chemical imbalances in our minds don't ask our permission to foul us up. Understand this, accept it, and realize that you can move on, as long as you seek help.
- 5.) ***Disappointments (regardless of how major or trivial they may seem) can drive anyone to feel depressed – we're all different.*** There is no litmus test that says that it takes 2.2 years to recover from the loss (death) of a dear loved one or 5 months to recover from the loss of a dear friend. We're all so very different, which is why we need to seek help when we feel depressed.

More than anything else, we need to be supportive and open – ***BOTH TO OURSELVES and OTHERS*** – when dealing with depression. We need to help out those with the problem by being 'fountains' of compassion, of sound counsel, of charity, of tough love, and of all the other virtues that only a true friend can deliver. And if we are

the ones that are depressed, we need to reach out and find a soul (or souls) to help us through the process (along with a professional).

One of the most vital aspects of the development of our character is to RECOGNIZE THE OBVIOUS and utilize all of our energies to properly bring about the good that must be done. In reference to depression, we need to cling – as best we can – to good habits, to virtue, to charity, to kindness and compassion; all with hope of bringing about an end to those sad times that often seem to have no end.

DEPRESSION ... 6 STEPS TO EFFECTIVELY TREAT IT!

- 1.) Recognize it, ***SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR IT***, and treat it the same way you would treat a heart attack or severe cancer – ***WITH GREAT CARE AND CONCERN***. Also, if you know someone who is depressed, learn (from professionals) how to help with the process.
- 2.) Realize that ***ACTION – VIRTUOUS ACTION*** – can often help to diffuse it. Volunteer at a hospital, visit the elderly, work at a soup kitchen, counsel a prisoner, or teach a child some good values. Remember, your mother always used to say, “Get up and do something for someone else, you’ll feel better.” It works!
- 3.) ***EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE***. A great deal of research shows that consistent strenuous physical activity can relieve stress, improve moods, increase overall health, and help you function much better. If nothing else, make sure you try to walk 2 miles a day.
- 4.) ***SEEK OUT TRUE FRIENDS***. Remember that it is not a weakness to feel depressed. We all need loving and caring relationships in our lives to feel fulfilled. Often times in life we need to work at friendships, and we need to ask friends for help. This is often the most difficult thing to do when we feel depressed because many of us have a tendency to ‘run and hide’ when we are troubled. However, this type of forced behavior – this self-inflicted solitary confinement that we impose on ourselves – often perpetuates the problem even more. When you’re down, reach out to a friend, and reach out and be a friend.
- 5.) Realize that you have ***NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF!*** All of the anticipatory anxiety that we put ourselves through often only adds to the sadness that we may rightfully feel at certain times in our lives. The death of a loved one, broken relationships, lost ventures, and major disappointments will naturally cause us to feel sad. But when we allow the sadness to fester and feed off itself, we open the door to darker days. Our fears tend to multiply and we literally drive ourselves to despair. Fear of the Lord is necessary...that’s a good fear. Yet, don’t let fear consume you by allowing it to feed off your natural sadness. Recognize that fear often helps you to act prudently and properly to avoid danger. Also, recognize that fear has the capacity to chain you to a life of anxiety and despair. Every one of us makes the call on our own.

6.) Utilize all of the power that you can muster in your heart and soul to COMBAT depression. And the *easiest way to do this is for us to honestly access how we COOPERATE* with depression – and we need to be honest. Remember that the definition of insanity is not feeling depressed. It's doing the same thing while expecting a different result! When we feel depressed, we need to ask ourselves if we are cooperating with it, what SPECIFIC things we can do (right now) to combat it, how we can avoid the occasions that make us feel sad, and focus on how we will feel when we are no longer depressed. We often 'talk' and 'think' ourselves into depression; we must consciously start to talk, think, and ACT our way out of depression. And this involves a conscious all-out effort every day that we awake. Don't ever give up!

OUR RESPONSE TO HOPE ... The key to it all!

In reality, when we truly hope, *we begin to view our lives as if God actually exists*. What we believe – our FAITH – is actualized in the reality that all of our efforts must be in union with the Source of all Goodness. This goes far beyond being optimistic or positive, as it no longer is simply a trait of our disposition – which can change. Instead, hope becomes a basis for our life.

Uncertainty involving our expectations will always remain with us in everything that we do. Again, we want our children to be healthy and loving, we want a dear friend to recover from an illness, and we want to have a sound future in something honorable and deserving of our energies. But we can never replace true hope and a call to value with mere traits of our disposition that can cause us to appear positive (optimistic) or negative (pessimistic). To do so will leave our aspirations and actions in an empty void.

True hope awaits us at all times and *is a great gift when we respond to its call*. It is a call to hope in truth, in goodness, in charity, and in all the other values that make our lives meaningful and complete. And it is an abandonment of the many immature responses that we succumb to each day. It is only when we acknowledge and reject our old-self that we are be open to the gift of hope. All of the many vices impede our quest for greatness: greed, deceit, pride in all its forms, and more. And we must try to purge them from our habits and lives. It is both a surrender to value and a leap out of our mediocrity – at the same time – and it must be done every day that we awake.

The happiness associated with a meaningful and lasting hope can – and should -- be shared by all of us. Approaching each day with joyful anticipation is vital for our attitudes and our ability to encounter goodness in the world. Because there are thousands of things that we aspire to and expect to occur. But all of these desires must be forged together to form a complete personality that longs to be genuinely good. In its essence, the gift of hope is that we shall see as we are seen by God; in all the beauty and wonder. It is also that we shall love as we are loved by God; in all His Purity and Goodness.

Most importantly, true hope fuses all of our aspirations under the conviction that our life does not end with the grave. For any person to look at the grave as his finality and not despair would, by pure reason, be an insane person. With this understanding that we will see God face to face, and have the chance to spend eternity with Him, our hope then transforms our acts, deeds, and aspirations into a life – of happiness.

RELATIONSHIPS ... Our reason for being!

***BECAUSE IT IS ONLY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER
(AND GOD FIRST) THAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF BEING TRULY FULFILLED.***

The Story of Robert Gerhardt

“I don’t know if I’m going to be able to make it,” said Bob Gerhardt to Mike, who was getting a glass of water and taking a short break from cutting Bob’s grass. “I felt so good the last couple of months, but the last few weeks, I feel terrible,” said the 77-year old retired engineer. “Maybe we can let the lawn go another week next time, Mike,” said Bob nervously. “I’ll talk to you later.”

After he was done with the lawn, Mike felt as though he should ‘check-in’ on the elderly man. “I’m all done, Mr. Gerhardt, and it looks good,” said an upbeat Mike. “Just wait a second, Mike and I’ll pay you,” replied Bob. “Don’t worry about it now, Mr. Gerhardt, I’m running to the store. Can I get you anything?” Immediately, Mike recognized a spark in Bob’s eyes. “Yes, Mike, I wonder if you could get me some cheese and milk. Colleen and Alicia love my cheese sandwiches. And they’ll be back – I hope – from the beach in a few days. I wish they came home today,” said a sad looking Bob.

“No problem, and you can pay me for them when I get back in about an hour,” said Mike. About 2 hours later, Mike rang the doorbell. Bob answered with a look of desperation, and then disappointment, after he knew it was Mike. Clearly, Bob was hoping it was someone else. “Thanks, Mike...and here’s your money for cutting the grass. Thanks for picking up the milk and cheese for me,” said Bob. With that, Bob closed the front door without even waiting for Mike’s reply.

Three days had passed and Mike saw no signs of life in Bob’s house. Usually, the two girls from the neighborhood would visit him constantly and decorate the house for every conceivable holiday. And Bob loved the two girls as if they were his own. Mike decided that he better check in on Bob. Once again, Bob rushed to the door, only to be disappointed that it was ‘only’ Mike. “Mr. Gerhardt, do you think that I can come in for a moment?” asked a concerned Mike. “Sure, I was just watching a little TV,” responded Bob.

“I’ve noticed that the house has been closed up for the last few days, and I just wanted to make sure that you were OK,” said a concerned Mike. “I’m OK, Mike. And I’ll be a lot better when Colleen and Alicia get home from the beach. I miss them terribly.” Mike decided to stay for a little while and talk to the lonely man. After about a

½ hour, he realized that Bob had had quite a career in engineering and had filed for several patents with his employer. Bob was truly a gifted and talented man.

“It’s funny, Mike,” said Bob as he somewhat reminisced. “My wife has been dead for 10 years, and I thought I was going to join her soon – out of sadness – until Colleen and Alicia came along. Their visits have not only kept me alive, but have given me a reason to get up in the morning. Despite all of my accomplishments during my career, I can never remember looking forward to doing something as much as I do having a cup of coffee and some conversation with those two lovely girls.”

Later in the week, Mike saw that the 2 girls had returned and they immediately went to see their ‘best buddy’, Bob. On their way, Mike went and told them what Bob had said about them, and Mike thanked them both for being so good to Bob. “Don’t worry, Mike,” said a happy Colleen. “We know that Bobby can’t live without us, and we’re not going to let anything happen to him. He loves us and we love him. And that’s what makes the world spin round,” said Alicia. “Wow,” thought Mike to himself. These two young girls understand what it’s all about!

RELATIONSHIPS ... Our reason for being!

The most fundamental aspect of our existence involves our ability and openness to enter into true union with others. In its purest sense, this fulfillment is culminated when we enter into this relationship with God. And while this union with God is frustrated in this earthly existence to a great degree (due to our mortality) it is nonetheless the essential element in our capacity to experience true joy.

Similarly, *our ability to encounter each other* – fully and unconditionally without the interruptions from the world of imagery and deception – is fundamental to our human nature. Because far from being a relaxation from what many of us consider as the ‘real’ world, (i.e. work, daily tasks, commitments, succeeding, etc...) when we encounter each other, love each other, and enter into communion with our souls, we actually enter into the realm of true living.

There is nothing more beautiful than a loving relationship; be it between a spouse, child, dear friend, parent, or something as magnificent as the bonds between combat veterans. This priceless gift (love) can make any moment special, any occurrence complete. And there is no price tag on these relationships either. We all know – deep within the recesses of our hearts – that these precious people are the real reasons that make our lives worth living. They are the juice that keeps us going; the very lights of our lives.

And while we (hopefully) recognize that loving relationships are the key to a life of joy, we all need to maturely approach our relationships and be ware of the many obstacles that may impede our ability to encounter each other. And this is no small task. While these loving unions ultimately bring us an immense amount of true joy – both in the presence and absence of the beloved – the lack of them can cause so us an immense amount of emptiness and pain.

Very basically, the very climax (LOVE) of relationships can be thwarted by obstacles that WE CAN RECOGNIZE, CONFRONT, AND OVERCOME by an act of our own free will. Specifically then, we need to address how ***Respect, Building People Up, Deference to the Beloved, Communication, Trust, and Loneliness – and LOVE*** – each plays a role in our particular life and how we can respond to each – in order to be happy.

RESPECT ... The starting point!

At first, it may appear silly to introduce respect as a primary focal point in our explanation regarding relationships. However, we all need to understand that ***RESPECT plays a vital role in every relationship***. In fact, it is usually when we fail to respect each other (DISRESPECT) that we tend to start all of our problems.

Respect in its most basic sense, ***involves the understanding that there are things that are important in themselves***. In other words, by the objects very essence – and apart from any subjective analysis on our part – there is a value to be recognized and validated in and of itself. And in reference to relationships, this involves recognizing the dignity and loveliness of another precisely because THEY are a magnificent creation from God.

Respect is also the mother of all values.

Without adhering to respect, we fall prey to many bad habits that can ultimately lead to our ruin. This can easily be understood when we draw our attention to the natural beauty of things. A drive to the mountains, or a walk along the beach, speaks for itself. It can also be seen with laws of the state. Most laws (except those that do not recognize the Eternal and Natural laws) demand our respect if only for us to avoid penalty and/or imprisonment. If we steal, we run the risk of imprisonment in this life and punishment in the next. If we brutalize a person, we similarly stand alone to suffer the judicial consequences. Hence, respect entails a kind of barometer that calls out to warn us of the ramifications, - lest we forget.

In relationships, respect is the major prerequisite for successful unions. That's because it is primarily when we fail to respect each other that we tend to cause most of the damage in our relationships. When a husband fails to respect his wife, the marriage is tested on a daily basis. When children show disrespect to their parents, every issue becomes a battle. And when any of us displays a lack of respect for someone in our lives, we've basically destroyed any hope of true union with them.

Our ability (willingness) to understand values, to apply them to our intellect/free will, and to properly RESPOND to them, is the cornerstone of grasping moral values as a person. And these decisive aspects can only be found in a person who honors and respects. Because ***if I am blind to the value of others, I AM BASICALLY INCAPABLE OF ANY MORAL GOODNESS***. If my world merely centers around 'ME' and a selfish

existence of viewing things as simply pleasing or pleasurable, I can never really be morally good.

And it will be difficult – if not impossible – for me to truly participate in loving relationships. Just speak to any person who has undergone a divorce or separation from his/her spouse. Regardless of the reasons given, respect (or lack of it) is most likely the main reason for the separation.

Respect then *demands an abandonment of ourselves and a recognition of the importance and essence of truly good things*. The parable of the Good Samaritan clearly illustrates the justice and mercy exhibited to the battered soul left for dead on the side of the road. The Good Samaritan willingly engaged himself in recognizing the inherent dignity of the brutalized man (as well as his own responsibility in the matter) instead of indifferently passing by like the others that came before him and just kept going.

Upon reading the beautiful Scripture passage, each one of us instantly realizes that the Good Samaritan did the ‘right thing’. It was not easy, agreeable, or totally pleasing, to care for the unfortunate victim. Yet, all of us recognize the duty that the Good Samaritan responded to...which permitted him to act properly – and LOVINGLY.

Respect implies – and demands – that we recognize that the inherent value of people and things do not have their origin in me. It is the indispensable presupposition for our response to every other value. It is free from pride and ego; recognizing that I am not the Lord unto myself, but rather subject to grasping that respect is a **FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHERS**.

More importantly, *respect is THE prerequisite for every true love*. For how could I truly love someone, make numerous sacrifices for them, and value a relationship with them beyond all else, if I don’t truly respect them? Similarly, how could I possess the correct attitude towards justice, goodness, hope, truth – and all the other fundamental values, if I don’t first recognize the inherent ‘worth’ of anything?

Respect is also a fundamental attitude towards all that we do. It subdues the shallow inclinations of our personality and forces us to sit up and take notice. Rather than shrugging off the seemingly nagging items that pass before our eyes, we pay attention, evaluate our required role, and respectfully address the situation at hand.

This is primarily what is wrong with a lot of young people today. They have not been properly educated and disposed to what true respect (for everything) affords them in life. They often believe that respect costs too much, and that it’s easier to be a rebel without a cause, or to simply not care about a great many things. Yet, this blatant disregard (immaturity) ultimately costs us all a great deal – both in the present and the future.

When we truly respect, we begin to open the doors to gratitude, to meaningful relationships, to a personality which is not bent on receiving the next little pleasurable

thrill, and to a life that is truly...worth living! This respect is an active submission of our INTELLECTS and WILLS to recognize that the many people and beautiful things that we come in contact with each day do not have their origin in me. In other words, by means of their own inherent beauty and worth, they have a value ***all by themselves***. Respect rings out to each of us every moment of every day and it's up to each of us to answer the call.

BUILDING PEOPLE UP... Our Contribution to each other!

Treat people as they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.

-Goethe

Showing people that they really matter. Is it important? Consider this Story:

A teacher in New York decided to honor each of her seniors in high school by telling them the difference they each made. She called each student to the front of the class, one at a time. First she told them how they had made a difference to her and the class. Then she presented them with a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters, which read, "Who I Am Makes a Difference."

Afterwards, the teacher decided to do a class project to see what kind of impact this kind of recognition would have on a community. She gave each of the students three more ribbons and instructed them to go out and spread this acknowledgement ceremony. Then they were to follow up on the results, see who honored whom, and report back to the class in about a week.

One of the boys in the class went to a junior executive in a nearby company and honored him for helping him with his career planning. He gave him a blue ribbon and put it on his shirt. Then he gave him two extra ribbons and said, "We're doing a class project on recognition, and we'd like you to go out, find somebody to honor, give them a blue ribbon, then give them the extra blue ribbon so they can acknowledge a third person to keep this acknowledgement ceremony going. Then please report back to me and tell me what happened."

Later that day, the junior executive went to see his boss, who had been noted, by the way, as being kind of a grouchy fellow. He sat his boss down and told him that he deeply admired him for being a creative genius. The boss seemed very surprised. The junior executive asked him if he would accept the blue ribbon and would give him permission to put it on him. His surprised boss said, "Well, sure." The junior executive took the blue ribbon and placed it on his boss' jacket above the heart. As he gave him the extra ribbon, he said, "Would you do me a favor? Would you take this extra ribbon and pass it on by honoring somebody else. The young boy who first gave me the ribbons is doing a school project and we want to keep this recognition ceremony going and find out how it affects people."

That night, the boss came home to his 14-year-old son and sat him down.

He said, “The most incredible thing happened to me today. I was in my office, and one of the junior executives came in and told me he admired me and gave me a blue ribbon for being a creative genius. Imagine! He thinks I’m a creative genius. Then he put this blue ribbon that says, “Who I Am Makes A Difference” on my jacket above my heart. He gave me an extra ribbon and asked me to find somebody else to honor. As I was driving home, I started thinking about whom I would honor with this ribbon and I thought of you. I want to honor you.”

“My days are really hectic and when I come home I don’t pay a lot of attention to you. Sometimes I scream at you for not getting good enough grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess, but somehow tonight, I just wanted to sit here, and well, just let you know that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You’re a great kid and I love you!”

The startled boy started to sob and sob, and he couldn’t stop crying. His whole body shook. He looked up at his father and said through the tears, “Dad, earlier tonight I sat in my room and wrote a letter to you and Mom explaining why I killed myself and asking you to forgive me. I was going to commit suicide tonight after you were asleep. I just didn’t think that you cared at all. The letter is upstairs. I don’t think I need it after all.” His father walked upstairs and found the heartfelt letter full of anguish and pain. The envelope was addressed, “Mom and Dad.”

The boss went back to work a changed man. He was no longer a grouch but made sure to let all of his employees know that they made a difference. The junior executive helped several other young people with career planning and never forgot to let them know that they made a difference in his life...one being the boss’ son. And the young boy and his classmates learned a valuable lesson. Who we are DOES make a difference!

BUILDING PEOPLE UP ... It matters!

One of the most important contributions that anyone can make to society is to be a person who works to build-up (and not tear down) other people. This is something that is done one person at a time and is an essential element in all of our relationships. And one of the best ways that we can do this is to treat people whom we encounter as if they ARE WHAT THEY OUGHT TO BE – and are capable of becoming – rather than constantly reminding them of their apparent shortcomings. By actually living our lives this way and trying to apply this to the people we meet, we can transform the world.

That’s because by adhering to this philosophy, ***we don’t give up on people***, but rather understand that their apparent misbehavior is actually a detour or ‘wrong turn’ that they have taken. This is much different than looking at a person as being a ‘bad guy’ or a ‘wicked soul’ while constantly warning them that they better clean up their act. This in no way infers that we are blind to the improper (sin) behavior or that we in any way

condone it. Rather, we want to consistently encourage people to understand the beauty that true greatness affords them and help them to recognize how to move beyond their present predicament or fallen ways.

Mother Theresa knew this all too well. She didn't look at a starving beggar or a shriveled-up leper the same way that most people do. She saw them as a child of God; a beautiful soul destined for eternity and someone worthy of her every effort. This is precisely why Mother Theresa was such a fountain of love – as well as a great contradiction for our times. For true love is the only thing that we can give away and receive back a hundred-fold. She knew all too well, that a little love, compassion, and hope were the primary things that each one of us needs; and she devoted her every waking moment to this conviction. Is it any wonder that she was always smiling and full of joy despite the apparent chaos around her?

Similarly, when parents love their children despite their many bad habits, they do so because they recognize that these actions are not a true reflection of the child's character. A mother who often visits her son in prison and eagerly awaits his release is not blinded by his crime. Rather, she loves, forgives and tries to forget. Most of all, she truly grasps that he is capable of achieving many great things.

This is much easier for any of us to do than one may think. All we need to do is step back and realize how we look at ourselves in this regard. ***Because we actually judge ourselves not so much as to what we have already done, but rather what we truly believe we are capable of doing.*** When we do something wrong, we realize it (to varying degrees) but we also know that we did something foolish; and that we are capable of doing much better. We don't want people to think that a particular bad action (or series of bad actions) that we've done is a true representation of our character. This being the case, we need to remove the log from our own eyes, diffuse some of our own silly pride and stubbornness, and look at other people in the same manner.

Specifically, we need to look at our spouse, friends, and the people we meet in this way. We need to move beyond impressions. We need to forgive and forget. We need to constantly build them up with praise and encouragement instead of tearing them down with insults and ultimatums. We need to consistently look at ways to help them to renounce their foolish ways and direct them to lives of virtue – and greatness. More than anything else, we need to be living examples (proof) of the unquestionable love that God has for us despite our many mistakes.

This attitude on our part has ramifications that are earth shattering! Suddenly, the drug addict is worth treating, the convict is worth rehabilitating, and the alcoholic is worth helping. More directly, our marriage partner is worth our love and affection, and our marriage is worth working at, despite some of the problems we encounter. We no longer focus all of our energies on simply recognizing (pointing out) the apparent lack of good behavior that has been exhibited, but we look to see the possibility of what our love and faith can do to transform other people to achieve greatness in their lives.

10 Commandments for Parents

1.) *Don't nag or scream at your children...lest they lose heart.*

If we ever listened to ourselves or looked in the mirror when we screamed, ranted and raved, or nagged at our children, we'd surely be disappointed – to say the least. That's because when we are trying to bring about a desired outcome while acting like raving lunatics, it resembles more of a sideshow than a way to achieve some rational response. An easy way to understand the INEFFECTIVENESS of nagging and screaming is for all of us to remember how we react when someone nags or screams at us. If you are like most people, we DETEST when someone nags or screams at us – so don't do it to your children. Instead, make your case, as pointedly and forcefully as possible, while (trying as best you can) remembering how much you truly love your children.

2.) *Always listen – regardless of whether you agree with your children.*

Listening is truly a lost art. Many of us have so much on our minds and work such long hours that we tend to turn people off when they speak to us. When it comes to children this is not only ignorant, it is also downright dangerous. Any psychiatrist will tell you that kids need attention if only to 'sift through' the mess while they try to figure things out for themselves. And this often involves a lot of babbling and bouncing ideas off mom and dad. So be ready, be attentive, and be willing to give your children the time they need – WHEN THEY NEED IT – and not when you're ready.

Children need to know that parents are **ALWAYS** there for them. They need to know that whatever they have to say is worth your time. They need to know that they are the most important things in your life. Because if they don't get the attention from you, they'll look in other places (the wrong places) until they do get it. Many of the problems that affect children today (i.e. disruptive behavior, drugs, impurity, alcohol, etc...) could be avoided *if we all just LISTENED a lot more* to our children. This doesn't mean that you have to agree with them about everything, but you do need to listen.

3.) *Always apologize to your children when you offend them.*

Somewhere along the way (probably around the same time that people formulated the silly notion that children should be seen and not heard) parents came to the conclusion that they never have to apologize to their children. Since parents make more decisions (and mistakes) than anyone else in a family, this seems to be foolish – to say the least. When we raise our children, we try to formulate their characters so that they own up to mistakes and admit when they are wrong. As parents, we detest when our children are stubborn, proud, and refuse to bend their wills by admitting that they did something inappropriate. This being the case, how do you think our children look at us when we stubbornly refuse to apologize when we act inappropriately?

Allow me to make a bold statement here: There is **NO GREATER binding action that you can make with your children than to apologize when you do them wrong** and humbly ask for their forgiveness (when you have been wrong). For when your children see this, they immediately forgive you and tell you that no apology is necessary.

More than anything else, however, they realize that the values that you are trying to instill in them apply to everyone; and they CATCH this much better than you can ever teach them. It also supports the fact that an act of humble apology, of forgiveness, or of loving charity is infinitely more valuable than buying them anything or telling them a million times how much you care for them. If you truly want to grow closer to your children and win their confidence and affection, then make certain you apologize to them when you do them wrong.

4.) *Never speak AT your children or treat them like IDIOTS.*

In line with commandment #1, it is vital that parents realize that a conversation entails two parties. Often, we tend to speak at our children and not with them. In defense of parents, we do this because of the great amount of opposition that we experience when we speak to our children – about anything. However, my dear grandmother used to say, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it.”

When we speak AT children we generally remove them from a conversation. We tell them how we did things when we were a child, or how we pulled ourselves up by the bootstraps, or how we made it through tough times, or whatever. In doing so, we leave them no room to maneuver or respond.

All too often, we back them up against a wall and force them to listen while we tell them how (seemingly) smart we are and how they need to learn from us. Unfortunately, we tend to make them feel stupid (whether we actually say it or not) and we undermine our ability to get our point across because we’ve completely turned them off. Speak WITH your children often, include them in a conversation and build them up. You’ll be surprised how quickly the arguments stop and the conversations improve.

5.) *NEVER COMPARE your children to anyone else.*

The most magnificent thing about children is that they are all so very different. Some like to read, others dance, while others love to sing; it’s a true pleasure to witness a child mature. Yet, one of the most destructive things we can do to a child is to compare them to someone else.

In the chapter about Self-Image, we indicated that a major cause of a poor Self-Image is the constant comparisons that we make with other people. We sometimes feel inferior when we compare ourselves to others and somehow don’t seem to measure up all of the time. With children, we don’t even give them a chance to dream up the comparisons. When we tell them that, “your sister never did that” or “why can’t you be like Joseph”, it creates the comparison and immediately gives them a lower score. It’s becomes a lose-lose situation. Never compare your children to anyone else, always tell them how much you value their input, and constantly remember to encourage their unique (virtuous) character traits.

6.) *Always remember that – despite their wayward ways – your child is simply straying off course from their true character.*

And this is harder than you think. For we we're all born for greatness. However, there are often too many detours (i.e., drugs, illicit behavior, selfishness, sinful lifestyles) that throw us off the narrow path. We, as parents, need to be reminded of how much God loves us. Despite our shortcomings (granted, of course, that we wish to amend our ways) God always loves us.

We need to take the example of a loving mother who still loves her child even after he commits a brutal crime and is imprisoned. She is not blind to his faults/actions, nor does she condone them in any way. She simply realizes that he has done wrong and that it is a false expression of what his true character should be. This is what we mean by never giving up on people or never accepting that people can't change for the better.

7.) *Instill in children the need to obey, to form good habits, and to bend their wills towards Goodness.*

Obedience is the first virtue that a child can respond to and practice. It is also one of the most determining factors in a child's development – regardless of their age. When a child obeys, she bends her will to fight her naturally impulsive tendencies and inclinations. In doing so, the child develops good habits that allow her to grow and mature, by channeling her energies towards virtue instead of feeding her every appetite.

Parents abscond their duty when they do not take the time to require that a child obeys. It is a total injustice to any child if we do not continuously demand (lovingly) that they bend their wills and recognize that life does not revolve around how they 'feel' about any given situation. The world has been too corrupted because of bad parenting in this regard.

We all need to start being better examples to our children. Adhering to goodness, truth, purity, justice, respect and all the other beautiful personal moral values should no longer be an option for children. We need to fuel their call to greatness; and we begin the process when we require that they bend their wills and obey.

8.) *Praise your children often...counsel them tenderly.*

For whatever reason, parents hold back too much and too often in praising their children for their efforts. Studies clearly show that praising a child raises their self-esteem and allows them to develop a sound character. We all need to commend our children a lot more than we already do.

Similarly, our counseling techniques often revert back to "just because I say so." If we want our children to change some type of poor behavior or attitude, we need to understand that they need to 'buy into it', or our efforts are in vain. We should NEVER praise them or agree with them when they do wrong. We should, however, be extremely careful about the way we counsel our children. One of the greatest ways to counsel is to consistently praise them when they do well (in anything). That's because complimenting

someone is the most beautiful music to anyone's ears. And none of us ever wants to change the radio station from praise 101 to reprimand 101.

9.) *Instill in your children a love of all things true and good.*

Being a parent is an extremely demanding job. And we all need to be much more aware of how we can do it better. One of the most rewarding aspects of parenthood is watching our children grow and mature into truly good men and women. This does not happen by accident. A child – regardless of his/her age – wants to be good, to do good, and to choose the right path. Unfortunately, we don't always supply the proper nutrition for them. Instead of turning on the TV, we need to give them a good book and read good books ourselves. Rather than run to our next pleasurable encounter, we need to walk with them, encourage them, and drive them for a snack while counseling them.

We parents must try to focus – every day of our lives – on bringing our children closer and closer to the bosom of God. We must make it a priority to protect their innocence and never allow them to believe that we will entertain imagery, sin and deception in our lives. We must strive to be fountains of all the values that make life worth living while allowing our children to be free from the distractions (i.e. peer pressure, TV, dirty music, indecent behavior) that continuously knock on their doors and could cause their ruin. This is not an option.

10.) *Never be afraid to pull rank!*

Children want to be loved above all else. We've all read about and witnessed the growing problems that occur in society (and in our neighborhoods) when they are not loved enough. And a great part of love is being that pillar of support for a child that will not allow them to HURT THEMSELVES. All too often, we hear how parents are sometimes afraid of their children. Yet, whatever the circumstances, we need to exert as much pressure and control as humanly possible over situations that could harm our children. That may mean no new \$100 shoes, or no trip down to the shore for your teenager, or no party on Saturday night. We need to love them enough to pull rank or at least state our case as clearly as possible when we see them on a crash course for trouble.

10 Commandments For Children

1.) *Honor your father and mother (or guardian) – even after you're 18 years old.*

Respect plays such a vital role in any relationship. And in relations with our parents, it often is THE determining factor on how well we get along. Honor involves taking into consideration that a person (parent) rightfully deserves a certain amount of respect by virtue of their existence yes, but more so because they have acted to bring about some good end. And that good end is you!

When parents cooperate with God in creation to bring about a new life into the world, they have an awesome responsibility; and they also deserve a great deal of respect. Parents may test a child's patience and foolishly tinker with their own honor by doing stupid things, however, except for physical, sexual or emotional abuse (whereby a parent

dishonors themselves and forfeits their honor) children have no right to arbitrarily decide to stop honoring their parents. Give your parents the honor they rightly deserve and the benefit of the doubt in all that you say and do. Isn't that what you ask from them?

2.) *Thank your parents (every time you see them) for all that they do for you.*

Gratitude is a mature reflection on what has been bestowed on us. It is also a constant and consistent response of our personality. When we are ungrateful, we often find ourselves being nothing more than selfish fools! There are so many good things that our parents give to us each day (i.e. food, clothing, good counsel, shelter, a life of love, hope, etc...) that we often take for granted. Step back and reflect – EVERY DAY OF YOUR LIFE – regarding all that your parents give to you. Be sure to thank them often. Your sincere thanks is the only payment necessary for a bill you'd otherwise be able to pay.

3.) *Develop habits that your parents would be proud of; these habits are the ones that help you most in life.*

Habits are the channels where our energies flow. And when we develop good habits, we direct our intellect and our wills in the proper direction. Parents spend an enormous amount of time trying to help us channel our efforts to achieve some good end. They teach us to pray, to work hard at all that we do, to discipline ourselves in so many ways; all with the hope that we will develop our character and personalities to become good people. As children, when we realize that our parents are helping us to develop habits to hopefully achieve great things in life, we become much more receptive and less antagonistic towards their desires. Remember, that you don't need to develop good habits just because your parents say so, but because good habits will help you in every aspect of your life.

4.) *Always apologize to your parents when you offend them.*

Confession is good for the soul. This is true primarily because we recognize that we did something that separates us from another (i.e., God, family, neighbor, friend, etc...) and we want to be reunited. A sincere apology, an act of forgiveness, a self-less act of humility weighs infinitely greater in the scheme of things than any keen wit or personal achievement. Your parents understand your shortcomings much more than you do and they are always open to a sincere and humble apology. You need to be BIG ENOUGH to say you're sorry whenever you offend them. A sincere apology covers a multitude of sins and is THE basic prerequisite for all successful unions once a wrong has been committed. More importantly, it is the only thing that can truly reunite two people; we all need to apologize a lot more often.

5.) *Realize that your parents always have your best interests at heart...even if you disagree with them.*

The primary cause for tension and arguments between parents and children focuses around differences of opinion. Children want to go to the shore for the weekend; parents disagree and say maybe next year. Children want to push the curfew past 11:30 p.m., parents indicate that 11:00 is good enough. And parents want a long skirt and pretty

blouse for the party, but the teenager wants to wear jeans and a T-shirt. The lists of possible differences are well known to many of us.

Yet, one of the most disruptive things that a child can do is to continuously challenge a parent in order to get his/her way. For some reason (other than immaturity and selfishness), many children never seem to let up or give in regarding certain matters. As children, we need to remember that our parents almost always have our best interests at heart. Parents want their children to be happy; but they will not agree to things that they feel will hurt us or cause us pain – just because we say so. If a child truly understands this and takes it into consideration when a difference of opinion occurs, it is often much easier (as a child) to accept a decision when it doesn't necessarily settle in their favor.

Just because your parents differ with you regarding certain matters does not mean that they don't love you or that they don't want you to be happy. In fact, probably the exact opposite is true.

6.) ***Listen to your parents and take things to heart – they've been there before.***

Listening is a lost art. Yet, it is actually THE determining factor in our communication skills with every person that we encounter. And when dealing with our parents, it is vital for our relationships that we listen to them. Because our parents usually have our best interests at heart, they have the experience of having 'been there, done that' before, and the record number of mistakes to prove it.

When children refuse to listen they not only do something that they themselves DETEST, but they waste an enormous amount of time and energy trying to re-invent the wheel because they were too stubborn to listen to sound advice in the first place.

To be a good listener you need to do three things: First, you need to 'shut up' and give your parents your undivided attention. ***Second***, you need to separate the message from the messenger. In other words, if your mother or father is driving you crazy in the way that they are directing you, you need to be mature enough to sift through and LISTEN to the message that they are trying to convey instead of focusing on the way they deliver the message. ***And third***, you need to be big enough of a person to ACCEPT (it doesn't mean you need to do it) advice that is given even if you don't agree with what is being said. Give and take (listening) is part of every relationship – to varying degrees. If you don't want to listen, why should you EVER expect anyone to listen to you? Many receive advice, only the wise (listeners) will profit from it.

7.) ***Tell your parents what's going on in your life. Nobody else really cares or wants to help more than them.***

Talk to your parents; they often see things a lot more clearly (even if you don't agree with their conclusions) than you do. They want to know what's important to you. They want to know when you're feeling good and when you're feeling down. They want to help in so many ways; children need to take the first step and let their parents into their lives.

The best reasons for you to tell your parents what's going on in your life is that parents (for the most part) want nothing more than for their children to become good people, avoid as much pain as possible, and help in any way that they can. There is never any charge for lending an ear and often it helps more than anything else to speak to someone (parents) who happens to care more for us than anyone else does in the world.

8.) *Always curb your tongue with your parents and learn to count to ten.*

There's an old saying, 'Some things are better left unsaid'. In my opinion, when children are at odds with their parents, MOST things are better left unsaid. This doesn't mean that we don't disagree with our parents and tell them so, but rather we need to be careful of WHAT we say as our words often cut like a knife and later demand a great amount of healing time.

In other words, when you catch yourself getting mad and ready to fly off the handle, learn the age-old technique of counting to 10. Take a deep breath, curb your tongue, count to 10 (or 20 or 30 if you have to) and respect them – and yourself – enough to concentrate on solving whatever contention exists rather than adding to it.

9.) *Never drive a wedge between your parents – everybody loses.*

Each one of us has a different type of relationship with our parents. We may love them both equally, dislike them both, or like one and not the other. But whatever the circumstances are, it is not right for children to be the divisive or disruptive force in their parent's lives. And this occurs more than we are willing to admit. Yet, it is totally unfair to step in and attempt to ruin a relationship (as long as there is no sexual, emotional or physical abuse) just because it fits our fancy to do so.

It is not only wrong to interfere in your parent's concerns... it's also hypocritical. Many of us would shout and swear if our parents – or anyone for that matter – interfered and tried to disrupt our relationships. And when we pit one parent against the other or attempt to win approval with one over the other for certain matters, it drags us into a playing field where the stakes of the game are much too high for everyone involved. Don't bait your parents, or look to one to over-rule the other in order to have a certain decision settle in your favor. If this happens...everybody loses.

10.) *Learn to say 'YES' and learn to 'do what you're asked' the first time that you are asked. These are two of the greatest gifts that you can give to your parents.*

When you get older and become parents, you will realize how fantastic it is when your children develop beautiful personalities. This alone makes all the effort of raising children worthwhile. A good child is a blessing and a source of great joy for every parent. And a child who doesn't listen and doesn't channel their energies in the proper area is often a terrible heartache. You don't have to win the state championship or finish first in your class to be #1 in your parent's eyes. All you have to do is cooperate and obey a little more often than you're accustomed to...it goes a long way.

DEFER TO THE BELOVED ... Everybody wins!

Of all of the prerequisites necessary for successful relationships (i.e. respect, communication, building people up, etc...), ***deferring to the beloved is perhaps the most important of all.*** In modern day terminology, it involves looking out for the other guy, giving people the benefit of the doubt, and giving them a break. In its truest and most pure sense, it involves a selfless abandonment to the desires of others. And it is the arena where most of the give and take in life occurs.

When we defer to another person, ***we basically forego our own desires and look at ways that we can serve each other*** – in word and in deed. This isn't a surrender on our part or an excuse to allow ourselves to be used by other people. Nor is it an excuse for people with weak or immature characters to simply give up (or give in) all of the time. Rather, it is a concerted effort on our part to love unselfishly – and to often allow the desires of others to take precedence over our own wishes.

Perhaps the greatest example of a person who often defers to the beloved is a loving mother. Those of us who are blessed to have been the recipients of a truly loving and caring mother understand that her love is something that can never be replaced – or repaid. How can anyone put a price tag on the gentle loving qualities of a loving mother? How can we ever begin to measure the positive influence that a selfless mother has on the world? How many times did she wait for 'her turn' while we were being educated, trained in athletics, or fitted for a new outfit? How many times did she sit up late at night with us when we were sick with the flu?

And any of us that have had the good fortune of having a spouse, friend, or other family member who exudes the selflessness of a good mother, recognize (hopefully) just how fortunate we truly are. ***Ultimately, when we defer to the beloved, we become much more unselfish (and loveable),*** we diffuse a great deal of unnecessary confrontation in our lives, and we tend to spend a lot more time enjoying each other's company. So, instead of threatening each other over stupid and silly things, we become people who literally change the world – for the better.

By adhering to this attitude and by applying it in action to the people we encounter every day, ***we become the greatest friend anyone could ever have.*** That's because instead of always trying to 'get something' or 'receive', we clearly grasp that there are things (i.e. people, situations, circumstances, events, etc...) that are more important than what I can somehow derive from them.

It's the loving wife who offers a cup of coffee and allows her husband to complain about all of the bills instead of picking a fight. It's the loving father who changes his plans when his son or daughter needs to talk. It's the child who bakes a cake for mom when she's had a terrible day instead of turning up the stereo and closing her door. And it's the selfless reaction by each of us – in so many ways – towards those in our lives when it would be easier to respond as if we just don't care.

This glorious attitude becomes a way of life and is not a passing fancy based on our mood or present disposition. ***This selfless approach permeates all of our actions and transforms our personalities***; and we are all the better for it. Instead of mounting the present-day battle cry of ‘ME, ME, ME’ with all of its blatantly sinister side-effects, we step back and ask: “How can I make this situation better?” or “How can I serve?” When consistently put into action, it has ramifications that are earth shattering.

When we put it into practice in our marriages, we take the time to listen to our spouse and give them the right to make mistakes without our threats of retaliation or separation. With our children, we allow them to be imperfect (while not accepting immoral behavior) while loving them the same after the accomplishments as well as the mistakes. And with our other relationships, we tend to forge deeper unions precisely because we give of ourselves in so many ways instead of constantly looking to ‘get’ something.

Deference to the beloved involves an abandonment – a surrender if you will – of our wishes...for the wishes of another. Mother Theresa was a glowing example of this type of life. She recognized the inherent dignity of the homeless beggar, the sick, and the innocent; and she gave all her love trying to serve – and she changed the world by doing so. Also, those who were ultimately close with Mother Theresa would all remark at the great amount of joy she shared and experienced in her life.

More than anything else, deference to the beloved challenges the heart and soul of the ‘SELF’ generation by rejecting the selfish mentality to always ‘look out for #1’ at all costs. It’s an attitude that looks to serve instead of being served, to love unselfishly in order to experience love, and to give of ourselves in countless ways because we recognize that only by giving can we expect to receive the truly good things in life. We are easily trusted, quickly forgiven, and usually surrounded by loving relationships precisely because we have formed a personality (and character) that is not fixated on always selfishly getting things. Instead, we look to others and acknowledge their desires first.

If we want our relationships to be more fulfilling, loving, and vibrant, ***then we need to SPEND ourselves for others.*** Only when the emphasis in our relationships shifts from ‘ME’ to ‘WE’ will we be capable of enjoying the beauty of intimate relationships. And this can only be accomplished by a firm commitment (every day) on our part to defer to others in practically all that we do.

COMMUNICATION ... Making the Connection!

The Story of Vince and Peggy Sutherland

*“I wish I knew what was going on, Jane, but I don’t,” Peggy told her friend.
“Three months ago, we were fine, but ever since Annie left for school, he hasn’t spoken*

to me for more than 10 minutes. You'd think that after 20 years you'd understand your partner, but I don't know...maybe it's me," whined Peggy. "Well, did you ask what was going on?" asked Jane. Have you confronted him and asked him why he's treating you this way?"

"Of course I have," said and exasperated Peggy. "And all he says is that he's stressed out at work, that his back is sore, and that he wants to be left alone, that's all. He has a tendency – like most men – to just shut down...and shut me out," said Peggy. "My dad did the same thing to my mom; and it isn't fair." "Tell me about it," added Jane. "My Ronny shuts down like the local Ford plant on the 4th of July weekend when he gets upset." They both started to laugh uncontrollably, spilling coffee all over Peggy's new desk. "Maybe he'll surprise me and come home with flowers and candy tonight," joked Peggy. "Yes, and maybe it'll rain wooden nickels tonight too, Peggy," replied Jane. "Look, Peggy, I have a meeting in 5 minutes, but call me, OK? You and that man of yours have to talk soon, or it's going to get worse."

Two months later, it was a lot worse. The communication had increased a bit, but only consisted of some yelling and fits of rage. And Peggy didn't know what to do. Finally, Peggy convinced Vince's mom, Allison, to stop over 'unexpectedly' to try to get her son to open up a little. "You don't understand, mom," said an insistent Vince. "I'll get through this OK, I just want to be left alone, OK?" "No, Vincent, it's not OK," replied Allison. "There's something wrong and you're ruining yourself, your wife, and your marriage over it. Everything is not OK. I've set up a meeting for you to go see a counselor on Friday and you're going, even if I have to drag you there by myself," said his usually reserved mother. "OK, OK mom, I'll do what you ask. Now can you just leave me alone for a while?"

Vince kept his word to his mother; and he took Peggy along with him. After 10 minutes of introductions and small talk, Vince put his head in his hands saying, "I'm so ashamed. And I'm more stupid than I am ashamed. How in the world could I ever have been so stupid?" After 10 more minutes, 'it' finally came out. Vince had lent an acquaintance over \$20,000 – on a handshake – to partner with him in a new internet/web site business. Instead, the partner took the money and ran!

"Vince, thank God you're OK...we're OK," yelled a relieved Peggy. "We'll make it through this. And no, you're not stupid, you're an honest man," cried Peggy. "I'm so sorry, Peggy – I really am – but I felt so horrible about the whole thing and it was eating me up inside. Let's go home, OK Peggy?" As quickly as that, the communication lines were open again.

COMMUNICATION ... It's what links us up!

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of relationships over the past 10 years has been **the need for better communication**. Many of us try to focus on the similarities (and differences) of the sexes, races, religions, and cultures all with the hope of clearing away many of the roadblocks that impede our ability to effectively communicate with each

other. Business people, school administrators, our churches and members of our communities are spending more time each day trying to make things better with more effective communication. And this attempt is a great development as a society; we all should continue to strive to make progress in this area.

Yet, in all of our discussions and amidst all of our relationships there are fundamental aspects that almost always go unnoticed in our quest to communicate better. In short, this involves the reality that communication is primarily composed of 3 basic elements: The desire to convey a particular message, the hope of invoking a desired response, and the need to be receptive to what someone else is conveying to us.

Communication goes much deeper than simply trying to listen a little better or trying to understand another person's point of view. It is the way in which we 'link up' with each other. And it entails much more than simply delivering a message or waiting for a response.

Marketers understand these fundamental aspects of communication better than most of us. They clearly understand that their number one goal is to create a starving crowd. And they will stop at nothing to try to convince you that you desperately need the new car, the cruise vacation, or the latest style. Advertisers spend billions of dollars trying to convey a myriad of messages; hoping to invoke a desired response, so that you'll be receptive to their messages and their products. Regardless of how we respond to this apparent one-sided type of communication, it is clear that 2 for 1 sales, \$1,000 cash back, and 'bonus buys' influence us a great deal.

What message do we want to convey to the people we meet? After all, the way that we communicate and what message we INTEND to convey is, or rather should, be our focus. Specifically, do we wish to be charitable or ruthless, sympathetic or heartless, understanding or close-minded, lovely or indifferent? More importantly, what message do we consistently deliver to the ones that we love? Are our words filled with compassion, kindness, gentleness, understanding and encouragement? Or is our delivery dependent on our mood at the time or the possible favorable outcome of some event in our lives? Do the words, 'I love you', pour forth as easily at a family meal as they do on Christmas morning while exchanging gifts, or does indifference play too much a part in our daily dealings with our loved ones?

Some may say that this basic aspect of conveying a message simply recognizes the obvious and does not truly open new doors to unveiling effective communication in our lives. Yet, what do you think would happen to our personal intimate relationships, our neighborhoods, our communities, and our world, if people consciously tried to adhere to value and attempted to consistently convey truthful and lovely messages?

What would happen to our marriages if we consistently spoke to our spouses with charity, understanding, empathy and loveliness? How much better off would our children, family and friends be if we respectfully approached them as people with inherent dignity who deserved to be treated accordingly? What would our relationships

at work, at school, or in our communities be like if we were shining examples of gentle men and gentle women?

When we say we want to communicate better don't we really mean that we should all strive to be better (good) communicators? Is it possible that in our quest to achieve, to obtain and to prevail, that we may focus an inordinate amount of time and energy pursuing some goal, while disregarding the way in which we get there? Quite often the problems in our lives occur when we find that chasing after things (whatever) usually costs a great deal more than we are willing to give.

When we fail to acknowledge and recognize the people in our lives – and to consciously communicate with them in order to induce a heart felt joy – we tend to make the kind of mistakes that costs us a lot of pain. Also, it's often too hard to make things right later on. ***Instead of working at our communication skills and trying to convey better messages, we tend to spend a great deal of time in 'damage control'.*** Broken marriages, failed relationships, troubled children, and friction at work, could be avoided much more often if many of us would attempt to convey the types of messages that we want (and need) conveyed to us on a regular basis.

And this is easier than first imagined. It simply involves a conscious, mature, and consistent approach by each of us to ***build people up rather than knock them down.*** It entails a conviction that we want to become the fountains of charity, of kindness, of understanding, of trust, of loveliness – and of all the other things that make life worth living – to the people we encounter (and communicate with) in our daily lives. Each one of us is capable of being an AMBASSADOR of change (change for the better) if we simply decide to accept the challenge.

With this in mind, ***we need to honestly ask ourselves what response we desire from the many messages that we deliver each day?*** What responses do we wish to receive from our spouse, our children, our co-workers, and others to whom we communicate with in our lives? What respect do we deserve or want? What manner do we consistently exude that would cause someone to respond to us in ways that nurture relationships rather than destroy them? What kind of messages do we wish to receive or create by our actions? Do we – like the marketers – want to create a starving crowd whereby people crave communication with us? Or do we present ourselves in ways that convey messages of apathy and indifference?

The hope of invoking a favorable response, involves a consistent attitude and approach that respects the inherent dignity of the people with whom we communicate. It involves a conscious decision that our messages will cling to the World of Value and are always focused on being truthful, just, and free from imagery and deception. It involves a mature reflection on our part that focuses on creating a starving crowd because we grasp that we can only be happy by developing deep and lasting relationships. More than anything else, is the conviction that we must hope to invoke responses that focus on the needs of others instead of being fixated on constantly (selfishly) trying to receive things in our lives – 24 hours a day.

The need to be receptive to the messages that people attempt to convey to us is a fundamental prerequisite in our communication with other people. ***Because it's here where we choose to either link-up or disconnect with other people.*** Effective listening is essential; however, we can't stop here. In order for us to be receptive to others, we need to abandon our own desires and direct all of our energies towards the other person – precisely because of the inherent dignity of the individual conveying the message.

It's is primarily in the lack of respect where most of the damage occurs in our lives. When our spouse attempts to convey a message that is important to him/her, it is vital that we sit up and take notice. When our children reach out and try to tell us something that troubles them, we had better listen – and listen well – in order to make the connection. And when others in our lives are somehow trying to 'get through' to us, we must grasp that whatever they are attempting to convey to us may have significant value even if it appears to only benefit the other person at the time.

Communication affords us the ability to 'leap' beyond ourselves and truly encounter one another. It involves effort; however, it is the type of effort that continues to build us up rather than tear us apart. Effective communication is open to each one of us and affords us all the opportunity to move beyond a lonely existence (where we are thrust upon ourselves) to a life where we truly encounter and love each other. And since true love is the climax of all relationships, we all find ourselves naturally enriched by the constant give and take of quality communication with each other.

5 RULES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1.) Focus on the other person.

77930588.) **Practice at listening.**

77930676.) **Look beyond the passions – forgive and forget.**

77930764.) **Stop trying to WIN in every discussion.**

77930852.) **Build people up – don't tear them down.**

1.) Focus on the other person.

Anyone who has ever sold a product, negotiated a deal, or enjoyed the beauty of an intimate relationship will tell you that there can be no success without a total sense of commitment in our communication towards someone else. When the focus of our communication (in any relationship) is on the other person involved, we all benefit immensely. Find out what motivates other people, consistently look to communicate by focusing on what they need (as long as it is not in any way immoral), and you will develop superb communication skills.

2.) Practice at listening.

Effective listening involves taking time and consistently making an effort. And in our present day of instant gratification, multiple TV channels, and bottom lines, we're all victims (and culprits) of poor listening skills. With our busy lives apparently

growing busier each day, the willingness to sit down to listen – really listen – is quickly disappearing. Yet, we need to personally evaluate how we can all become better listeners. This primarily involves an act of our free will. If only we truly realized how listening improves our countless relationships – and makes them better – we could literally transform lives. Practice, practice, practice.

3.) ***Look beyond the passions – forgive and forget.***

All of us have undoubtedly been involved in a passionate argument with someone else. Clearly, there are many things said in such arguments, which were simply said in the heat of the moment (with no harm intended). Each one of us needs to learn to look beyond the passionate arguments and truly try to determine why the other person is apparently ‘loosing it’.

There are countless instances when generally reasonable people act like fools. When we either act irrationally or are the recipients of such outbursts, we need to be big enough to try to separate the message from the messenger. We need to look beyond what someone is apparently trying to say and understand what they are screaming about...and why. More than anything else, we need to bury our silly pride, forgive and forget (and ask for forgiveness by sincerely apologizing, if necessary) and keep the lines of communication open. The #1 impediment to effective communication between all of us is our inability to maturely forgive, forget, and ask for forgiveness.

4.) ***Create WIN-WIN situations...stop trying to WIN in every discussion.***

One of the more distinguishing aspects of most of our present day discussions is the amount of contention that exists in practically every conversation. This is clearly apparent when looking at any television show; it appears that every sentence is contested. It’s child against parent, husband against wife, worker against boss, and so on. Our many discussions at home and in public often revert back to ‘my way is better than yours’. And this must change.

This immature aspect (NEED TO WIN) in conversations is a major deterrent to clear communications, based on silly pride, and is a problem that can be solved by a clear resolve to make things right – not to get 1-up on someone else. Except in areas of immoral behavior, we need to focus all of our energy on making every conversation a WIN-WIN situation. Specifically, this involves apologizing often, constantly asking for clarification, calmly stating your position, looking beyond the passions, and always setting your sights on how to make each situation better. It includes deferring to your spouse/friend when they feel strongly about a certain matter. It means allowing your children to learn the hard way sometimes. It entails cooperating with your boss by recognizing the pressure he/she is under even though you feel something could be done differently.

The major reason why we need to stop trying to WIN in conversations is because this mentality is usually the major reason why effective communications STOP. When our communication involves ‘my way or the highway’ it’s often the case that future

effective communication drastically decreases. Never is this more apparent than in father-and-son relationships. How often have you heard that a son won't speak to his father (or vice versa) because of some silly matter that couldn't be resolved? How tragic is it that a man would forego a relationship with his own flesh and blood due to some trivial matter and silly pride? Yet, this is often the case; and it spills over to other relationships as well. We must try to replace this quest to WIN in conversations with a heart felt desire to let everyone WIN.

This doesn't mean that we capitulate or vacillate on vital matters; as we must be pillars of truth and goodness. Rather, we need to see how we can communicate in ways that don't alienate others because of our pride or our inordinate desire to WIN at all times. Focusing on creating WIN-WIN communications is an easy approach to apply to our lives and is a vital consideration in every conversation. It's up to us to decide if we want to truly WIN when we communicate.

5.) *Build people up...don't tear them down.*

As previously discussed as a prerequisite for relationships, building people up is a vital element in any type of effective communication. Isn't it fantastic to when you hear your name used lovingly or respectfully by other people? Conversely, how sad it is when you are addressed improperly (ignorantly) or indifferently by someone?

Perform a week-long study and you will see amazing results. Pick 3 people with whom you come in contact with and sincerely try to compliment them and encourage them in all that they do. Make it a special point to use their name, tell them how well they did something (no matter how small or inconsequential the event may have been), and constantly praise them and encourage them. The results will be earth shattering! Your next pilot test is for your entire life, and involves building-up everyone that you meet. Your life – and your relationships – will be infinitely more rewarding!

TRUST ... It's irreplaceable!

Trust is the cornerstone of every relationship. It's the pillar in which all other aspects of our relationships are built upon. It is also the fundamental prerequisite to every true and lasting friendship. And it appears to be lacking more and more in our society as the 'ME' generation continues to take hold.

Trust entails a confident reliance on the actions of another. We hope that a judge will issue true justice, that our spouse will be true to us, that our broker won't steal our money, and that our children will make good decisions. Trust affords us the opportunity to deal with others with the knowledge that they can be counted upon to deliver – in minor and major ways – without our watchful eye. It involves an abandonment of our silly pride and selfishness; and a firm commitment to always try to do what is right for us and for someone else. Trust also recognizes our imperfections and calls us to grasp, as well as to practice, the great act of forgiveness.

There are 3 primary aspects of trust that we need to consider if we are ever to understand the importance that it plays in virtually every type of relationship. For if we fail to attempt to acknowledge the very rudimentary aspects of trust – and the vital role that they play in our lives – we will be hard-pressed to ever enter into the fullness of relationships that add the ‘spice’ to our lives and makes life worth living.

The first aspect of trust entails the reality that we must first come to trust ourselves – to a certain degree – before we expect to experience trust in our lives. For how can we expect the many relationships to flourish with our peers, our loved ones, and our business associates if we don’t exude the qualities and convey the persona of a trustful individual? How can we expect our spouse to trust us – fully and unconditionally – if we don’t consistently act in ways that allow us to form a character that is trustworthy?

And this is very tricky business. Because not one of us is perfect. Each one of us has tendencies and faults that cause us to fall so many times in so many ways – each and every day. Even the Scriptures tell us that the just person sins 7 times a day. St. Francis of Assisi coined the phrase, “There, but for the grace of God, go I” when he would witness the peril (i.e. drunkard, prostitute, beggar, God-less rulers of his day) of people whom he met. St. Francis understood our inclination to often do (SIN) things that we shouldn’t, and he rightfully credited God’s good graces with helping him to avoid similar problems. In fact, St. Francis really understood that because of our inclinations to often do the wrong thing, it was a good policy *not* to TRUST ourselves totally and unconditionally – without help.

Yet, how can we learn to trust ourselves when we understand how we often fail to make the grade? How can we truly be a person to be counted upon when we deceive, when we are impure, when we steal, when we bear false witness or when we do any of the other dastardly deeds that ultimately proves that we are not totally trustworthy? Is it possible for anyone to actually be a trusted soul when each one of us falls victim to so many offenses and imperfections?

The answer lies clearly in our willingness to cling to the World of Value, to consistently (daily) ‘throw-off’ the old person and ‘put-on’ the new one, and to constantly be open to – and actively participate with – the practice of forgiveness. When we adhere to the world of value (i.e. goodness, truth, hope, justice, respect, etc...) we lay the foundation of a trusted soul. Despite our many faults and the countless times that we display our imperfections, this yearning to earnestly try to play by the rules and do the right thing tells us (and others) a great deal about ourselves. It also affords us the opportunity to trust ourselves – just enough – to know that we are capable of falling at any time if we fail to keep our guard up. By clinging to value, our attitudes and our approach to life takes on a whole new dimension compared to living a life whereby we make up the rules as we go along or do so many things ‘just because we feel like it’.

There is a vast difference between a woman who honestly tries to be a truthful and good person – no matter how many times she may fall – and a woman who has

crowned herself as queen of her every action and whim. Accordingly, the litmus test for trust is really quite simple. Who would you rather trust in your life? Is it someone who always tries to do the right thing and makes every effort to adhere to ALL values or is it the selfish and self-centered person who makes up the rules as he goes along? The first aspect of trust; namely learning to trust ourselves (while at the same time recognizing our selfish inclinations and constantly looking to overcome them) is a stumbling block for far too many people today. We need to recognize our shortcomings (daily) and look at ways to overcome our bad habits and tendencies. Instead of rationalizing about everything or somehow trying to convince ourselves that everything is OK – no matter what we do or how we do it – we need to consciously rid ourselves of the deceptions that destroy any semblance of trust.

Trusting ourselves entails an understanding that we should never really allow (trust) ourselves to do something without thinking of the consequences. In the same breath, trusting ourselves involves a confidence and attitude that we'll always try to do our best – no matter what the cost. It involves a never-ending pursuit towards the World of Value. More than anything else, trusting ourselves involves a constant rejection of our selfishness and a firm purpose to mold our characters to become shining examples of truly good men and good women.

We need to trust ourselves – just enough – to know that someone else can always trust us because we're constantly on guard of our senses AND because we are people of CONVICTION. Despite our imperfections, we recognize ourselves, and are recognized by others, as someone who can be depended upon – and trusted.

The second aspect of trust involves a confident reliance on the actions of another. This is most often the overwhelming facet of trust that people associate with being trustworthy...because it involves someone else. Again, we trust that our accountant will report our taxes properly, that our broker will give us the best advice, that our loved ones will always be loyal, and that our elected officials will act in our best interests. This reliance on others involves a 'leap of faith' to some degree and the promise that the person we trust is first and foremost TRUSTWORTHY.

There are few things in life as lovely as a person we can actually trust. Unfortunately, for too many of us, there are not enough trustworthy people around to help us get along. And the ramifications are earth shattering; both positively and negatively. We see the hard-working teenager succeed – who is dependent (trust) on her parents – compared to the delinquent who's always been lied to and neglected. We witness marriages blessed by love/honor vs. those infected by doubt and deception. And we observe businesses that flourish with open communication, while others struggle with constant office in-fighting.

When we truly trust someone else, we are fearless of the consequences when dealing with him or her, because we are confident that they will act with our best interests at heart. They may fail in our expectations; however their intentions are never meant to hurt or deceive us. For example, we trust that our spouse will not forget the late

dinner outing we planned for Saturday night, yet we realize that working late was clearly an oversight on her part or out of her control. Similarly, we trust that our boss will always keep us informed about things at the office, even after hearing of the surprise merger of our company on the 6 o'clock news.

Inherent in this faith – this notion that we can trust and can rely on someone – *is the reality that we must constantly strive to give people the benefit of the doubt.* If they're late, there must be a valid reason. If they forgot something, it was forgetfulness and not malice. If they fly off the handle, it was stress and fear rather than any deep-seeded animosity towards us. Trust involves the understanding that while many things are not negotiable (i.e. infidelity, cheating, stealing, lying, deception, etc...) there are so many minor faults in people that we must look beyond if we are ever going to be able to trust anyone. Because if our barometer to trust someone is perfection, we'll all be looking frantically forever ... as nobody is perfect. In short, we need to allow people to make honest mistakes.

If we are ever to experience trust in our lives, *we need to step back and allow people the chance to be trusted.* We need to consistently look at ways to build them up and cease measuring trust by some immature or silly standards. More than anything else, we need to stop monitoring trust by the 'you cross me and you're finished' mentality. This type of mis-trust simply alienates people and stymies the chances of reunion in the event that our trust is threatened or tested in some way.

And this leads us into the third, most misunderstood and perhaps the most important element of trust: forgiveness. At first glance, many of us may wonder what forgiveness has to do with trust. Well, sometimes we are led to believe that trust involves a 'one strike and you're out' requirement. And with cases of constant infidelity, repeated deception, and flagrant violations, it is clearly apparent that certain actions do indeed forfeit our trust of someone else.

Yet, all too often we allow unrealistic expectations to meddle with our notions of trust. Especially today; we work so hard that we often fail to communicate, we sometimes fail to respect and build people up, and we rarely defer to others. Subsequently, we alienate ourselves more and more from each other, however, we still hold people accountable to a trust 'without exception'. We also fail to work with people who demonstrate minor imperfections.

A lack of forgiveness on our part is also very hypocritical. We beg for forgiveness yet we often remind others of their shortcomings and fail to forgive. We ask people to lighten-up and relax, but we are sensitive to the most trivial of circumstances that don't set well with us. And we fail to maturely sit down to communicate and fix our problems, because it's often easier to simply pout and claim that 'we don't need this aggravation anymore'.

Instead of a 'leap' beyond our selfishness and immaturity, we tend to complain a lot, all the while thinking we are achieving something by appearing to have command of

the situation. In this respect, forgiveness tends to count only if we want it to; despite the fact that it's always the best medicine.

Forgiveness is the primary building block of relationships because it is the only thing that can repair the damage inflicted by anger. In any relationship (i.e. marriage, work, parents, children, siblings, politics, etc...) forgiveness acts as the equalizer because it recognizes our imperfections as people....and moves beyond them.

If we are ever to truly trust and be trusted we must learn to forgive – and accept forgiveness. We all need to start trusting each other – while becoming people who are truly TRUSTWORTHY – in order to live a happy life. Anything less simply won't cut it.

LONELINESS ...a major stumbling block to a life of joy.

The Story of Maryanne Goretti

“See you tomorrow, Maryanne,” said Jeanette, Maryanne’s favorite co-worker. “And good luck on your exam!” “Thanks Jeanette, I’ll do my best, talk to you tomorrow,” replied Maryanne. At that moment, Maryanne’s mother called her on her cell phone, “Honey, good luck on your exam. Please make sure that you bring home some bread, and don’t be too late, Maryanne,” said her mom. “OK, mom, don’t worry. I’ll see you around 9:30 tonight, bye.”

At 29-years old, Maryanne was a good daughter and she still listened to her mom. They lived together in a small apartment on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. The third child, and the baby, her other 2 sisters were married and busy with their own families. Maryanne had assumed the responsibility of caring for her mother, who was diagnosed 5 years earlier with chronic bronchial problems.

Maryanne didn’t like to study, nor did she like the pressure of the exam all week long. She wished somehow (miraculously) that she could instantly get credit for the 6 courses that she needed to graduate from college. Maryanne also didn’t like her teller job at First Union Bank. She wasn’t challenged anymore by the daily work routine that she had known for the past 5 years. In fact, her mind constantly wandered between waiting on customers...and she day-dreamed a lot. She really couldn’t call anybody a true friend, and it seemed that nobody seemed to seek out her friendship either.

Yet, Maryanne was a real sweetheart. Everybody seemed to like her. She didn’t date at all, even though she was in great shape and was actually rather good looking – even in her own eyes. It’s just that Maryanne was locked inside herself – she was lonely – and she grasped at ways to pass the time and cover-up her loneliness. She loved to eat, and she loved listening to music for hours in her room. It was there where she thought she could ‘handle’ her loneliness. In reality, she often drifted deeper into a world all by herself.

Her loneliness was not apparent to everybody else...which only made things a lot worse. She found herself worrying about stupid things, and she often tried to be funny in order to hide her confusion along with the sadness that she was feeling. Maybe an 'A' on the exam would give her some confidence, because she was doubting herself concerning just about everything. Two weeks later, the 'C' she got on her exam didn't bother her at all...as long as she passed. Suddenly, as she turned her car onto a busy Madison Avenue, she heard a loud ...BOOM! Her front right tire had blown out. "Oh no," said a newly depressed Maryanne. "I left my cell phone at home. What am I going to do now?" she complained to herself.

Five minutes later, Steve drove by and rolled down his window. "Are you OK, Miss?" said the concerned graduate student on his way home after coaching his young inner-city basketball team. "Can I give you a lift or help you change your tire...or something? It's kind of late, and it's going to start to rain real soon," said Steve. "Yes, thanks, I...well, I've had a bad day...can we go to get my car towed...I don't have a spare tire," replied Maryanne. "Sure, hop in, we'll get you taken care of," said Steve.

Not only did Steve drive her to a phone, he drove her back and waited until the car was towed away. He even drove her home – more than a ½ hour out of his way. And for the first time in a long time, Maryanne didn't worry. For the 1½ hours with Steve, she didn't feel the lonely sadness that she was so accustomed to feeling all of the time. "Thank you, so much Steve, for your help. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't stopped to help me," said a grateful Maryanne. "My pleasure," responded Steve. "I'm glad I could help." "Thanks again Steve, and if I can ever repay you, please let me know," said Maryanne, "Bye."

That night Maryanne slept like a baby and the next day she told everyone at work about 'Steve, Steve, Steve.' "Sounds like I should go get a flat tire on Madison Avenue, Maryanne? Maybe Steve will come along and change my tire," laughed her co-worker Jeanette. Four months, 7 basketball games, 3 movies, and 12 dinners later, Maryanne was the most satisfied owner of a flat tire in the world! Finally, after years of struggling, her loneliness was gone, and she was the happiest girl alive with her newfound friend, Steve.

LONELINESS ... There's only sadness when we are thrust upon ourselves.

Listen to the radio for more than twenty minutes and you will surely hear at least a few songs about 'lonely hearts' or 'lonely days'. The music industry is keenly aware of the lively sentiments to play upon in order to keep us coming back for more. Similarly, movies and romance novels have made fortunes by creating many happy endings (tear-jerkers) whereby the main characters are somehow reunited in the last scene of events. In short, we're all happy that their loneliness is gone and that the couple is back together again for good.

Perhaps the most feared type of existence for any soul involves the fear of being alone. Worse yet, if we actually are lonely, we understand all too well that our fears are

warranted and we ‘feel’ the terrible pain of loneliness in our hearts. Because if we agree that loving relationships (TRUE UNION WITH EACH OTHER) offers us the surest path to fulfillment and joy, then we need to attempt to understand how the varying degrees of loneliness stand ready to rob us of our happiness.

Amidst the never-ending changes that take place today, the depersonalization of our lives generally finds us less likely to enter into communion with each other. Yet, do we really need to be convinced of this? Drug abuse, a 50% divorce rate, increased time at work, and the growing world of imagery are just a few of the symptoms – and causes – of a world that is growing more lonely.

First, there is the blatantly apparent type of loneliness where a person lives alone – basically separated from others. The pangs of loneliness are real and can never be adequately treated with animal companions, excessive physical activity, work, or other diversions (i.e.: TV, drugs, games, etc...).

Inherent in this loneliness is a painfully REAL understanding that we are separated, apart, cut off from contact with other people. We may be alone on a farm in Pennsylvania, in a Manhattan townhouse, or in a log cabin in the mountains of West Virginia; but there is no doubt about us being alone. For some time we may actually enjoy the silence and the ability to contemplate without interruption; however, after a while we grow weary of the same old walls. In this existence, (whether voluntary or involuntary) we feel the pain of being separated ... and we don’t like it.

The second type of loneliness is one where we find ourselves ‘alone in a crowd.’ It’s an office environment where a woman sheepishly forces out a giggle at the dirty jokes being told (despite her personal disgust) so as not to make waves. It’s the stories at a cocktail party with the countless conversations about vacations, weight-loss and new business deals. And it’s the conversations we endure that are often so superficial and peripheral.

In other words, ***we fail to make A TRUE CONNECTION.*** We don’t spark the lovely and vibrant sentiments of our personalities because we may have our defenses up. We fail to talk about the essence of most things, because we try to make the conversation light-hearted and speak in generalities. It’s precisely in these types of conversations where we find ourselves being politically correct; where we talk about the weather, the market, the price of everything... and the value of nothing. And it’s a very lonely place.

The third type of loneliness entails a life of selfishness whereby we have crowned ourselves as King (or Queen) of our every thought or action. It is a place where we rarely let anyone in, and likewise fail to often leave. Mainly, we adhere to this type of loneliness when we violate the world of value – or sin. When we shun truth for our own self-deceptions, when we ‘make the deal’ regardless of its impact on others, and when we settle for mediocre and self-destructive relationships – rather than reaching out for the love of our lives – we are all very lonely people. Actually, it is the world of imagery where some of us ‘pretend’ some parts of our lives away.

In short, we drive a wedge further between others and ourselves. In doing so, we perpetuate a life of imagery and DECEPTION. We also build bigger and bigger walls around us; walls that *must* be broken down in order for us to truly encounter one another.

The fourth type of loneliness is really a combination of the other three.
Basically, it's a life of self-imposed loneliness. To this very day, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT is still a form of punishment in prisons. When we throw someone in a 'hole' we thrust him or her upon themselves. And often times, people literally go MAD in solitary confinement. This is precisely what we do to ourselves when we entertain loneliness in our lives.

Whether it be living alone, living alone in a crowd, or a blatantly selfish loneliness, we all – at times and to varying degrees – feel this separation, this solitary existence in which we are confined... to ourselves. And we can only depart this type of life ***with a concerted effort to GIVE of ourselves*** in so many ways. It involves a ***LEAP*** from our often foolish and selfish tendencies – towards others. And it is a conscious leap every day of our lives. It also involves COURAGE – a bold determination to try to make things better each day that we awake. And most of all, ***it involves ACTING in ways that perpetuate a life worth living*** – a life of risks where we run the risk of failing at a good many things – because we have tried to reach out and move beyond ourselves.

LOVE ... The answer!

The Story of Ted and Julie Bronson

"I'll be right down, honey. Don't forget to let Bo-Bo (the dog) out before we go," said a rushed Julie. "OK, sweetie, could you bring down my sun-screen please? I don't want to get burned at the beach today," answered Ted. It was Ted and Julie's 33rd wedding anniversary, and they were going to spend the day together by walking along the New Jersey beach on a warm Tuesday in July.

At first, nobody gave them much of a chance to make it together. Ted, now 75, was 42 at the time, and Julie was a beautiful, 27-year old young woman. The 15 years difference was always a big deal to both of their families, but not to them. They were in love – and that's all that mattered.

"Do you remember how scared I looked when I couldn't pay the total bill at the supermarket 33 years ago, honey," recalled Julie, as she cuddled next to Ted in the car. "Yes, I remember...like it was yesterday. You still owe me the \$1.25 for paying the total bill," laughed Ted. "You're lucky my framing crew needed something to drink, or else you'd still be stocking shelves trying to come up with that \$1.25," said Ted. They both laughed and held hands for the rest of the 45-minute drive to the beach.

Ted's contracting business had given him a lot of flexibility over the years. Recently, he was working less, and spending a lot more time with Julie. "Don't you ever

give up this business that you love so much Ted, when I'm dead and gone," said Julie. Ted answered quickly, "Don't talk like that Julie, we're going to get you better, you know that." "Teddy, Teddy – we both know my situation. I just don't want my man chasing after young chicks all over New Jersey when I'm gone, that's all," laughed Julie nervously. "Oh, Julie, you're crazy...I love you," said Ted. "I love you too Teddy, and I always will."

Never in their wildest dreams could they have thought that Julie would contract her life threatening kidney problems so quickly. Ted was 15 years older, and had some minor heart problems. Besides, Julie was never sick a day in her life. Yet, one year earlier, her kidneys started acting up – and shutting down. She needed 2 new ones and she needed them fast. "You'll feel better, Julie, with the sea air," said Ted confidently. We'll call the kids tomorrow – today is for you and me."

Ted always had an encouraging word for Julie. When she got down – and drained – after dialysis treatments, he'd always pick-up her spirits and tell her to "keep going." In fact, every day Ted made his customary 15 to 20 phone calls to try to locate kidneys for Julie, and keep the love of his life alive a little longer. Without Julie's knowledge, he had recently pursued some out of the ordinary (illegal) ways to get her some kidneys. He was astounded at the amount of illegal 'organ trafficking' that was going on. At least, it gave him some hope in what seemed like the worst nightmare of his life.

Later in the afternoon, as Julie wrote for her customary ½ hour each day in her diary, Ted stood standing at the sliding glass doors of their hotel room, looking at the ocean. And for the first time ever, he started to get sentimental and sad. "Julie, I love you baby," sighed Ted. "I love you too, Teddy," replied Julie as she dropped her pen to comfort her man, who never seemed to get upset in the past. "You know Julie, we never imagined that we'd get here, did we?" asked a usually self-assured Ted. "Sure, I did Teddy, you know all the roads and we've stayed at this hotel a dozen times," joked Julie.

"Goofy! What I meant was, everybody counted us out from the start. Yet, I knew you were the girl for me, the second that I saw you," cried Teddy. "Oh, Teddy, and I knew you were my man. I never doubted us for a minute," added Julie. "Don't be sad, honey," said Julie. "I'm not sad, Julie," replied Ted. "I'm the luckiest guy alive.

"I love you, baby," said Ted slowly. "Most guys only dream of having what I've had with you. For 33 years, I've been the happiest man alive because of you, Julie. We'll keep plugging away, looking for some kidneys or for some other cure," breathed Ted deeply. "But I'd never trade a minute of the last 33 years away for anything in the world." "Me either, Teddy," cried Julie. "You are the love of my life – and you've made every day of my life with you a little piece of heaven...thank you, my love."

LOVE ... There's nothing better!

Love is the climax of our relationships. And trying to define it is like attempting to explain what moisture is to water or rhythm is to music. But if we can agree that in order to be totally fulfilled (happy) in this life, that we need to enter into true union with each other, then it's clear to say that love is the target to which all of our aspirations and energies should flow. For our hearts are restless until they rest – in love.

Love, by its very nature, is diffusive. In other words, we must give love away in order to fully experience it. This is not to say that we cannot totally enjoy being the recipients of love; whether it's from a child, friend, spouse or parent. Quite the contrary, our ability ***to BE loved*** is intricately linked to the diffusive nature of love. Rather, this 'giving love away' is vital for us to understand how we should participate with it. As mentioned previously, the very act of creation is the primary example of this diffusive aspect of love. God, Who is Love, ***had no real need for us***. Yet, compelled by love, He gave us life and all of creation.

This diffusive aspect of love is more easily understood when we think of a loving mother, a generous soul, or a saintly figure like Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Each of us recognizes the beauty and loveliness of a caring mother. We need no explanations to grasp the joy that she gives and receives by her countless selfless acts each day. She is our hero, someone whom we revere and honor each of our days.

Likewise, the generous soul (either with their money or time) derives a joy unknown to the selfish and self-centered person. They give of themselves in countless ways only to be enriched more and more precisely because of their generosity. Lastly, can anyone doubt the joy that saintly souls like Mother Theresa enjoy, despite the many heartaches, while living a life of complete and utter service to others?

Suppose for a moment, that you won the lottery for \$100 million dollars! Initially, you'd be so 'high' that you'd most likely laugh uncontrollably for at least a few days. Now suppose also that one of the stipulations was that, in order to receive the funds, you had to move into a mansion without your family or friends. In addition, you could not spend any money on anyone but yourself, nor could you have any type of relationship with anyone except an occasional 'hello' to the gardener and the maid. How would you feel if you were 'thrust upon yourself' without the ability to share your good fortune with the ones you love?

Similarly, let's suppose you were stranded with a group of young children after your bus broke down on a trip through the Nevada desert. Imagine the sadness and horror you would feel if you came upon a campsite only to be told that you could have something to drink, but not a drop for the children. Your inability to quench their thirst – to help them – could literally drive you insane.

With this in mind, we need to try – with all of our might – to grasp and apply to our lives this great contradiction; namely, ***in order to experience love we need to give it***

away. Or in other words, we need to participate with it. We need to recognize that love entails an openness unknown to the arrogant, greedy, impure and self-centered man.

But why is the fundamental aspect of love so hard to understand and apply to our lives? Why is it so difficult for many of us to recognize the undeniable fact that we can only truly experience love when we ‘leap’ beyond our natural (selfish) inclinations and give of ourselves in countless ways? There are many reasons for this; the two primary causes being that: (1) we are so often easily confused by the many charlatans posing as true love, and (2) that we often find ourselves caught up in so many distractions.

In fact, many of us say to ourselves that this selfless way sounds good... but we act otherwise. We recognize the need to be unselfish, yet our focus tends to shift towards ‘me’ all too often. We understand that loving relationships serve as the fuel for a happy life, yet we’re often just too busy or it may take too much effort. However, the great contradiction – *of giving instead of always looking to receive – is the KEY to a life filled with true love. And it will ALWAYS be the KEY.*

Love is also primarily a gift. And those of us who work hard should easily understand this fact. In sports, the champion recognizes that hard work pays off. In business, the entrepreneur grasps that risks need to be taken in order to share in the rewards. Similarly, the gift of love often comes after an immense amount of work performed and risks taken. Yet, many of us can work at relationships and come away empty-handed, or invest a great deal in some endeavor only to find frustrations. One could tend to argue that we really have no control over the ‘gift’ of love... and we’d be correct.

We often think of a gift as something given to us freely without the slightest bit of effort or work required on our part. And when we think of the gift of life, a loving embrace from Mom and Dad, or a smile from our newborn child, this is clearly the case. Yet, we tend to confuse the moments that gifts are actually given to us (i.e. Christmas, birthday, retirement, etc...) with the daily requirement to participate fully in life by ‘spending ourselves’ in order to receive all that life has to offer. The realization of love as a gift is simply the understanding *that it is bestowed fully in relation to our openness and willingness to cooperate with it.*

Think for a moment of some of the most beautiful and memorable times in your life. What about your wedding day, or the birth of a child, or the last-second victory, or the opening of a business? Granted, you were the recipient of joy at those particular times (and rightfully so), but did you ever give thought to the immense amount of time and effort you put into those occasions? Did you ever ponder about all of the time and energy (sacrifice) you invested in making your wedding day so lovely? Is there any parent alive who doesn’t recognize the immense amount of time and effort it takes to raise a child? Is there an athlete among us who doesn’t grasp, ‘NO PAIN – NO GAIN’? And is there a hard-working person that doesn’t grasp the work (and \$\$\$) it takes to open a business? This fundamental understanding of love as a gift is crucial to our maturing process.

Our understanding that love is primarily a gift is rooted firmly in our ability to cooperate with it and consistently respond to its call. For how can we ever expect to truly come to experience the gift of love if we are not always open to it? How can we hope to enter the race if we're not in shape, to capitalize on our work if we haven't put forth our best effort, or to 'WIN' in any number of ways if we haven't prepared ourselves accordingly?

Moreover, happiness (love) is something we must 'feel'; and this involves our active participation. We can dream or think about love all we want; however, it is only when we exchange love that we come to experience it – and are happy. This is primarily why living a life of selfishness and as a *sponge* – whereby we believe we were born to simply soak up every type of pleasurable encounter – is a great deception.

Inherent in our ability to give and receive love is a blessed freedom. In fact, it is precisely in this freedom that love plays such a vital role in our lives and makes its mark so indelibly in our hearts. Our ability to express our love for a child, spouse, parent or friend, is first and foremost an act of freedom. And it is much more than an act of our free will. We are never forced into a true love, nor do we feel any specific obligation to 'love' in some obscure way. ***Rather, we freely love others precisely because it is the most profound expression of our humanity;*** we were all born to love and to be loved.

There can also be problems here. We tend to often equate our ability (freedom) to do something with our 'right' to do it – and at times we get confused. Simply put, while each of us tends to do everything for love (happiness) we do not place our love (happiness) in the same things. Because of this, we try to 'make love' in so many different ways, and in doing so, we force the issue and often chart a course that is headed in the wrong direction.

We may enter into illicit relationships, and basically sell ourselves short by a life of indecent behavior. We can place love of money (or being comfortable) over everything else in our lives and wonder why there's rarely true peace in our hearts. And some of us may focus a good deal of our time trying to supply a continuous flow (i.e., golf, clothes, vacations, fun, careers, etc...) of pleasurable encounters ***while living a life on pause,*** whereby truly great achievements will have to wait until we're 'ready'.

The whole notion of a gift implies something freely given, freely received... something you can't give to yourself. Freedom to love in no way implies an uncurtailed 'flexing' of all of the passions

Love is fundamentally the deepest and most profound of our responses to value. It is the essence of all goodness, and can only be realized by a complete subjugation of our 'old self' and a consistent effort 'towards' others. Simply put, our love for someone can never function outside the boundaries of the World of Value. What do this mean?

Basically, our lives get fouled up miserably when we operate outside the World of Value. When ***respect*** leaves a marriage, it's possible for any type of problem to occur.

When we fail to *forgive* and seek forgiveness, we build walls that are difficult to break through. When we *show no mercy, no kindness, and no generosity* towards others – we effectively forfeit the love in our lives. And when we fail to trust or act in ways that violate the trust given to us, we break the bonds that allow love to grow and flourish.

Love is also the culmination of all values (i.e. hope, faith, truth, mercy, respect, etc...) *in people*. It is also the indispensable fuel for our hearts and minds. Love recognizes our imperfections as people, and simply demands that we adhere to value in order to maintain our capacity *to remain LOVEABLE*. Far from the arrogant, self-centered, and narrow person, as long as we set our sights on honestly trying to do the ‘right thing’ we exhibit the capacity to share in the loveliness that life has to offer.

This whole aspect of being LOVEABLE is a vital aspect of our ability to experience love in our lives. And the criteria for it is not based on a pretty face, a good-natured personality or a sizeable personal net (\$\$\$) worth. Nor does being LOVEABLE demand perfection. A mother can still love her son after he’s been accused of a terrible crime. Her love for him is not blind, but rather rests in the conviction that his actions were a mistake and not a reflection of his true personality or his potential. Being LOVEABLE simply demands that we respectfully pay heed to the World of Value and humbly approach each other with a sincere desire to serve.

Perhaps the greatest example of LOVEABILITY is Jesus. Undoubtedly, He has had more influence than any one in history. And one of the most distinguishing aspects of Jesus’ life was that – **BY HIS ACTIONS AS WELL AS HIS WORDS** – He made Himself more loveable than anyone else...ever. Many religions preach for us to follow certain precepts, and live certain ways in order to find some type of peace. To the Christian, Jesus entered history – and conquered it! He told us that He was The Way, The Truth, and The Life. He took all of our transgressions upon Himself to free us, even though He had done no wrong. And he suffered – even unto death on a tree – to prove His love for the world. Is it any wonder why Jesus is so loved (LOVEABLE) by so many?

Love is the mysterious element in our lives that makes life worth living. It is the pinnacle of all of our relationships with other people. It is never narrow or selfish. Nor is it a never-ending list of what I can somehow derive for myself. Love is linked to all the World of Value, and at the same time is the essence of every good thing. Love involves a free ‘leap’ out of our selfishness, whereby we express (and receive) the true communion we were born to enjoy.

We must each live up to our moral and intellectual constitution in order to experience what a true love can convey. This does not mean that we need to be perfect. Simply, we must act by our reason and understanding. We must realize that by consistently bringing our intellects and wills to act – and to habitually mold our behavior in ways that discern the good that must be done – we allow ourselves to cooperate with true love...and be happy. *Because LOVE is the embodiment (and manifestation) of all values*.

And it is a world that is open to each and every one of us. True love is the most beautiful thing to experience in our lives. And we know it when we see it. And it will flourish in our lives, in direct proportion to our willingness to actively participate with it and give it away.... as it will always return a hundred fold.

WHAT HAPPINESS IS NOT

The chief object of education is not to learn things but to unlearn things.

G. K. Chesterton

(1) One More Thing, (2) Fun, (3) Receptivity, (4) Sense of Lacking, (5) Fear

Often the best way to help fully explain or understand the meaning of anything is to define what it is **NOT**. Even though this approach often fails to do total justice to the true meaning of something, this perspective or understanding often tells us what something should never be.

If we speak of coordinating a wardrobe, we exclude the notion of wearing plaids and stripes together. If we hope for a beautiful day at the beach, we rule out the possibility of rain. And if we expect a good year in business, we hope it will be much better than the small gain we posted the previous year. It's sometimes easier to see what is **not** stylish, good weather, or profitable.

The same rule applies for happiness. Because understanding what happiness is **NOT – and responding to it** – is a fantastic way to free us from some of the things that tend to get in our way of experiencing true joy.

ONE MORE THING ... If only I could get that car, or that new job, or that girl...!

One of the primary fallacies that we all need to immediately dismiss in our lives is that we simply lack one or two 'things' that – if we had them – would truly make us happy. And many of us fall prey to this horrible deception at times. Think about it. Don't we sometimes say to ourselves how everything would be perfect if we just had that **CERTAIN SOMETHING** to 'truly satisfy us' or rescue us from some emptiness in our hearts and minds?

If only we had a few million dollars, everything would be great, we wouldn't have to work, and life would be easy. Or, if only we could find that perfect someone to love and be with for the rest of our days? What about that new house you want more than anything else? And if we allow our minds to wander, the list could possibly keep growing and growing. If only we could lose this weight, or get this promotion, or take that certain vacation, or move away from this rotten neighborhood. Wow, everything would be great, and our lives would not only be complete, they would be completely happy!

Unfortunately, getting **ONE MORE THING** may not really make us happy.

That's because the very notion of **ONE MORE THING** can be a key cause of our inability to experience a happy life. There are many reasons for this and chief among them is the uncanny ability to create new things to want the very moment we attain what we were convinced was going to be the 'one more thing' to set us free.

Plato was right when he claimed that the *rich person was the one with few wants*.

That's not to say that the particular thing that we desire is in any way unnatural or inordinate for us to want to have. It is not wrong or threatening to our happiness to want a better job, or to have a business, or to want an intimate relationship. Quite the contrary, these are areas that profoundly affect our lives. The problems occur when we place everything we are and do at the doorstep of these events. So, if the door opens, we'll truly be happy. If it doesn't open, well, unhappiness tends to slip in through the back window.

Unfortunately, happiness then becomes an 'if this' or 'if that' scenario, contingent upon something settling in our favor? In other words, it's all **CONDITIONAL**. If we get the job, we are happy; if not, we're sad. If the bank approves the mortgage or car loan, then we'll be happy; if not, depression creeps in. And we begin to see that if our lives are governed by this assault at the moving target of **ONE MORE THING**, we really have no basis for our happiness.

For if we allow our happiness to become a never-ending wish to obtain certain things, then our attachment – in our hearts – to happiness, becomes the anxiety to the very 'things' that may have no capacity to bring happiness to us at all!

The list(s) we make could be seemingly endless. Life may not be complete without the new home out on the nice side of town. Or, our heart may be unsettled if we can't increase our personal net worth by \$50,000 this year. Or, life may not be complete until I have my own business, or unless I get that great new job. Getting **ONE MORE THING** is not a mentality that will allow us to be happy. It never was and it never will be.

In most instances, a life that is fixated on ONE MORE THING is a self-defeating approach that stunts our growth as people. When we look at a new job or new home to supply us with the ticket to happiness, we often times shut out the real World of Value and fail to concentrate on the very things that can bring us joy. Because as we live our lives for the next thrill, we basically live a life on PAUSE, whereby we place everything else on the back burner until our 'real' ship comes in. We find it hard to find the time to develop deep friendships, or to give of ourselves in so many fantastic ways, because we are bent on achieving or receiving something; which is usually the creation of a bizarre sense of success or importance in our own minds.

If we're totally honest, when we live a life with a mindset of **ONE MORE THING**, we usually allow ourselves to be governed by illusions and false gods. In fact, we most often become the very people that we detest when we succumb to this baseless approach.

Far too many of us spend a lot of time focusing on things that actually contribute to a very small part of our happiness such as: money, social status, physical appearance, and work. In doing so, we can abdicate our very freedom with a senseless pursuit of the next **ONE MORE THING**, in order to fill some obscure void in our lives. Far from the beauty of achieving something great and admirable, we replace the call to greatness with a constant stream of aspirations that feed our ego and pride.

More than anything else; however, a **ONE MORE THING** approach to life perpetuates an attitude *which claims that happiness is whatever we want it to be*. And this is a silly and damaging mentality, which has caused some of us an immense amount of pain. For when we attempt to formulate our attitudes around the pursuit of the next pleasurable encounter, we basically give in to the world of imagery and selfishness: and we ultimately ignore the call to true value. In doing so, we never seem to have enough time for the truly important things in life, and we tend to spend a great deal of time chasing after things that are, in effect, causing our unhappiness.

Happiness cannot be achieved by living in anticipation of getting **ONE MORE THING**; because we can never be fully satisfied living this way. It cannot be **CONDITINAL**, based on our receiving the next thing, or experiencing the next pleasurable encounter at all costs. If we live our lives governed by an attitude that **ONE MORE THING** will make us happy, we'll remain **LOCKED-UP** in our own little world of constant want.

Every one of us must either: conquer, subdue, remove, or make friends with, the **ONE MORE THING** in our lives. Some of us may have one, over-riding 'thing', such as a new home, new job, or good health. Others may make it a continuous flow of **ONE MORE THING(s)**. Most importantly, we must all try our best not to allow this fallacy to rule our lives by consistently living our days on 'PAUSE', while constantly looking for **ONE MORE THING** as the ticket to bring you true joy. Remember, true happiness is the only thing that we all really need.

FUN AND HAPPINESS ... The great confusion.

I know that what you see is not often what you get.

John Sizer

FUN, despite its importance, and the momentary satisfaction it conveys, is definitely *NOT* happiness. If it were, then all of our acts of fun would simply bring extra spurts of happiness into a life already filled with joy. Watching movies, skiing, water surfing, and bowling are fun experiences and forms of entertainment. Yet, fun is what we experience during an act. Happiness is something far greater and is experienced before, during, and after the act.

For many people, *fun can serve as a masked drug*. At times, it appears that some of us can't seem to get enough of it; even though all the fun in the world cannot make us happy. If you disagree, then just look at the people in our society who seem to have the most amount of fun in their lives. For example, let's take a look at Hollywood stars and professional athletes.

If we can learn anything from some of these burdened souls, it is precisely that happiness has nothing to do with fun. Most of these people have lots of money, beautiful features and abilities, attend all kinds of parties, drive expensive cars, live in Grande houses, take exciting vacations, and are pampered and idolized every moment of every day. Yet, many live their lives in quiet desperation.

With each passing day, we hear of another star that falls from the land of fun and fame. Drug addiction, divorce, spousal abuse, depression, alcoholism, and more, often reveals a world of imagery, of make-believe, and of UNHAPPINESS. Our initial reaction is usually bewilderment and disbelief, as we try to figure out what is wrong with these people. They appear to have everything that the world has to offer and yet they throw it all away to a life of misery. We can't understand why they do such stupid things. Yet, the truth is that there is nothing really wrong with these people. In fact, most of them are very talented and intelligent individuals. The problem is that the 'everything' that they appear to have DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY – IN ITS VERY ESSENCE – to bring happiness.

But let's *be honest, it's difficult to understand how money, fame, and fun* – things that we've been told are supposed to make everyone happy – *can cause us pain* and even ruin. So, upon reading about or hearing the demise of the stars, the little voice in the back of our heads unconsciously confirms – and simultaneously denies – the notion that fun really can't bring happiness. In short, we say that money, fame and fun can't bring us happiness, but we want them anyway, more than anything else.

We tend not to pay too much attention to that little voice telling us that fun is not happiness. We move beyond it as if it doesn't exist. It's as if we see our car steaming at the hood and just keep driving, or feet the rain dripping on our child's bed and simply cover her up with another blanket. We convince ourselves that we are different, and that fun may not bring us happiness, but it'll really help.

And even though the search for happiness continues 10 minutes after the party is over, 5 minutes after we drive off the new car lot, and the moment we walk through the door from vacation, we don't care. The fun is over. All we need to do is find more fun

and we'll be happy, right? The confusing part of it all is that we should and we do enjoy ourselves when we have fun. We truly enjoy playing basketball, racquetball and golf. We really like going on vacation and joking with people. We need to relax and watch a good movie once in a while. Yet, we need to grasp that all of the different forms of fun have literally NOTHING to do with our personal happiness.

But *why is it that fun does not have the capacity to make us truly happy?* After all, we're happy when we have fun. Shouldn't we just continue to fill our time with moments of fun and games? Wouldn't life be fantastic if we could just do anything we wanted; whenever, and without interruptions? And shouldn't we all just look for fun when we feel a bit down or depressed to lift us back to happiness?

Acts of fun, for the most part, *have no lasting depth in and of themselves.* There is no prolonged happiness that rests in our souls from skiing, biking, or playing softball. And while we may enjoy these experiences very much, and may look forward to the times that we perform these activities, they are but transitory acts, which can only provide a temporary infusion of enjoyment and light-heartedness. This fun is far different than something as magnificent as a true love or the beauty of an intimate relationship.

When someone makes fun their ultimate priority, it reveals a great deal about their personality as well as their overall approach to life. In doing so, they treat themselves as sponges, with the belief that life is meant to fill them up and saturate their senses. There is no participatory action needed or any response to true value; rather, it's simply a matter of experiencing a continuous flow of pleasure – or absorbing. *This is precisely why fun – in all its forms – often acts as the ultimate deceiver,* and why it cannot supply the promise that true joy delivers.

For anytime that we look for a pleasurable activity to deliver a prolonged joy, it's as if we attempt to create a result (happiness) simply by wishing it to be so. It's comparable to the absurd notion that we can enjoy the fruits of a harvest, without ever planting the seed. Hence, we force the issue, by focusing all of our energies upon mere reflections of joy – or images. And we can never be happy living this way.

In fact, *the time we waste pursuing fun tends to create the very habits that draw us further away from our ability to truly encounter one another.* The constant longing for real joy that we all desire is frustrated by our fixation on receiving the next pleasurable thrill.

The constant pursuit of fun also tends to develop an immature personality while feeding our natural inclination to mediocrity. It acts as a kind of intravenous (IV) tube that supplies us with just enough juice until we can get to the next pleasurable situation. In short, a life devoted to fun usually nurtures a selfishness that ultimately can consume us. So, instead of developing a sound character while striving for greatness, we spend our days running around in a hurry to have more fun.

Fun allows our hearts and minds to be lifted from the strains of our everyday life. Yet, when we elevate it to THE priority in our lives, we close the door to any real hope of complete happiness. Anxiety attacks, mood swings, and various forms of depression, are often the result of our insatiable desire for more fun along with our immature or non-existent response to true value. For it often doesn't matter how much fun we've experienced, or how many fun things have evaded our grasp, because we want goodies... and we want them now. The things we may want don't really matter, the result is the same: we need them to fill the void.

A major problem that surfaces as a result life fixated on fun, is that after a while, we get weary of either not getting our fun fix or, even worse, getting our fun fix which causes an even higher expectation the next time around. The need for a higher dosage drives us to a fun-frenzy. So in essence, we become FUN junkies! And if we don't get what we want, then we feel deprived, depressed, angry, anxious, and inferior to those who have what we want.

Having fun is important. We all need to have fun in our lives, yet fun can – and does – serve as a masked drug, if we let it. Fun does not have the capacity **IN ITS VERY ESSENCE** to bring us joy. Acts of fun have no lasting depth, and the time we waste chasing them literally creates many of the bad habits that can cause us a lot of problems. The endless pursuit of fun also generally develops an immature personality and can nurture a selfish character bent on mediocrity. Each of needs to recognize fun for what it is and to see that it can help us to enjoy life, as well as help us to subdue some of the stress and strains that affect all of us. Yet, we should never allow fun to replace our call to greatness, with a senseless pursuit of the next little pleasurable thrill.

SENSE OF LACKING ... “I can't quite put my finger on it, but something's missing”.

The story of Joseph Campbell:

Joseph couldn't seem to shake the awful feelings out of his bones. It was 4:00 a.m. in the morning and he couldn't sleep. Something was troubling him, but he really didn't know what it was. At 44, it seemed that lately he was asking himself more and more what life was all about. He worked hard, yet his technical office job was boring and he just didn't seem to care anymore. Talks of downsizing at the company actually – for the moment – made him hope they would let him go. Often times; however, he would slip into bits of depression and anxiety at the thought of losing his job.

For Joseph, something was missing. In his mind he wanted a wife and a family. Yet, it seemed that he could never find the right person. Many of his friends had growing families, while others knocked on his door now and then to pour out their souls over a failed marriage or relationship. All Joseph wanted was a fantastic woman to spend the rest of his days with...at least that's what he thought he wanted. His parents and

immediate family were delightful and loving people, they just didn't seem to understand what he wanted. And they didn't know why he wasn't happy.

The one thing that he kept thinking of over and over again was that life was supposed to be better, it was supposed to be more complete. He lacked something – maybe it wasn't a wife or a relationship – but something was definitely missing. He couldn't figure out what it was that seemed to be evading his grasp, or why he felt so empty all of the time. No matter how much soul searching he did, he couldn't quite figure it all out. All he knew was that he was tired of feeling that way. He desperately wanted something to fill the void.

So, Joseph did the customary knucklehead things that guys tend to do. He started dating like a fool...as many as three girls at the same time. Then, he'd hit a slump, and wouldn't even go out to see his friends for months at a time. His drinking was under control during the dating, but at home he tended to drink more than he needed. He couldn't sleep too well...and he didn't know why. All he wanted was to get rid of this 'feeling'. So, on one Friday night in late April, he set out to 'put it all together' by going out on the town with some old friends and take full advantage of happy hour at a local pub.

At first, he was rather quiet, listening to all of his buddies tell their tales of recent conquests. But after his third drink, Joseph started asking the guys some really strange sounding things. "What's up with you and Karen?" he asked his best friend Jim. "And when the hell are you gonna settle down, Frankie? John, you haven't said a word all night, what the heck are you doing with your life?" All at once, his friends knew something was up with Joseph. "Hey Joe-man, take it easy on the owner of this place, he's gonna stop happy hours...you'll put him out of business at the pace your keeping," said Jim. But Joseph kept talking and drinking...and then accidentally drove his car off a cliff later that night!

SENSE OF LACKING ... It can become all too real.

A mentality entrenched in a ***ONE MORE THING*** approach to happiness is fueled by unnatural and false presuppositions. And one of the major culprits in this process is the overwhelming feeling that we are always lacking something. This ***SENSE OF LACKING*** seems to hit us from all sides. We don't have quite enough money, or a nice enough home, or a pretty enough face, or a good enough car, or that great relationship we really need. When we have a ***SENSE OF LACKING***, we are convinced that all we need is 'more' and 'more' is everything.

We haven't made it until we don't lack anything.

We're restless until our ship comes in.

We aren't complete until we can have it all.

Yet, should we really feel like we are lacking – in the truest sense of the term? Should we feel that we don't have enough of whatever? Is it true that we lack many things and is this sense of lacking something that is good and natural that will help us to succeed? Or is this feeling something that feeds off itself and perpetuates a life in which we can never – regardless of how much we obtain – have a happy and fulfilled life?

First, especially in America, it can be said that we have more of everything than any generation or country has ever had – EVER! Regardless of your individual situation, as citizens of the United States, we all have access to more things and share in more benefits than any people in history. With the advancement of technology and computers, we can plug into practically any source of knowledge that has ever been written or discovered.

And when we look at the arts, higher education, freedom of religion, medicine, health and fitness, natural resources, our beaches and national landscapes, sports, transportation networks and infrastructure, housing, public works and utilities, goods and services, career choices, and more, we see that we have more opportunities – more access to things – than any others have ever had. Despite our many problems, we are still the envy of the world; countless people still dream about coming to live in America.

So, let's take a closer look at a specific sense of lacking. Let's zero-in and focus on what we could seem to lack...from a financial perspective. Because even if you don't consider yourself to be a wealthy person by American standards, most of us have more things than our parents and grandparents ever dreamed of having. The gadgets are everywhere! We have new carpets, furniture, microwaves, blenders, toaster ovens, fax machines, computers, stereos, televisions, VCR's, camcorders, extra freezers, dishwashers, CD players, washers and dryers, cordless phones, beautiful cars, car phones, answering machines, bread makers, video games, exercise equipment, pool tables, and much more. And if you go into a thousand American homes, regardless of their location or household income, you would not be shocked to find many of the things just mentioned.

Yet despite all that we have, we all tend to believe that we need more. We don't have enough outfits, or a big enough house, or a nice enough car – or whatever. And we often go through life with this feeling that we constantly need to get more, to have more, to get the next thing that will somehow make our life more complete.

The problem with a personal sense of lacking is that it tends to feed off itself. In other words, once the seed (sense of lacking) is planted in our minds, we somehow find ourselves convinced that we supposedly 'lack' something – no matter what it may be. And we all tend to focus a great deal of energy on craving and pursuing the desired thing; regardless if we truly need it or not.

IT IS OFTEN IN OUR IMMATURE AND INORDINATE DESIRES that we tend to produce and perpetuate our own sense of lacking. We then create the

uncomfortable feeling that we're being left out because we don't have something ... and we don't like it at all.

Initially, we've equated a sense of lacking to material things, but don't forget everything else that we have access to, and feel that we lack...it is vitally important. This sense of lacking can involve relationships, personal achievement, a sense of self-worth, careers, fortunes, or anything, and the illusion still holds true.

It also really doesn't matter if you feel like you lack a lot in your life, or you think you have a lot more reasons to be happy than your neighbor does. Many of us can create our own personal sense of lacking, solely in relation to what everyone else seems to have. In other words, without even thinking, ***we COMPARE what we have to what others have***, and then give ourselves a grade. If we have less, we feel we lack certain things. If we have more, we're fine until the next comparison comes along. If we have the same, we tend to look to many other things (i.e. profession, career, physical appearance, home, car, etc...) to see what tips the scale, and in whose favor.

Our sense of lacking is almost always fueled by the ***CONSTANT AND CONTINUOUS COMPARISONS*** that we make about...everything. Whether it's homes, relationships, children, careers, cars, it really doesn't matter. If we are honest with ourselves, our sense of lacking usually stems from a never-ending struggle to keep up with the Jones'.

This is precisely why your home is good enough until your coworker moves into a brand new mansion. Or your car is just fine until your cousin picks you up in her new convertible. And your husband will do until you lay eyes on your girlfriend's new gorgeous fiancée. It is natural, yet extremely immature, to live a life measured by a foolish sense of what is good enough, and not good enough, based on what somebody else has. And the marketers have done an outstanding job to help convince us of this.

We really don't even covet our neighbor's goods anymore. We just keep comparing – creating a new and higher level to attain – only to find ourselves lacking more as we accumulate more.

The major problem is that with this mentality, we come to view goodness, humility, truthfulness, charity, hope, and kindness, as things we'll work on after we lose our sense of lacking – or after we become 'fulfilled'. We're often too busy, and we have no time to work on, and respond to, things that will actually DESTROY THE SENSE OF LACKING (AND UNHAPPINESS) in our lives. Yet, our focus should be in three specific areas when we think about a sense of lacking.

First, this whole sense of lacking basically makes us feel as if we don't have 'enough'. We don't have enough money, good enough relationships, good careers, nice enough homes, it can be anything. Again, it really doesn't matter if we actually do or do not have enough of what we feel we are lacking. We feel deprived, left out, forgotten – ***and we don't like it.***

Second, with this feeling of not having enough, *we often find ourselves in a constant state of want*. We create our own silly slogans: “I am, therefore I shop,” or “I never met a shopping mall I didn’t like,” or “I owe, I owe, it’s off to work I go”. And we sometimes succumb to the deceptions and false promises without ever thinking twice or wondering why we want the many things which we place so much importance upon each day.

Third, if we have succumbed to this mentality in the past, we need to face it – and conquer this sense of lacking – or we will never be truly happy. It doesn’t matter the degree to which we are deprived, nor does it really matter what the specific thing is that we feel we lack. Unless we overcome our sense of lacking, our life can NEVER truly be fulfilled.

Just try your best not to get confused. You may really need another job because there is no room for advancement where you work, or you may be next on the firing line. You may need to start a business in order to fulfill a life-long dream, or you may need to seriously consider initiating or terminating a special relationship that you’ve been hesitant to address for sometime. Often, it’s simply a matter of one minor thing that will fester into what seems like a thousand other problems. This results because we may or may not be lacking something specific; however, we can drive ourselves to the point of panic because we refuse to focus on what needs to be addressed or dismissed.

Finally, we need to pledge to ourselves – and make a vow – that we will truly try to replace a sense of lacking, with a true sense of gratitude and hope. For if we fail to do so, we will never overcome those certain feelings which claim that we don’t have enough. We must try to discern between what we truly lack from some of the things that we’ve somehow been led to believe that we need. Only after doing all of this, and surrendering to true value, will we be able of truly succeed and achieving...and rid ourselves of a sense of lacking.

RECEPTIVITY ... Looking out for #1!

The Story of Randy Fischer:

Randy had just finished a long 10-hour day at work and was driving home for a late dinner. He was a hard worker and loved the challenge of his construction job. At work, he was always doing something new and he liked the fast pace. It was his personal life that was troubling him. While at home, he found himself eating more than usual; constantly flicking the channels on his TV to find the next game or action adventure thriller. His wife had also remarked that his weight problem would go away if he’d simply get out and do some exercise for a change. Randy liked his home and he appeared content to be just left alone to do whatever he wanted.

But he also roamed whenever the spirit moved him. He was the talk of the office, with his tails of drinking, parties, vacations, and weekend excursions. To Randy, there were simply not enough hours in a day to do everything he wanted to do. There weren't enough TV channels, vacations, wild parties, and sporting events to fill his senses. He felt that he loved his wife but somehow their relationship was getting a bit old – and he didn't know why. His ingrained sense of honor, along with 2 children, had kept him loyal during their entire marriage, but lately he found himself looking at the young women in the office. In fact, he caught himself doing a number of things he didn't like to admit to others while roaming around town and on his weekend excursions. Even his wife didn't know his problem.

Randy had developed a small cocaine habit and it was getting the best of him. He knew he had to quit but it just seemed like tomorrow was always a better day to try. So, he stopped his truck at a nearby diner and called his wife to tell her he'd be late because he had to take supplies back to the site for the next day. Instead, he headed to Rob's house to get high on white dust.

Little did he know that the road had a surprise all of its own. At first he thought his eyes were playing tricks on him, but in a second he brought his truck to a screeching stop and jumped out without the slightest bit of hesitation. The river was much higher than usual and was bopping the small car around like bumper cars at a local carnival. Worse yet, he could hear the woman and children frantically screaming for help without them knowing he was only 20 feet from them.

What could he do? He couldn't let them be swept out further towards the middle of the river because the current would take them under in no time. He grabbed a hammer and some rope and jumped into the swollen river. After a minute and a half he found himself hanging on their passenger door screaming back at the woman and children to stay calm. He broke the side window with his hammer and pulled a five-year-old girl out and strapped her on his back. Remarkably, the woman and her nine-year-old daughter were scared but unhurt. Randy calmly told the two that they had to get out of the car and hang on with him because the car was about to go under. In fact, twenty seconds after they got out, the car was tossed upside down and sank. After 5 to 10 more minutes of fighting the river's rage, along with the help of some passing motorists like Randy, everyone was pulled out to safety. And Randy was a hero.

He was also a changed man.

Immediately upon being pulled ashore, Randy sat down and wept. And for the first time in a long time he felt like a REAL man. It wasn't because of the physical strength that he had used, nor was it because of the reporters and emergency people telling him repeatedly how he saved the woman and two children. It wasn't the hug and handshake from the eternally grateful husband and father of those in the car. And it wasn't even the tears of joy he shared with his beautiful bride when she joined him in the back of the ambulance where he was being treated for his broken arm. Randy was wet,

cold, bleeding, in pain, and totally exhausted – yet more free than he had ever been before in his life!

And he didn't know why he felt so good.

He begged people to stop calling him a hero and kept asking the woman and two children how they were. The ambulance corps assured him they would be just fine while Randy kept asking if there was anything else he could do. They all just laughed and told Randy to lie down and relax. He was truly a new man!

RECEPTIVITY ... What is it?

It's the never-ending quest to receive (receptivity) or constantly 'get' things in life. This should not be confused with our need to be open – or receptive – to the World of Value, but rather limits itself to the prevailing notion that, in order to be happy, ***all we need to do is continuously feed our passions.*** Actually, it's one of the most damaging and destructive tendencies characterizing people today.

With receptivity, many of us tend to live in the ***me*** generation and, accordingly, everything that we then view and encounter in life is supposed to be for ***me***. Our thirst for entertainment is often unquenchable and we seem to always be looking for as many things (***for me***) as possible to fill our moments with each day. In order to do so, we've devised a smorgasbord of ways to tantalize our senses and feed our passions with just about every form of fun that we can imagine. In many ways, we have truly outdone the Romans, who gave us the gladiators and lions in the coliseum.

The problem of receptivity ***is immediately apparent when we look at our beautiful children.*** Generally speaking, children have more of everything today than any generation of children have ever had before. They have bigger schools, better clothes, computers, electronic games, TV shows, music boxes, sporting events and leagues, and much more. And as parents, we feel that the more that we are able to give them (and they receive), the happier and more complete their lives should be. The whole problem is that “drowning the senses” in every form of entertainment conceivable conditions our children to want more of everything – all of the time. ***Unfortunately, they have been subjected to a mind-set claiming that they need to have their senses entertained 24 hours a day.*** And all the time we keep working harder to give them the best of everything.

The whole problem of receptivity; however, is by no means limited to children. As adults, like Randy in the opening story, there never seems to be enough hours in a day to obtain all that we believe is truly ours. And this has nothing to do with greed or the pursuit of power. It is totally based on a dangerous creed that claims we were born to be served instead of to serve, to be loved instead of to love with all our hearts, and to always watch out for #1 instead of to give of ourselves totally and unconditionally in order to receive the good things in life.

This whole mentality bent on constantly getting things and feeding our senses is precisely ***the attitude adopted when we view the world and ourselves as if GOD does not exist.*** Drug abuse, corruption, broken homes, greed in all its forms, and more, will only leave our lives when we eradicate this absurd notion of receptivity and decide to respond to true value.

Luckily for Randy, the river helped wash him clean. For on his way to the next thrill, he was literally thrilled – almost to the point of death – precisely because he gave of himself completely. He didn't cry like a child because he hurt himself or due to some sentimental memories. No, his pursuit of the next 'high' was interrupted by the World of Value. And by making this leap outside of himself – a decision he claimed was something anyone would have done – he saw the shallowness of his life, and the love he truly had for his own family. He had given of himself totally and unconditionally, and had received more from this giving than by all of his previously selfish pursuits combined.

Christians should have no problem relating to this apparent contradiction whereby we claim that in giving we receive, in pardoning we are pardoned, and in dying to self we attain – everything. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian is called first and foremost to be an imitator of Christ, and does not have the option to pick and choose what he or she feels like doing. Christ owned the world yet entered it a pauper. He came to serve instead of being served, to love in order to show us how, and to take all of our transgressions upon Himself on the Cross; even though He had done no wrong. The message of Jesus is totally complete and speaks to all of us in so many concrete ways, if only we weren't so afraid to let go and maturely bend our wills a bit.

If we're ***willing to be honest*** with ourselves, we all need to personally come to grips with the simple fact that ***selfishness has taken over in so many ways.*** To varying degrees, depending on the person involved, SATISFYING SELF has become the top priority for a lot of us ... 24 hours a day.

And all of our lives will get a whole lot better, with a conscious and concerted effort to shed our selfish tendencies. This shedding effect affords us the opportunity to enter the arena where we can be truly joyous people. This arena is open to all, and demands a renouncement of our old (not so good) ways, a firm intention to amend and change our lives when we need to, and an approach to life that cooperates and heeds the call to true value instead of making up the rules as we go along.

Because more than anything else, a life based on RECEPTIVITY, or of having to constantly receive things in order to be happy, ***is actually in direct contrast to the very nature of love – which is diffusive.*** In other words, in order to love and be truly fulfilled we need to give love, participate with it, and accept it on its terms. The very act of creation is the primary example of this diffusive aspect of love.

Yet, somehow we're still confused by this great contradiction. This great warfare that EACH and EVERY one of us battles with (concentrating on giving instead

of receiving) has us confused. And unfortunately, when most of us get confused or come to decisive moments in our daily lives that call for us to make a change, we sometimes revert back to lazy, lukewarm, and self-destructing bad habits. And yet, in all of our deceptions and self-centeredness, we know what the true response should be. We know that we should be courageous. We realize that breaking out of our selfish, lazy, and immature ways will always be the right choice.

Just be careful not to be confused about receptivity. ***We should never feel guilty or strange about receiving good things.*** Happiness itself must be *felt* in our hearts. We can think of having a loving relationship with someone but it cannot make us happy; we need to actually ‘exchange’ love with someone and feel the happiness that love brings.

This is precisely why we can’t buy or coax ourselves into being happy. Standing in front of a mirror and telling ourselves to be happy, is an act of insanity. Likewise, trying to force the issue – in any aspect of our lives – only makes the situation worse. Yet, this is exactly what we do when we somehow convince ourselves that we need to be entertained at all times. The pursuit of the next pleasurable encounter actually becomes the new god in our lives.

The real danger of receptivity is that it creates an approach or mindset whereby ***we live each moment simply to satisfy our every lust and desire.*** Randy understood, all to well, a life governed by receptivity – of having to receive and be entertained at all times. But all the parties, vacations, and drugs, could not fill the emptiness awaiting his response to the World of Value. And no matter how hard we try, we can never replace the need to receive the truly good things in life with a never-ending attempt to drunken our senses with fun and games.

To say ‘no’ to receptivity, demands that we try to confront and overcome our own selfishness. We have to look at receptivity for what it truly is: the curse of the ‘me’ generation. It’s precisely when we abandon our selfish ways that we truly receive all that life has to offer. And this must be a DAILY and CONSISTENT effort on our part. All of our actions must begin to take on a new direction – a direction that is brought about by consciously merging our intellects and our wills to act in ways that will truly set us free!

FEAR ... The thief in the night!

We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

-- Winston Churchill

The Story of Angela Penny

“I’m really confused as to what the problem is with your PC, Angela,” said John, the head of troubleshooting at Adessa Corp. “I looked at it myself yesterday late in the afternoon, and I left you a note explaining what I did,” he added. “Yes, John, thanks...I got your note. And please thank your staff for me also, they did a lot of work on this crazy PC of mine. What do you suggest that we do?” asked Angela. “Angela, I’ll replace

it this morning with a spare one that I have down here in storage, and I'm ordering a new one for you today. I think you've been working it too hard, Angela. By the way, that's a great looking sailboat – the picture in your office. Is that yours?" asked a relaxed John. "Sure is," replied Angela. "Oh goodness, I'm late for a meeting; I have to let you go. Bye, John...and thanks again."

Angela wasn't late for a meeting. She sensed where John was going with the conversation, and she didn't want to go there. Angela knew that she was a beautiful woman – everybody told her all of the time. It was nothing against John either; he was actually quite nice and very handsome. It's just that she didn't have time for a man in her life. Besides, she didn't have a good track record of her own when it came to men.

Later that evening, she and her best friend, Vicky, went out to grab a quick sandwich at the new pub that had just opened close to the office. "Well, Angela, I like this place," said a spunky Vicky. "And I think that every handsome man in Atlanta is here tonight! Angela, those two guys at the bar have been staring at you for the last 10 minutes. I hope they come over." "You're wrong, Vicky," replied Angela. "They're looking at you. Why don't you go order one last soda? I have to go in 5 more minutes," said a hurried Angela. "Oh, come on Angela, you're always running to some meeting or running home," said Vicky. "Let's have some fun tonight and hang out. The scenery (men) is getting better every minute," sighed Vicky. "Nope, I have lots to do tomorrow, and I want to get an early start," replied Angela. "5 more minutes for me and I'm out of here."

At that moment, the waitress came over and said, "Those 2 gentlemen at the bar told me that they want to buy you both whatever it is that you're drinking." Angela interrupted, "Thanks anyway," as she nervously waived to the 2 men at the bar. "I have to get going. Please tell them thanks, but maybe next time." Angela gave Vicky a quick hug and dashed out the door. "See you on Monday, Vicky."

Actually, Vicky was right. Angela knew it as she dashed out the door, and even as she cuddled up and changed channels, searching for a movie on another lonely Friday night. Angela always ran away from men. She had developed a boatload full of excuses to ward off the constant requests for her phone number and dinner. She just couldn't allow herself to get hurt again. Not after enduring her Dad's mistreatment of both her mom and her all of the time, or how she felt after Scott, her only true love, had dumped her a year earlier.

Nine months passed, and Angela gave her friend Vicky another quick hug. "I'm so happy for you, Vicky," said Angela. "I hope you and Doug are very happy together. We're going to have the best time at your wedding reception, I can't wait," said an unusually enthusiastic Angela. "Thanks, Angela. I'm so excited. And so is Arnie," replied Vicky. "You remember Arnie, don't you, Angela? He flew in for the wedding earlier today and he's thinking of taking a job back her in Atlanta. He can't wait to see you again," said a smiling Vicky. "In fact, he and Doug are dropping off that new TV that I bought yesterday. They should be here in about 10 minutes," said Vicky as she peered at Angela for her normal reaction.

“I just remembered Vicky, I have to drop something off at the office...I’ll be back in an hour,” responded a newly tensed Angela. “Oh, no you don’t, Angela,” laughed Vicky. “I got you! Doug and Arnie aren’t coming over now, but Arnie does want to see you. No marriage proposals, Angela, he’s just eager to see you and say hi, that’s all,” laughed Vicky. “Angela, you are one of the dearest – and most beautiful – woman that I’ve ever seen. And you’re the best friend anyone could ever have,” said Vicky. “But why do you run away all of the time when men try to talk to you or ask you out? Aren’t you over Scott yet?” asked Vicky.

“Of course I am, even though I do miss him at times,” said Angela. “I don’t really know what it is, Vicky. I get so afraid when men start asking me for my phone number, and I don’t want to go out,” responded Angela, as she took a deep breathe and started to relax. “I’m so afraid of winding up like my mom or getting hurt again like I did with Scott. I just don’t want that pain again,” said Angela.

“OK, I understand, Angela,” said Vicky. “But Angela, are you going to spend the rest of your life in fear of what 2 idiots – your Dad and Scott – did to you?” The sound of Vicky’s words cut through Angela like a knife. And for the first time ever, Angela realized that her Dad and Scott still had control of her life. At that, Angela jumped up and said, “You’re right Vicky, let’s go pickup Arnie and Doug right now and go over to our favorite pub. I promise I’ll buy Arnie a second drink ... let’s party!”

FEAR ... The thief in the night.

We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

- Winston Churchill

Consider the time that Winston Churchill coined this phrase. The world was at war. Hitler threatened to take over entire nations and install his brand of evil (NAZISM) on the rest of us. For the English people, they were losing sons, brothers, and friends every single day. Bombing and air raids were as commonplace as morning tea. And yet Winston Churchill had the guts to tell his countrymen, and the rest of the world, that they had nothing to fear but fear itself. Thank God he did (and that many other brave people banded together with him) or Hitler may have very well achieved his goals.

Fear is perhaps one of the most influential forces in our lives. Unfortunately it dictates a lot of our actions (and lack of action). Its influence is noticeable in so many ways, that it is often difficult to fully explain all of its affects. There is the fear of heights, the fear of public speaking, the fear of rejection, the fear of failure, the fear of failed relationships, and the fear of all of the pain that we’ll endure if we should experience any of these things (or others).

Fear is also often good for us. For example, fear of the Lord is necessary and not a silly and cowardly fear, but a recognition of Him and the dignity that He commands from us. Fear is also often controlled by the virtue of temperance; whereby we act rationally and maturely instead of attacking all things in an impetuous manner. It also keeps us on our toes by prodding us to work hard so that we can provide for our families and ourselves; instead of being lazy and indifferent. Unfortunately, fear can paralyze us and control us to the point where we fail to strive for greatness.

When we fail to reach out to others in order to develop lasting friendships because we're afraid that we'll be rejected, we'll never know the beauty of loving relationships. When we fail to take risks (calculated, not insane risks) for our business, our spiritual life and for our daily tasks that demand the most of us, we'll stay forever saddled to the 'same old stuff, different day' routine. And when we fail to recognize that there are areas in our lives that we are truly afraid of approaching, we run the risk of living the life of a coward; and there is no joy to be found where cowardice abides.

In fact, many of us act out of fear more often than we do out of any other emotion – especially love. In doing so, we set a course for our lives that is difficult to navigate through rough times. A lively fear in any aspect of our lives can generally force us to act – or fail to act – in so many irrational and foolish ways ... and that's often where our troubles begin.

In effect, fear can paralyze us, and rob us of our peace – and our ability to pursue our dreams. It is precisely this paralyzing affect that fear often has on us that we all need to face. In other words, how do we respond to fear, what silly notions do we need to dispel about it, and how we can look at it in a way that will allow us to live a happy life. More specifically, we need to uncover the most vital aspects of fear (that are not readily apparent) and how it can control us and stunt our growth as people. Let's look at three distinct aspects of fear and attempt to tie the process together by uncovering what we can do to overcome it.

First, we need to discard the notion that all we have to do is rid ourselves of certain types of fear and we'll be happy. And while consistently facing REAL fear, and maturely responding to it, is ultimately what we all need to do each day, we need to understand that our knowledge of FEAR (in general) is often so limited and narrow. Most often, our initial desire to overcome fear is simply a desire to rid ourselves of a natural inclination.

For example, people will say that if you're afraid of heights, you should go to the top of a tall building and look down. If you're afraid of snakes then pick one up and hold it for an hour, and if you're afraid of the sight of blood, you should go to a hospital emergency room and try to help clean up after an accident. By facing these types of fears you won't be afraid of heights, snakes, or blood anymore. And as a way of overcoming certain fears, this approach has some real merit. Yet, too often this is where most people stop in life.

This is not to say that we shouldn't attempt to face these minor types of fears. Quite the opposite, taking the small steps are often the most important factors before we address the bigger ones. But the act of overcoming minor tendencies of our personality – which are often simply timid or natural inclinations and are not good or evil in themselves – has little to do with ridding ourselves of the REAL fear that we need to subdue in our lives. So, jump out of a plane, give a speech to a thousand people, or ask your dream-girl out for a date. Just remember that it's only the first step.

The second aspect of fear involves a mature confrontation with the way that we respond to so many values. Here we move much closer to uncovering the proper way to deal with fear in our lives. In other words, we should focus on how fear has a paralyzing grip on our relationships, our spiritual life, our work, our health, or our financial position. And this is often a difficult step to take.

Initially, we need to recognize – and admit – that we do act out of fear in a lot of ways. When our relationships are suffering, when our financial position is threatened, when our health is in trouble, or when some vital aspect of our life is under fire, we often get scared ... and we do a lot of crazy things. Our major focus is not what we've done in the past, but rather how we're going to confront – and overcome – our fears in the future.

Specially, how can we treat the ones that we love – and that love us – when confrontation arises? Do we always need to be the one who 'wins' or 'proves his point' so that we don't appear inferior or stupid? How can we respond to people in our lives that threaten our security, our jobs, or our relationships with another family member or friend? Are our reactions to the countless situations grounded on a creed backed by true courage, or are our responses (both actively and passively) often so silly and immature.

Recognizing how we SPECIFICALLY RESPOND to so many situations reveals a great deal about ourselves; especially when it comes to overcoming fears. We can entertain our fears – or overcome them – and our responses determine the direction that our lives take.

The third aspect of fear, and by far the most important, is the fact that we all need to COOPERATE with it much more and try to make it our dearest friend. For if our aim is to achieve some semblance (maybe even abundant quantities) of happiness, then we need to grasp that fear can assist us along the way. A healthy understanding of fear is the realization that we ***should indeed be fearful if we fail to develop our characters to their true potential.*** Our cooperation with fear should be a conscious awareness that by giving in to our childish and selfish inclinations we tend to drive our lives to ruin. And we can never be happy living this way.

More importantly, we need to understand that we all need to FAIL a lot more in life – and we need to allow others around us to fail as well. Marketing people call it testing, CEO's recognize it as the only way to learn, world-class athlete's understand that it is part of the journey, and people who aspire to greatness understand that it's the price

that needs to be paid. For a failure is not someone who tried something and was unsuccessful, but rather someone who succeeded - AT DOING NOTHING.

It is precisely when we overcome our own insecurities and selfishness that we tend to break a lot of the chains that fear conveys. When we understand that by giving in to our natural inclinations (i.e., laziness, greed, illicit behavior, deceptions of all sorts) we, in fact, often build the type of weak character that is unable to overcome even minor fears. For how can we expect to develop a character that is truly great, if we fail to act in ways that are honorable, truthful, and – good? ***Bottom line: Our fears of so many different things decrease, to the degree that we increase the moral fiber of our character.***

WINNING AND SUCCESS

Winning isn't everything... it's the only thing!
- Vince Lombardi

The Story of Vince Lombardi

Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach for the Green Bay Packers during the 1960's, was well known for his intensity and his desire to win. All of his players realized that they had something special in Green Bay and recognized the genius of Lombardi's coaching skills. They also realized that he was committed to teamwork and to them personally. He respected them as players and expected the same in return, as well as 100% commitment to the team. To Coach Lombardi, anything less than total loyalty to the Green Bay Packer's organization was unacceptable.

On one occasion, in the off-season, an attorney walked into Coach Lombardi's office. "Coach Lombardi," said the attorney, "May I have a half an hour of your time?" "Sure, what can I do for you?" responded Coach Lombardi. "Well, I'm the attorney for your starting right offensive tackle and I'm here to re-negotiate his contract for the next few season," said the attorney.

At that, Coach Lombardi stood up quickly and asked politely, "Could you excuse me for a moment please? I'll be back in a few minutes." Coach Lombardi returned 15 minutes later, apologized for his absence and again asked, "Now what can I do for you?" The attorney answered, "Well I'm here to renegotiate your starting right offensive tackle's contract."

Coach Lombardi leaned up in his seat, folded his hands together and said, "I'm afraid you're talking to the wrong coach. My right offensive tackle was just traded to the Philadelphia Eagles five minutes ago!" Coach Lombardi was renowned for treating his players like family and could not see himself dealing with people who were only interested in making money. The next season, he had a new right offensive tackle.

WINNING AND SUCCESS

Everybody wants to win...everybody. And everyone wants to succeed. Yet, winning and success are perhaps the most misunderstood subjects around. In fact, even the words of legendary Green Bay Packer's coach, Vince Lombardi, need to be clarified. According to Coach Lombardi, he believed that if you are going to pursue something, then you ought to pursue it with all of your might. In other words, all of your energies should be devoted to **WINNING!** So, regardless of the score at the end of the game, you are a winner when you give 100% all of the time. Coach Lombardi felt this way about his faith, his family, his friends, and his football team. And this commitment to **WINNING** at life made him a legend.

Unfortunately, all too often, many of us allow ourselves to get caught up in the "WIN-LOSE" mentality. So, if we win the game then we're "WINNERS" and the other team is "LOSERS." Or if we get the job promotion then we're a "WINNER," but if we don't then we're some kind of "LOSER." The list goes on and on. Yet, it's only when we create a WIN-WIN mentality – and apply it to our lives everyday – that we can actually become real WINNERS at life... and SUCCEED.

WINNING and SUCCEEDING are intimately linked together. They feed off each other and are essential for each other's growth. So, if our sense of WINNING or SUCCESS is, in any way, fouled up or skewed, it will profoundly affect our ability to believe that we are both WINNERS and SUCCESSFUL.

A winner requires an attitude that claims we will do our very best each and every day. We will devote all of our energies to WIN... but not at the expense of compromising ourselves or at the expense of someone else having to "lose." Our sole purpose is to strive for greatness – while often doing the seemingly little things – and bending our will towards always doing what is right.

Remember when we spoke about what makes a **good** woman? The same applies for a WINNER. A winner is never narrow or selfish. She is always inclined to help, and she's a person of true conviction. A winner recognizes that she must be diligent – and work extremely hard at perfecting her character, so that the TOTALITY of her life is comprised of truly good and beautiful things.

Success in life is the ability to understand and to put into perspective the carious WINS and LOSSES (accomplishments and disappointments) that affect us all. It has nothing to do with coming out on top each and every time. In fact, a SUCCESSFUL parent or teacher doesn't necessarily WIN every time. There are many outstanding parents and teachers whom often fall short of raising and teaching children properly. Similarly, there are countless successful professional athletes in their respective HALL of FAME that failed at their particular sport a lot more than they succeeded. Just consider the fact that Babe Ruth struck out more than anyone else in baseball. He also hit more home runs than anyone else (except Hank Aaron).

Understanding how each of us measures success plays a vital role in our lives. Many of us strive for greatness every day. We can be great parents, or CEO's, or workers, or children, but how we MEASURE success – in our minds – has a lot to say about how happy we will be, as well as how we will be able to “fuel” our attitude so that we can continue to WIN and SUCCEED in the future.

Anyone who has ever participated in sports understands this perfectly. Two athletes of the same size, skill sets, and abilities, may have drastically different views of what success means to them. One may be happy with a conference championship in high school or college while the other may only be satisfied with a big professional contract or winning the World Series. Similarly, some teams are satisfied with a winning season, while others aren't happy unless they are the champions.

Actually, the major battle for each of us is to convince ourselves that we can be WINNERS... and that we will never give up. This is a conscious choice that each of us makes and we make it every day of our lives. So, regardless of the final score, the profits at the end of each year, or the attainment of any particular goal, we can look in the mirror and smile because we know that we have given it our very best.

Everybody wants to WIN...and everybody wants to SUCCEED. Each of us can win and succeed if we formulate our attitudes and habits in ways that mold our intellects and wills to always do what is right. We are winners when we do the right thing!

FORGIVENESS...One of the greatest acts we can perform.

The Story of John and Vivian Steckel

It was 10:30 on a Tuesday night and Vivian still wasn't home. John paced the floor, dialing Vivian's cell phone every two minutes. Interrupted by his four-year-old daughter asking for a drink, John threw the phone on the sofa and directed all of his attention towards his little Annie. “When's Mommy coming home Daddy?” asked the inquisitive child. “Mommy will be home soon, Annie,” replied John. “Now let's get you back to bed... it's late and you need your sleep.”

Actually, John didn't know what time his wife was coming home. She had called and said that she would be “really late” working on a project, but John was no dummy. Ever since she took her new position at the company four months earlier, Vivian got home late three nights a week and she always seemed to have a function or party to attend on the weekends as well. Always the love of his life, Vivian had grown cold towards John. In fact, John had had enough. So, the next morning, he confronted Vivian.

“Honey, I want to talk to you,” said John sheepishly. “I know that you are seeing another man... I'm not stupid. His cologne is much stronger than mine and he always

hangs up when I answer the phone,” said John quickly. “Oh John, don’t be crazy,” replied Vivian “You’d be the first to know if I had another man,” she continued coldly.

“I’m trying to be calm about this Vivian,” said John impatiently, “But I’m not a fool. I’ll always love you, but I heard your conversation on the phone the other day – on the bedroom extension – and neither of you were discussing business...that’s for sure!” Vivian’s face turned bright red and she dressed quickly, without saying a word, and ran out the door and drove away. She came back two days later when John wasn’t home, packed up her belongings, and wrote a short note. “I love you and Annie,” it read, “but I have to go... I’ll call you.” Unfortunately, the call never came.

Six months later, the phone ringing at 3:15 in the morning startled John. “Hello John, it’s Vivian,” she said weeping. “Where are you Vivian? Are you OK?” John asked gently. “I’m OK, John. I’m in New York. I want to catch an early flight and come home to you and Annie, if you still want me?” Vivian cried. “Johnny, I’m so sorry,” she repeated over and over again. “OK my love, come home,” said John sincerely. “Give me your flight number and Annie and I will pick you up at the airport.”

After an emotional reunion at the airport, Vivian started explaining why she had left. Weeping like a child, she spoke about the initial excitement of the promotion, the move to New York, the wild parties, and the romantic encounter with one of the owners of the company. All the time, she kept beating herself up about how stupid she had been and how sorry she was.

“Vivian, wait a minute,” said Johnny abruptly. “I forgive you. Annie and I have been praying everyday that you would come back and now that you are here our prayers have been answered. We don’t care about the particulars of what went on in New York. We’re just happy that you’ve come home for good,” said John with tears in his eyes. “There’s been enough suffering and sadness. I forgive you. Let’s move on with our lives and make tomorrow a little bit better than today.”

FORGIVENESS ...The key to restoring love in our lives!

A humble and sincere apology, and act of forgiveness, or a lovely request to be forgiven, is infinitely more important than any business deal, making money, or other worldly accomplishment. Forgiveness is perhaps one of the most powerful acts that any of us can perform.

In fact, acts of forgiveness – or lack of forgiveness – have influenced history much more than many of us are willing to admit. Imagine what the world would be like if Hitler had understood forgiveness. World War II would not have occurred and 45 million lives would have been spared. Just think, the HOLOCAUST would not have happened! Imagine if all Jews, Christians and Moslems could be moved to forgive. The senseless (ongoing) killing and hatred in the Middle East would come to an end. And imagine if your family could practice true forgiveness; wouldn’t our lives be much happier with true peace?

The whole beauty of forgiveness is that it contains the only solution to our many problems once a wrong has been committed. And it's free! There can be no reconciliation without pardon. There can be no pardon without a humble change of heart – an awakening of the soul – and an act of forgiveness.

Again, forgiveness costs nothing, except the loss of some of our silly pride. It can be the most lovely and strengthening aspect of any relationship that we have. And it is open to us all. Yet, for far too many of us, forgiveness costs too much... we all need to change this.

To be able to forgive (and forget), to ask for forgiveness, and to accept forgiveness, are the three major aspects of forgiveness that each of us needs to apply to our lives.

First, we all need to be able to forgive – and try to forget – the wrongs that are committed against us. Lies, deception, and problems affect us all. It's only in our ability to forgive that we conquer these treacherous deeds and show them that GOODNESS – and a humble act of forgiveness – ***is bigger than they are.*** It also helps us stay pure of heart by allowing us to move on instead of dwelling on the wrong that has been committed.

This is why there is no sin (except one which is not repented) that can't be forgiven. God, in His infinite Mercy, always accepts us and forgives us when we ask for pardon. To do otherwise, would chain God, as it were, to sin. And God would never allow Himself to be chained to sin...not for a moment!

Second, not one of us is perfect. Unfortunately, we offend others and sometimes say and do things that are just plain wrong. This is apart of our humanity. Therefore, our willingness to ask for forgiveness affords us the best – ***and only*** – way to reconcile ourselves to another person once we've done something wrong. There is no other way; we all need to humbly ask for forgiveness once a wrong has been committed.

Third, each of us wants to be forgiven for the wrongs that we commit. We need to accept forgiveness precisely because it is the right thing to do. More importantly, accepting forgiveness “unchains” us from the isolation and pain associated with NOT accepting forgiveness. How many of us have witnessed the bitterness in someone that's caused by his unwillingness to forgive? And how many of us have witnessed the beauty of people reconciled by a humble and sincere acceptance of forgiveness? There is nothing more beautiful in the world!

Forgiveness offers us the opportunity to recognize our faults... and move beyond them. It also “unchains” us from the wrong that has been committed, by getting on with our lives and moving beyond our faults. All aspects of forgiveness unlock us from the solitary confinement that we create for ourselves when we fail to practice forgiveness. In affect, we are “thrust upon ourselves” when we fail to participate in

forgiveness and we allow the problem to fester and become bigger than it was by perpetuation the problems and allowing it to take hold of our hearts. Most importantly, we drive people to us when we forgive. We drive them away when we do not. Forgive, forget, and move on. It's the only way to lead a happy life.

COURAGE ... The cornerstone – the foundation to build upon!

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, who strives valiantly; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

-- Theodore Roosevelt

The Story of Booker T. Washington

Born a slave on a plantation in 1858 in Virginia, Booker T. Washington serves as an eternal source of courage for all of us. He held no bitterness in his heart against the Southern white people who enslaved him. Instead, he rose as a perfect example of a man who lived courageously when it would have been easy to do otherwise.

While still a small boy, he was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, and went to work in the salt-furnaces – and later the coal mines – of West Virginia. His days started as early as 4:00 o'clock in the morning. Being unable to go to school during the day, he made arrangements with a teacher to give him night lessons. His early struggle to attend the Hampton Institute is a lesson in pure...determination!

Always eternally grateful to his teachers “from the North”, he had no patience “with any school from my race in the South which did not teach its students the dignity of labor.” At Hampton, he learned that it was not a disgrace to labor; in fact, he learned to love it.

A realist and an optimist at the same time, Booker recognized the need for people to ‘lift themselves up’ by means of bringing value to themselves and to others in their communities. “The man who has learned to do something better than anyone else, has learned to do a common thing in an uncommon manner, has power and influence which no adverse surroundings can take from him.”

In one of his most famous speeches at the Atlanta Exposition, he gives us the immortal words, “Cast down your bucket where you are!” This was his response to cementing friendships in every way with the people of all races. It was his response to commerce, to agriculture, to encouraging each other in all things essential to mutual progress. Far from the cries of hatred and bigotry, his words and his incredible life dedicated to the near miraculous work at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, are what true heroes are all about.

Slave, free-man, salt-furnace worker, coal-miner, student, professor, loving husband and father, public speaker, friend of US Presidents, and founder of the Tuskegee Institute. The words of Booker T. Washington should hang framed in every home and stay lodged in all of our aspirations. He said:

“I believe that any man’s life will be filled with constant, unexpected encouragements if he makes up his mind to do his level best each day of his life – that is, tries to make each day as nearly as possible the high-water mark of pure, unselfish, useful living. I pity the man, black or white, who has never experienced the joy and satisfaction that comes to one by reason of an effort to assist in making some one else more useful and more happy.”

COURAGE ... The cornerstone – the foundation to build upon!

Courage is the cornerstone of our character. It is the juice that fuels our ability to stand up and be counted. And it is the fountain from which our acts of bravery – our numerous daily actions – nourish our entire personality. Fortunately, each one of us has the opportunity to live a courageous life.

Just as Randy Fischer (in RECEPTIVITY) jumped into the swollen river to save the woman and her children when their car was swept away, and Booker T. Washington exhibited in his entire life, so too can we make this ‘leap’ to a life fixed on acting courageously in all that we do. It is a conscious decision on our part and it is simply a matter of waking up to answer the call. Three brief aspects of courage will help us to uncover it a bit more clearly in our lives.

First, courage is a total response of our personality. Just as goodness envelops our entire selves, so too does courage. It is the moral strength that each of us exhibits in the face of danger, and it affords us the opportunity to live a life of consistency and greatness. Courage is the armor that we wear when faced with difficult decisions. It is the foundation that we build upon in all of our daily responses to the World of Value. Most importantly, courage is not an option that we adhere to whenever it fits our fancy or raises our visibility in some manner; it must be part of our personality just as our heart and minds are part of our anatomy.

Second, courage is a clear understanding of the danger that awaits us in so many aspects of our lives; and it is a consistent response in which we accept the danger

– ***and move beyond it.*** Bravery is a type of fearlessness – or courage in action – whereby we fully recognize that we’re going to do all in our power to endure (and hopefully prevail) in all of our particular responses. Yet, bravery does not entail a narrow or silly fearlessness, but rather an understanding that something more important than my own natural fear calls me to act. A fireman, blinded by smoke and raging flames, can make several trips inside a burning building to pull people to safety. He may be deathly afraid of the circumstances and the harm that may occur, yet he moves beyond his fears and acts with honor.

And this is a pivotal point to consider for each of us. We do not need to pull people out of burning buildings, or save people from raging rivers, or pull our buddy out of a foxhole, in order to be courageous people. Courage is a fundamental attitude on our part that we must apply to our lives every day that we awake; and we need to build upon it. We all need to recognize just how courageous our parents are as they have taken on the enormous responsibility of raising us and caring for us in so many ways. We need to look at: the courage of people who forego personal gain in order to serve others in their lives, the courage of our children when they walk away from trouble, and the courage of our loved ones who – day in and day out – remain faithful to us and work at trying to make our lives a little bit better because they’re there to help.

Understanding courage is recognizing that the seemingly endless list of selfless and honorable acts that we all perform each day are the ones that often go unnoticed; and they’re also the ones that count the most.

Finally, courage involves a...SURRENDER on our part. And this is contrary to our natural inclination to view courage as always having to overcome something. Yet, by surrendering to courage, we generally make peace with it. In doing so, we tend to stop the battles that often rage within us when difficult decisions come our way. We give ourselves the opportunity to become people that adhere to convictions and we consistently act as we know (and believe) that we should. We no longer make up the rules as we go along, or attempt to rationalize our way out of many things. Rather, we exhibit a daring fearlessness in all that we do because we recognize that doing otherwise is not an option for us.

Courage affords all of us the opportunity to face dangers in our lives with a conviction that we will never give up the fight, regardless of the many times that we may appear to fail at different things. It is a tempered persistence whereby we clearly recognize the dangers and pitfalls that await us in most of our actions coupled with an attitude that will press-on with a bold assurance that to do otherwise would be cowardly and wrong. And it is the part of each of us that we need to nurture more in our lives every day that we awake.

Calvin Coolidge said it best when he explained persistence: ***“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; un-rewarded genius is almost a***

proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent.”

Persevere in all you do. Take Courage and try with all of your might to adhere to the World of Value by moving beyond your fears. It's the only way to live a happy life.