

## LOW SELF-IMAGE

*\*NOTE: Need copies of Renegade Thinking Errors*

1. Last week we learned we need to change in three areas: behavior, identity and cravings. We learned that simply trying harder not to act out does not keep us from falling.
2. So what will make the difference when we are tempted that we do not act out on our desires? I believe the Bible teaches the difference will be our thought patterns. Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will” (NIV). When a 3-year old has a tantrum and won't share his toys, we don't sit down and try to figure out why he won't share—we just tell him it's wrong to be selfish and to start sharing! Our response to temptations is similar. We don't have to wait until we go through the next 12 weeks of group to stop acting out.
3. One of the signs of maturity is what is called delayed gratification. That means waiting to be satisfied rather than demanding instant relief no matter how inappropriate that relief is. There are definite thinking patterns of a self-centered, immature person. It is these patterns that feed the addictive cycle. (Look at the model of addiction from last week). While all of us have some of these thinking errors going on at one time or another, the addict has all ten going on all the time.
4. There's a trap many of us fall into. We can sometimes change our behavior, but we never change the direction we are headed—we never change our thinking patterns. And so we either go from one addiction to another, or we are on what some people call a “dry drunk.” We are still self-centered, angry thinking people.
5. Look at the list of thinking errors and see if you can identify any errors you don't think you have.
6. Our desire in the group is to have a safe atmosphere where you can learn to overcome temptations. Part of that process will be accountability. We will never demand from you more than you are willing to give, or judge you based on what you do or do not share.
7. Remember, the class will have a two-fold focus. First will be knowing Jesus in a deeper way and thus allowing Him to bring healing and freedom. Second will be overcoming temptations through the renewing of our minds and learning to tackle the trials in life in a responsible manner.

8. A glass of water wouldn't be attractive to you if you just drank a large glass of water, but would be very attractive if you just ran a mile. Our temptations are like thirst—they indicate there's something going on inside. Throughout this class we will learn not only how Jesus will fill that thirst, but we will learn how to stop turning to a sugary, salty glass of water that only temporarily satisfies, but leaves us even more thirsty, i.e. acting out.
9. So how do you change these thinking patterns? Seeing them is the beginning—changing your behavior and being open and accountable when you fail will help you see how ugly and disgusting they are. The hard pill to swallow is that it's a process. There are no overnight successes, no easy recipes to follow, just a person to lead us—Jesus.
10. This week starts four very heavy sessions because we are going to be dealing with our sins--some of the real sins that lie at the root of our addiction.
  - a. The first week we said that we overcome addictions in three ways: through growing up, through experiencing the Lords healing and through repentance.
  - b. I am convinced that most change in our lives as Christians, most sanctification, comes from discovering the sins that are in our lives, and then truly repenting of them. The more difficult part is not the repentance; it is the discovery and really owning up to them. I am convinced that the worst sin in my life was not my addictive behavior--although I thought it was at that time--but rather much deeper, much more deadly things. And some of them I have discovered only recently.
  - c. You might be saying, "Look, I feel bad enough about myself already; you want to make me feel worse." My answer is, yes, if that's what it takes to tear down the old false, coping person and to reveal the true person God called you to be. That is what I hope we will be doing these four weeks. Of course, this will be only the beginning, but it can be a very significant one as regards your healing.
11. We are all familiar with the expression that we are sinners saved by grace. That is so true, and it is our great assurance and hope. We have been saved, but many of the old sin patterns have not gone away. Instant sanctification does not come with conversion. When the Bible says that we have become "new creatures," it really means that now we can change and grow, whereas before we lived perpetually under the power of our sins. Now we can escape from the power of those sins that controlled us, even defined us, but the process is one of discovery and repentance.
12. With the title of this session--Low Self-Image--you didn't think I was going to talk about sin did you? Well, it wouldn't do much good for me to just talk about low self-esteem because it isn't

- something you can do much about directly, as you'll see in a minute. About all I could do is commiserate with you about it, and that would only contribute to one of next week's sins self-pity.
13. Chances are, you can't really deal with low self-esteem the right way now because you already have well entrenched wrong ways of dealing with it. It is a part of a pattern we all develop of meeting our own needs; taking care of our selves. But the tragic thing about these wrong ways is that they block what we really need to do to come to terms with our low self-esteem, and thus they block our healing. The chances are, your wrong ways of dealing with low self-esteem really are sinful. Our job is to deal with those sinful ways, and then the Lord can deal with the low self-esteem the right way.
5. Now, a little about low self-esteem:
- a. Generally, we believe it comes from living in dysfunctional family where the normal needs of a child: worth; significance; and security are not met.
  - b. Bill Consiglio makes a valuable distinction between our self-esteem and our self-image. Self-esteem has to do with how we feel about ourselves, and self-image with how we think about ourselves or how we think others see us. The two can be quite different, but when they are, which do you feel controls our life more?
  - c. There are probably few feelings more painful than low self-esteem or a deep sense of worthlessness, so we must find some way of dealing with it -- ways that will distract us from the pain.
14. Why are our self-images so hard to change? There are two reasons:
- a. First, they were formed when we were vulnerable and had nothing else to compare with. Growing up, the only thing we knew was what we experienced at home. When we were told things such as "You are stupid!" or "You are ugly!" or "It's your fault!" we had no basis to dismiss the lies.
  - b. Another reason our distorted images are so hard to shake is that they work for us. To understand how, let's explore the concepts of shame and contempt:
    - i. God has given us a wonderful gift of shame. Shame involves exposure; exposure of either our dignity or our depravity. Legitimate shame occurs when our sin our depravity is revealed. There are other times, however, where we feel shame when we feel vulnerable. We can experience shame because we have been victimized by others.
    - ii. We've all been the victims of other people's lust and anger. When I say lust it doesn't necessarily mean sexual lust. Lust is simply a passionately strong desire. It leads to consuming someone or something to fill an emptiness we believe God will not satisfy. Jealousy and envy are lust. But there are other

forms of lust. . . the manipulation and demand that someone conforms to our expectations. To relate to someone not for their benefit, but to get them to fill our need. To be lusted after is to be used.

- iii. We've also been the victims of others' anger. This again doesn't necessarily mean the obvious lashing out, violent display of rage, though it could. Anger can take the form of attack, but it can also take the form of abandonment. In essence, anger says, "Leave me alone!" The passions of one's heart—security and significance—are exposed in the presence of another's vulnerability. An easy way to make others not desire anything from us is to squash their desire.
  - iv. And so we desire intimacy—love and acceptance, a sense of connection—and what we get is used. We desire impact—affirmation, a deep sense of calling—and what we get is abandoned or attacked. The by-product of being used is you feel cheap. You feel empty, like you have nothing to give. The by-product of facing another's anger is you feel shattered. You feel overwhelmed and desire to just quit. And so we feel naked and alone.
- c. Our fallen nature instinctively finds ways to avoid these painful experiences. Since shame involves exposure, we find one of two ways to avoid others from seeing our humanness:
- i. One way is that we will try to rip the other's eyes out. While we don't do this literally, we do use contempt to blind the other person. It can be either aggressively through attacking them, or passively by making them unimportant.
  - ii. The other way is to divert their eyes from seeing us. We do this by pouring contempt on ourselves. By seeing ourselves as despicable and unlovable, we can avoid the pain of being used or abandoned; we simply figure we deserve that kind of treatment.
- d. Self-image is only one sinful way to cope with the feelings of aloneness and nakedness that come from being used, attacked and/or abandoned. Let's be careful here to distinguish between low self-esteem, which comes from being victimized by living in a fallen world and low self-image, which is a chosen (although it is frequently unconsciously chosen) way to deal with low self-esteem.
15. I know some of you might be thinking that Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." You think you can't love others until you learn to love yourself. Well, look at what Jesus said in Mark 12:31-33 — He said we are to love others as we love ourselves—not when we love ourselves. That's been the problem. We all love ourselves and think we know the best way to live our lives so we don't get hurt any more—so we don't get abandoned, so we don't get used. And when we can see a poor self-image as a strategy to deal with our pain, we can turn away from it and enter into an accurate self-image.

16. As we dig into the lessons these next 3 weeks, we are going to look at the sins that we use to deal with low self-esteem. If you struggle with a bad self-image, look at how each of these sins fuels a poor self-image.

### **Teacher's Testimony on self-image**

I grew up being:

- ! abandoned — older brothers one year apart; I was five years younger. My dad favored me, so I was alienated from brothers. My dad was an alcoholic and my mom was hooked on prescription drugs and co-dependent on my dad
  - ! attacked — violence; peers mocked me because of weight and asthma; later on mocked me because of my brother's feminine mannerisms; picked on by class bullies
  - ! used — sexual abuse; my dad always was comparing me to my cousins (like he did with his cars), etc.
17. I adopted this view of myself as a loser—a helpless victim. I found worth in being used. I began to live my life out of my image—dropping out of college, getting involved in drugs and alcohol—but I couldn't be successful at those either. I got involved in anonymous sexual encounters.
- a. You see, I never realized that deep inside I was in great pain—emotional and spiritual. I not only used drugs, alcohol and sex to numb the pain, but I had adopted a bad self-image to distort and smother the dignity that God created at the core of my being. At an early age, fueled by sins of self-centeredness, self-pity and anger I chose to believe a lie about myself.
  - b. It worked for me because if I were nothing but this loser, this toilet bowl for people to use (but only when they need to), then all the junk happening in my life made sense. And while it was painful to have this image of myself, it wasn't nearly as painful as having to accept the fact that I had no control of how others treated me and how painfully disappointed I was when I allowed myself to embrace what I really desired.

#### **Scripture Memory Verse:**

*2 Cor. 5:17 (NASB)* Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

**Assignment for the Week:**

1. Look at the list of thinking errors and see if you can identify any errors you don't think you have.
2. Do you tend to deal with shame through others-contempt or self-contempt; passively or aggressively?
3. If you struggle with a distorted self-image pray that God will reveal how it works for you.
4. Read the handout "Holy Spirit Conviction vs. the Devil's Condemnation"

**SUGGESTED READING:** *Cry of the Soul*, by Dan Allender