

# Loving and Forgiving Yourself

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Sometimes it is easier to forgive others than ourselves. And self forgiveness is especially difficult when we don't love ourselves. When this is the case, we are more likely to allow others to define and control us or expect relationships and material things to make us feel good. The truth is, happiness and positive self-worth must come from within.

## How do I know if I love myself?

One good indicator of your level of self-esteem is your comfort being alone. Persons who dislike being alone and avoid it at all costs usually don't like themselves very much. This intense discomfort with solitude can put a strain on relationships and make friends and family feel smothered.

On the other hand, some people with poor self-esteem never want to be with others. They isolate themselves and avoid contact with others. This isolation keeps them from developing supportive relationships. Obviously, persons who feel good about themselves have balance. They are comfortable with relationships but believe their self-worth does not depend on others.

## Spiritual Messages

Our view of ourselves and God is shaped by experiences with childhood family and other relationships. These messages can play in our head and affect our relationship with God and others. The spiritual messages you received may have been spoken or unspoken. The unspoken ones are often the most powerful because actions speak much louder than words. Your self talk (what you say to yourself) based on these message tapes can affect how you feel about yourself and others.

To help you understand how your spiritual view of self evolved, complete the following exercise. In the space below, write out the messages you received about these areas of spirituality and how they impacted your self-image and your relationship with God. Beside each topic label, write the names of those from whom you received the message:

*God's love:*

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*God's grace:*

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*Sin:*

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*Salvation:*

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*Forgiveness of self:*

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*Forgiveness of others:*

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Review your answers. What patterns do you see? Who had the most positive spiritual impact in your life? Who had the most negative impact?

### **Rewriting Negative Messages**

The best way to overcome negative messages is to replace them with positive self-talk. Practicing positive self-talk will eventually erase the old tapes that run in your head. Rewrite the distorted negative messages you listed above, converting them into positive messages you can use to change old tapes. In order to internalize the new messages, use them as daily affirmations. Affirmations are positive declarations about yourself that can give you personal strength and positive self-esteem. Put your list of affirmations in a prominent place such as your refrigerator or bathroom mirror. Read them every morning when you get up and every evening before you go to bed. Ask God to help you bring these new messages into your heart.

*God's love:*

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*God's grace:*

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*Sin:*

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*Salvation:*

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*Forgiveness of self:*

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*Forgiveness of others:*

**Common Negative Spiritual Messages**

Check out the following negative spiritual messages. Circle any that apply to you.

- *My sins are worse than the sins of others.*

You may have heard the phrase: “There’s nothing new under the sun.” This also applies to sin. None of the sins we commit are any different than sins committed in bible times. David lied, murdered, and committed adultery yet he was forgiven. Paul persecuted, tortured and ordered the murder of Christians. Paul failed do good things he knew should be done but did the evil things he should not do (Romans 7: 19, 25). He called himself the “worst of sinners” (I Timothy 1:15) yet knew he was forgiven and his salvation secure (Ephesians 1:13-14). If Paul the chief of sinners was saved, you can be saved no matter what your sins are. James said, “We all stumble in many ways.” (James 3:2)

- *I can’t pray to God because I don’t live the Christian life I should. I’m not sure he’ll hear my prayer.*

Do you believe Paul’s prayers were heard? Paul struggled to live the Christian life but knew he had a place in heaven. He made many mistakes, but forgave himself and moved on with his life (Philippians 3:10-13).

Paul tells us that Christ and the Holy Spirit present our concerns, interceding for us when we cannot pray:

*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5-7)*

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. (Romans 8:26)*

*Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)*

Does this sound like Paul thought his prayers were not going to be heard because he failed to live up to the Christian ideal? Paul believed that God would hear and respond to his requests even when he sinned.

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory. (The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians 1:13-14)*

Jesus asks us not to give up on prayer:

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (Luke 18:1)*

- *It is hard for God to love me.*

God's love will always be there for you. God's love is so great that it is difficult to comprehend. Heavenly love is especially difficult to understand if one has never experienced unconditional love here on earth. The apostle Paul wants us to have the power to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:17, NIV). No matter what you do, God will continue to love you.

Some believe in "daisy salvation" based on the premise that God's love and our salvation is determined by how close we are to the Christian ideal at any given moment. In other words, He loves me, He loves me not; He loves me, He loves me not--depending on whether we are good or not. God's love is that of a father who loves his children even when they misbehave.

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)*

### **What Else Can I Do to Forgive Myself?**

- Treat yourself as you would someone you care about. Take care of yourself physically and emotionally. Set and maintain appropriate boundaries with others and avoid exposure to persons who treat you in a demeaning or abusive manner.
- Accept yourself as human and less than perfect, but loved by God anyway. People with poor self-esteem tend to beat themselves with their mistakes and expect more of themselves than they do others. Avoid catastrophizing or exaggerating your mistakes. Try not to over focus on a single negative detail and dwell on it until it overshadows the entire picture and you no longer see the positives. Not everything that goes wrong is due to some inadequacy on your part.

- Avoid cognitive distortions or faulty thinking. Be watchful for “all or nothing” thinking where you see yourself as a total failure if your performance falls short of perfection. Avoid jumping to conclusions, reading the minds of others, and predicting or anticipating the worst.
- Avoid the misleading assumption that your negative feelings about a situation reflect the way things really are. Just because you feel it doesn’t mean it is true. Carefully examine the big picture and try to decide objectively whether your feelings match the reality of the situation. Make sure feelings are based on the current situation rather than your history.
- If there are factors that affect your ability to overcome distorted, faulty thinking or negative feelings, see a counselor or doctor to determine if depression, other mood disorder, anxiety disorder or other physiological or emotional issues are present. If these issues exist, their presence can make forgiveness of self and others very difficult. Effective treatment can restore your ability to experience joy and celebrate life.
- Confession is good for the soul. Sometimes sin acts as a catalyst for a deeper, closer connection with God. Talk to God and tell him everything. He will keep your secrets and sins confidential and lighten your load by removing the guilt.

*When I kept things to myself, I felt weak deep inside me.*

*I moaned all day long.*

*Day and night you punished me.*

*My strength was gone as in the summer heat.*

*Then I confessed my sins to you and didn’t hide my guilt.*

*I said, “I will confess my sins to the Lord,” and you forgave my guilt. (Psalms 32: 3-5)*