

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE



FROM FEAR TO LOVE

DAN PEDERSEN

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

Copyright © 2012 Dan Pedersen

Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations were taken
from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission.

*THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ANYONE WHO HAS
EVER STRUGGLED WITH CHRISTIAN
FUNDAMENTALISM, OR ANY KIND OF RELIGIOUS OR
PSYCHOLOGICAL OPPRESSION.*

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

Feel free to share this ebook via email or post it on your website or blog.

INTRODUCTION

Our emotions go up and down. And if our level of confidence is attached to our emotions, our confidence will go up and down with our emotions.

When we're feeling good our confidence will be through the roof, and when we're feeling depressed our confidence will be in the cellar.

As I've heard many athletes say over the years, "don't get too high with the highs or too low with the lows."

We've all had moments where we've starting something new, full of zeal, not seeing future obstacles as much of a problem. Yet once we started running into some of those obstacles (and some others we didn't anticipate) it wasn't long before we found ourselves back at the beginning trying to regain the confidence we started out with.

Those are situations where we're basically just riding our emotions. After we come down from the emotional high we started out with we eventually recognize it for what it really is.

Relying on our emotions doesn't produce real confidence. We might *feel* confident, but underneath that cloud of emotion is an insecure human being.

Pride

Another distorter of real confidence is what I call *false pride*. Like many English words, the word *pride* has more than one meaning. Some good and some not so good.

The type of pride I'm referring to is *an excessively high opinion of oneself*. It's what some people would describe as *overconfident, arrogant, pretentious, or conceited*.

False pride, is over-compensation for our insecurities. It's evidence that we're not very confident at all. Real confidence doesn't need to try to impress anyone.

When we're over-confident, we're not being honest with ourselves, or with others. We're holding a false image of ourselves in our mind and wearing it as a mask.

Real Confidence

Real confidence is a quiet assurance. It's a small voice deep within us that just *knows*.

The problem is that voice gets drowned out by the excitement that comes from achievement and the despair that comes from failure. It also gets drowned out by the voice of false pride telling us things that aren't true.

Real confidence has a realistic view of itself. It knows what it's capable of and not capable of. Real confidence doesn't need to over-compensate for anything. It doesn't have to try harder to be more than what it already is.

Real confidence is secure enough to let someone else take credit for something, without losing its own identity.

Real confidence doesn't beat itself up when it makes a mistake. Real confidence recognizes its weaknesses and limitations, and is secure enough to admit when it's wrong.

ONE: TRUST

Real confidence starts with *trust*. We can't have confidence in something if we're not willing to trust.

In order for us to trust, we need a *reason* to trust. At the very least, we need to have a reasonable expectation that the thing to be trusted is reliable -- that it won't fail.

The more we trust something, the more we will rely on it. And the more we rely on it, the more our confidence in it will grow.

When I was going through army training, one of the requirements was to repel from a thirty-two foot tower and later a seventy-foot cliff, via a rope tied around my waist and upper thighs (known as a "Swiss seat"). The instructors would say to those of us who were afraid of heights, "trust your equipment."

I remember how empty the instructors' words seemed at the time. I didn't believe that a man-made rope tied together by *me* was something I could trust with my life.

In retrospect, I think the instructors' point was that although the rope was not perfect, it could be trusted to a certain degree, because it had been relied upon many times before.

The instructors had confidence in the Swiss seat because it had never failed them. But what if I were the first person to ever repel down a tower or a cliff? What if I were the first person to experiment with a Swiss seat?

What if I had no instructor to tell me “this has been done before, you can trust your equipment?” How confident would I be? Where would I get the confidence to begin?

If confidence begins with trust, where do we get that trust to begin with?

We all have the ability to trust things or people we’re not familiar with. But it starts out as a simple childlike trust. It starts out as a simple childlike trust and has the potential to grow into more mature confidence through experience.

A Higher Power

If we’re capable of having a simple childlike trust in natural, imperfect objects, how much more are we capable of trusting something that is perfect? What would our confidence be like then?

I’m referring, of course, to something *supernatural*. A “higher power.”

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

To an atheist, there's no such thing as a "higher power". Atheists are only willing to trust what can be proven scientifically.

As a result, atheists can only trust what is imperfect. Atheists can only be confident in things that are uncertain. Things that have the potential to fail.

To an atheist, all of existence is nothing more than something that has happened by chance. To an atheist, nothing can be perfect, therefore nothing can be trusted one-hundred percent.

She has no reason to hope for the best, because to her there's no higher power to ensure that the best will happen. She doesn't believe that a higher power is guiding or protecting her in any way.

To an atheist, life is a few years of good and bad times, followed by death. Never to exist again. There's nothing he can fully trust. Nothing he can fully rely on. And therefore nothing to be truly confident about.

Without the existence of a higher power, we have no reason to even believe in ourselves, let alone a god. Because if we're not a creation of God, we have no significance. Our only self-worth would come from what we can do through our own limited resources.

Our destiny would be merely what we're able to create for ourselves, in a world full of danger and uncertainty.

Although some people claim that they don't have a god, the reality is that everyone has a god of some kind. *Anything*, or *anyone*, can be made into a god. But nothing can be made into a higher power.

In other words, a higher power either exists or it doesn't. Man cannot create it. But man can worship anything or anyone *as* a god, whether it's a higher power or not.

The reality is that we can't have real confidence in something that is uncertain. And the things of this world are uncertain.

We can "trust our equipment" to a certain degree, but our equipment *could* fail. Real confidence can only be found in something that will *never* fail.

To say that we can only get real confidence through a higher power, is not to say we'll never have doubts. We *will* have doubts.

When we have doubts, it's because we've temporarily lost sight of the source of our confidence. But when we fix our attention back onto the source, our confidence returns.

Why Trust God?

In order for us to trust God, we need to know that God is good. More specifically, we need to know that we're loved by God. Not only that we're loved, but loved *unconditionally*.

If we know that we're loved unconditionally by God, we know that he'll never fail us. (I don't think God has a gender, but I'll use the term "he" for simplicity sake).

Most parents know that in order for their children to trust them, the child needs to know they are loved. And that they won't be abandoned, even when they misbehave.

It's the parent's unconditional love for their child that causes the child to trust them. It's the parent's unconditional love that convinces the child they can rely on their parents.

When we love our children unconditionally, we are giving them a glimpse of God, because God *is* love.

The story of the *Prodigal Son*, found in Luke's Gospel, is a great story about a father's love for his son. It depicts God's unconditional love for us.

After receiving an inheritance from his father, the younger son left home and "squandered his estate with loose living." After realizing he was broke, the

son tried to work his way out of it by taking a low paying job. Then he “came to his senses,” and made plans to go home:

“I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’”

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

But the father would have none of it. He said to his workers:

“Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

The father didn’t hesitate for a second to forgive him:

“While he was still along way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

In fact, the son was already forgiven. He just didn't know it until he came home. His "loose living" was destroying him, but all the while his father still loved him and was waiting expectantly for him to return.

Perceptions of God

During part of my childhood and most of my teenage years I regularly attended a Christian denominational church.

Although I spent a lot of time at church, and listened to hundreds of sermons, I had difficulty understanding who God was.

At age fifteen I said the "sinner's prayer" and sincerely meant it, and was "born again." Not long afterward, I began struggling in my "relationship" with God.

I had been told that once a person is born again they will no longer sin. At least not on purpose. I also learned that even if you have sinful thoughts, it's the same as actually committing those sins, because you desired it "in your heart."

I didn't want to displease God in any way, but I had difficulty not having "sinful thoughts." Some of my thoughts and behavior had improved literally overnight after being "born again". But they were far from perfect.

I began to wonder if I really was born again. I reasoned that after “sinning”, God must have changed his mind about me. I thought I’d have to continually ask God for forgiveness every time I sinned.

I went up and down on this roller coaster for about three years and became very frustrated and depressed.

Another complex for me was when I would hear a preacher or another Christian say “speaking in tongues is a sign of being filled with the spirit.”

I witnessed many people “speaking in tongues,” crying, and waving their hands in the air while praising God. I didn’t do, nor did I have the desire to do any of that.

I felt completely out of place. I wondered how I could possibly be a Christian if I wasn’t like the other Christians. I knew something had changed in me after I said the “sinner’s prayer,” but I could clearly see I was different from many of the people in my church.

So I continued to believe I wasn’t born again after all. I figured God hadn’t fully accepted me yet, because I wasn’t “faithful enough”.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

I even prayed for the ability to speak in tongues. And I tried putting my hands in the air like others were doing. But I just felt stupid doing it.

I eventually felt God was holding out on me. As though there was something more he wanted me to do in order to prove myself to him.

I began to tell God I couldn't live up to the standard *he* had placed on me. And I questioned his love for me. I said to myself, "God must be egotistical and selfish if he wants me to 'worship' him and be his 'servant' and love him."

I gave up and said to God I was no longer going to live under *his* oppression and was determined to enjoy my life. I decided I would do what I thought was best for myself, and was determined not to feel guilty about it anymore.

My new life free from *God's* oppression eventually included weekend drinking binges, bar fights, and a few failed relationships. I also developed a negative attitude, which led to me quitting my dream of becoming a professional hockey player.

After approximately ten years of living this way, I became very stressed and began having anxiety attacks for the first time in my life. I also had problems sleeping at night.

I had no inner peace, and began looking for it in different places.

I read a book on Buddhism, written by the Dali Lama. I tried meditating. I tried listening to the sounds of the ocean from an internet recording, to help me sleep at night. And in an effort to find some hope and inspiration, I read cyclist Lance Armstrong's book about his survival from cancer.

These things made me feel a little better temporarily, but they gave me no lasting peace. I knew something was missing.

These things actually led me back to reading the bible. Although I wasn't ready to confront God through prayer, I thought I could still find some peace through the words of Jesus.

Although there was no breakthrough at first, I did experience a greater sense of peace and comfort when reading. His words "come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" strongly appealed to my situation.

One night while driving, I heard a message on the radio by a preacher talking about how if you're confused about life and wondering why you are where you are, don't worry, because God has a plan for you, just trust him.

He also talked about how God loves us and wants only the best for us. I remember feeling a strong sense that what he said was true.

But I tucked it away in the back of mind, as if to say “I know that’s true, but there are some things I want to do before I get serious about having a relationship with God. I don’t want to go through the experience of trying to prove myself to him again.”

It was as though I decided to save God for when I hit rock bottom.

A couple of months later, I was sitting at my computer when I felt a strong urge to make peace with God. I had a revelation that the only way I was going to find peace was to reconcile with God.

This time I wasn’t able to tuck it away as a fail-safe for later. I had a strong revelation that all of the years I had spent trying to ignore God were worse than the years when I was trying to please him.

I was tired out. I was done trying to make myself happy, and done trying to figure life out. I came to terms with the fact that life without God was pointless.

I gave in that night. In my heart I asked God to forgive me, and to take my life and make it what he wanted it to be. It felt as though a huge burden was

lifted off of me. It felt like the beginning of something new.

I had a similar experience after saying the sinner's prayer when I was fifteen. But this time it was different. This time it didn't feel like God would be angry with me if my thoughts and actions weren't perfect.

This time, somehow, I knew that all God ever wanted from me was to just put my life in his hands and trust him.

I began to know God in a more personal way, rather than as an authoritarian who just wants a bunch of servants.

I was beginning to realize that God wanted to share his love, joy, and peace with me. That he wanted what was best for me. And that he didn't expect repayment.

My old way of thinking looked something like this:

*Make a mistake - feel guilty - beg for forgiveness -
make a mistake again - feel guilty - beg for
forgiveness . . .*

It should look more like this:

Make a mistake - acknowledge it - move on.

Fear of God

Some people believe we should fear God. But I believe that fearing God is really about being in *awe* of him. To be in awe of God means to have deep respect for who God is, and what he's capable of as creator of the universe.

There's no reason to be *afraid* of God when we know God loves us. Being afraid of God is what sometimes motivates us to *perform* for God, rather than trust him.

When we know that God is good, and that he loves us, we're free to make mistakes. We know that we won't be condemned for our failures.

This doesn't mean we have a "license to sin". It means that when we do sin, we're forgiven. We simply need to be willing to receive that forgiveness and move on. We're the ones who beat ourselves up about it.

Trying to perform for God through good behavior will inevitably suck the confidence right out of us. Because every time we screw up we'll make ourselves feel guilty.

The condition of our heart is what really matters. Either we've placed our trust in God's love or we haven't. That's what it boils down to. All God is looking for is a *willing* heart.

Our willingness to receive God's love is what will cause us to do good. When we allow God to do good *in us*, he will do good to others *through us*.

God's Character

Jesus said and demonstrated that God is not an authoritarian who we must please through good behavior. He taught people that life is about love, not rule keeping.

The purpose of the Old Testament laws may have been to demonstrate that we're not able to live up to God's standards.

It may have been meant to demonstrate how weak we are, and that we need God himself to bridge the gap between he and us.

The writer of the book of Hebrews described Jesus as the "exact representation" of God (1:3). Jesus represents God's true character. Which is *love*. All we need to *do* is accept that love.

One of the reasons we have difficulty trusting God is because we're so used to not trusting *people*. We find it difficult to believe that God will not let us down, because so many *people* have let us down.

But we cannot compare God to people. We don't know anyone who can be trusted one-hundred

percent of the time. Only God is faithful all of the time. Even when we're not.

Falling Short

None of us behave perfectly. We all "sin". Which means to "miss the mark," or to "fall short." Nobody can hit God's target of perfection. Our arrow will never hit the mark.

As the Apostle Paul said, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Our weaknesses keep us dependent on God. If we were able to behave perfectly, we would think we didn't need God.

Life is meant to be lived one step at a time, and making mistakes is part of life. It's one of the ways we learn. Just as a loving father would not punish his toddler for falling down, neither does our Father punish us for our failures.

A loving father would focus on his child's progress, not on failures. And if a man can love his child that way, how much more does God love us?

TWO : WHO WE REALLY ARE

An inhibitor to trusting God is *control*. When we're not trusting God, we're trying to be in control. But a natural expression of trusting God is to let go of control.

Trying to be in control is merely our attempt at making ourselves feel secure. But the truth is that it only gives us the illusion of security. It's really nothing more than a mask for our insecurities.

Only by giving up our efforts at gaining control do we hope to obtain real security. Real security can only be found in trusting that God is already in control.

God is already in control. We just get in the way when we try to assume control. There's nothing we can do to stop God from doing something, but I think God sometimes chooses not to do things when we try to make things happen that only he can.

In other words, by not trusting God to do it, we actually getting in our own way.

Making Peace With Weakness

The reason we're insecure is because we have weaknesses. Before we can let God's love be our strength we must first admit that we need it.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

As long as we keep up the charade that we can take care of ourselves, we remain closed off and continue masking our insecurities through failed attempts at control. The key to experiencing God's love is *humility*.

We need to admit that we have weaknesses. It's okay to have weaknesses. There's not a person alive who is not weak in many ways.

The sooner we admit that we're weak and let God be our strength, the sooner we'll have reason to be confident.

If we're not willing to admit that we're weak, we're only fooling ourselves. And that false confidence will come crumbling down when we eventually come face to face with the weaknesses we say we don't have.

Real confidence is different from *acting* confident. How can we know what real confidence is if we're merely *acting* confident?

We can never know what real confidence is until we are willing to make peace with our human condition, weaknesses and all. Once we make peace with the truth of our weaknesses, we are set free from living a lie and free to live in reality.

When we know we don't have to rely on ourselves all of the time, it takes the pressure off. It's that pressure which often weighs us down and discourages us. When we let it all go and simply trust God, we begin to see what real confidence is.

No matter how strong we think we are in a particular area of our life, there's always another area in which we're not strong. And the fact that we live in frail human bodies is a testament to our overall weakness.

Humility is the pathway to real strength. Humility is absent when we're trying to be in control. A humble person is someone who has made peace with the fact that they're not perfect and don't have to be.

A humble person is willing to admit they don't have all the answers, or even a fraction of all the answers. A humble person is someone who is willing to admit they're not in control.

Value

Admitting that we're weak doesn't mean we should think less of ourselves in terms of our value. It's simply a matter of coming to terms with the fact that we *are* weak and that we need help from someone who is *not* weak.

Our weakness has nothing to do with our value. In other words, our weakness is not a sign of worthlessness. It's the opposite. It's a sign that God

wants to take care of us, because we are valuable to him.

Many people suffer from a poor self-image and they have difficulty viewing themselves as valuable. It seems that people who grow up in abusive homes have an especially hard time believing that they're valuable.

It's difficult for someone to believe they're valuable if they grew up being treated like they're not. But the truth is that everyone is valuable, regardless of the way they've been treated by others.

When other people treat us like we're worthless, or as though we're inferior to them, it may cause us to think less of ourselves. But it's only a distraction from the truth. The truth is that every one of us is just as valuable as the other.

We have a habit of judging and criticizing one another according to our own standards. We're expert judges, because we've been judging others our entire lives. But nobody can correctly sit in judgment of another person. Another person's opinion of your self-worth is worthless.

Nobody is qualified to assess the value of another person. We may be experts at the *act* of judgment, but we're not experts when it comes to making the *correct* judgment.

We also tend to define our value by our occupation. The question “so, what do you do?” is a defining question in our society.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with that question. Usually, it’s only for the purpose of starting a conversation or to show interest in another person. But sometimes it’s a probe to find out where a person ranks in society.

Even when we don’t ask the question with the intention of ranking the person, we still make a subconscious judgment about them.

If someone says they work as a janitor, they don’t usually get the same favor from others as those who say they’re a doctor. Most people think doctors are more important than janitors. Many janitors themselves probably think the same thing. This is the sort of mentality that causes people to think less of themselves.

When we define ourselves by what we *do*, rather than who we *are*, we limit our self-worth to the judgment of others.

A person’s job or title doesn’t define who they are. It may provide some insight into their character, but it doesn’t paint the whole picture.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

Our value as a person is not determined by our upbringing. It's not determined by how others treat us. It's not determined by what people think. It's not determined by our occupation. It's not determined by good deeds. It's not even determined by us.

Our value simply is what it is. It has been there since the beginning. Nothing can change that. We were born with it. We don't have to go looking for it or try to fabricate it.

For argument sake, if we're going to judge a person's value based on what they do rather than who they are, we cannot limit our judgment to the person's occupation. What about everything else they do when they're not at their job?

What about the people who are janitors eight hours per day, but the rest of the day they're a terrific spouse, parent, care-giver, or volunteer?

Or what about *how* a person performs their job? Not only is a doctor not necessarily more valuable as a person than a janitor, but the *job* of doctor is not necessarily more important than the *job* of janitor. What matters most is *how* and *why* the job is done.

What if a janitor possesses a great attitude. An attitude that is an inspiration to others who come into contact with him or her? This might cause the observer to question their own attitude. Perhaps the

janitor's attitude inspires the observer to be happier with their own life.

We cannot measure the impact that one person with a positive attitude can potentially have on those around them.

A positive attitude can be contagious. If one person is affected by it, the benefits of it can spread to many others. One person with a good attitude can directly or indirectly have a positive impact on the lives of countless people.

Potential

Not only are we valuable, but in terms of our physical, mental, and emotional attributes, we possess God-given potential. In other words, we're all born with raw undeveloped potential.

It's not uncommon for us to compare our abilities with the abilities of others. We have a tendency to overlook our own abilities and desire the abilities of others instead.

It's fine to appreciate the talents of other people, but it's not wise to desire another person's abilities while overlooking our own.

When we focus on what we *don't* have, it becomes difficult to see what we *do* have.

Consider the following story:

An African farmer heard tales of other farmers who had made millions from discovering diamond mines. The farmer became so ecstatic of this thought that he could hardly wait to sell his farm and go searching for diamonds himself.

He spent the rest of his life wandering Africa in search of diamonds, but he never found any. Worn out and exhausted, he threw himself into a river and drowned.

Meanwhile, back at the farm he had sold, the new owner happened to be crossing the stream that ran through the property when suddenly a flash of blue caught his attention. He knelt down and picked up the interesting stone, and being that it was a good size, he decided to keep it and add it to his mantle in his home.

A few weeks later, a friend was over visiting and curiously picked up the stone and nearly fainted. He asked the farmer if he knew what he had found. The farmer replied “No.” He said he thought it was just a pretty crystal.

His friend went on to tell him that he had found one of the largest diamonds he had ever seen. The farmer then shared that there were hundreds of those types of stones in his stream, maybe not as big, but just as beautiful.

Needless to say, the farm that the first farmer sold so that he could search for diamonds turned out to be one of the most profitable diamond mines on the entire continent.

How often are we like the first farmer, failing to be patient? We go off on never ending searches for other people's diamonds when we already have a diamond mine buried within us.

Sometimes when we look at the talents of other people, it seems like their lives are more prosperous or even superior to our own. Part of the problem is related to what I mentioned previously about societal rankings.

It's easy to think less of our own ability if other people are more popular than we are because of theirs. But the truth is that just as a person's value cannot be determined by other people, neither can a person's potential be determined by other people.

Sometimes other people are just farther along in discovering and refining their potential than we are. That doesn't mean their potential is superior to ours. Potential is useless as long as it remains potential. It doesn't add value until someone begins to develop it.

Instead of focusing on what we don't have, we should rely on God to reveal to us our own unique potential and yield to him as he brings it to fruition.

Not only are we valuable, each of us has something valuable to offer. But this can only be realized by the power of God working in us and through us.

Opinions

What others think of us, doesn't change who we really are. Another person's opinion doesn't change our value or our potential. We're all valued equally by God. Nobody can change that.

Unfortunately, this doesn't always deter us from saying things to one another that are devaluing. (We don't always intend to devalue each other, often we don't even realize we're doing it.)

Although our words are sometimes false, they can still cause damage, because the recipient may believe them. Such words can alter the way we view ourselves, if we allow them to.

But what God thinks of us and what we think of ourselves is more powerful than what other people think or say about us. Sometimes we just need to be alone in a quiet place to reaffirm to ourselves who we really are.

We often beat ourselves up over what others think of us. Even if they haven't *said* anything. We try to figure out what they're thinking, but more often than not we probably get it wrong.

Even if they do say it, and it turns out not to be very positive, it doesn't change reality.

We also try to change other peoples' opinions about us. But if we would simply trust in who we really are, we could allow others the space to think whatever they want.

This doesn't necessarily mean that what others think about us won't bother us. But we don't always have to defend our own honor.

When we try too hard to gain the approval of people who are negative toward us, we are playing their game of insecurity. It's because of their own insecurity that they attempt to tear us down.

If we're desperately trying to seek someone's approval, we may find ourselves pretending to be something we're not. We shouldn't allow someone else's opinion to control us.

The reality may be that the person we're trying to convince doesn't want to understand or accept us anyway.

Trying to convince people of things they don't want to believe, is usually a waste of time. If they don't agree with us the first time we say something, they probably won't the second or third time either.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

We have nothing to prove to anyone in terms of our personal value and potential. If we know the truth, we have everything we need. We don't need to seek the affirmation of others.

All we're doing in those situations is trying to obtain our self-worth through the approval of others (who likely don't care about us anyway). All it will likely do is demonstrate to them that we're not as confident as we say we are.

Silence however, can be a powerful testimony. Ironically, people are more likely to approve of you when they see that you don't need their approval.

It can be difficult to accept that there will always be people who don't like us. But if we change in order to please one person or group, there will be another person or group who won't like the new person we've created.

We have a habit of focusing on ourselves too much anyway. Maybe somebody you know didn't say hello to you today, or maybe they were rude to you. That doesn't necessarily mean they don't like you. It could mean they were disturbed about something completely unrelated to you.

Maybe they had a rough morning, or maybe they struggle with negative thinking. Maybe something

was bothering them and those feelings were carried over into their interaction with you.

It's difficult to keep outside interferences from changing us. It's tough to be yourself in this world. But we shouldn't put our trust in outside circumstances.

Like emotions, circumstances change. They're unstable. And we can't find stability in something that's unstable. We need to anchor ourselves to the solid and immovable truth of who we really are.

THREE: ETERNAL HOPE

It can be a liberating thought to consider that this life is short and that we're going to leave this world some day. Viewing life from an eternal point of view like this can help us put things into proper perspective.

If our perspective includes nothing more than what we've experienced so far in this crazy world, it's easy to become discouraged and lack hope. Especially when times are tough.

But when we know that tough times are only temporary and that this life is merely a snap of the fingers compared to eternity, it gives us hope for a better future. One that is free from the troubles of this temporal life in the flesh.

When we know that this present life is a mere spec of time compared to eternity, and that eternity is going to be a blast compared to what we've experienced so far, that can give us tremendous confidence.

We would be wise to remind ourselves once in a while that life is bigger than what we've experienced so far and that there's a better life awaiting us.

Purpose

When we look at life from an eternal perspective we're less likely to do things in a hurry. If you recognize that this life is not the end, why hurry?

This doesn't mean we should be lazy and do whatever we feel like doing and waste our time. But being in a hurry is not the same as living with purpose.

It's possible to be in a hurry, but not really be doing anything purposeful. It's also possible to do things with purpose without being in a hurry. Very rarely is there a need to be in a hurry.

Even when urgent action is required it's important to pace ourselves. Imagine you're a police officer responding to an emergency. What good would it do you (and the person in need of assistance) to drive so fast that you get into a collision on the way and not make it to your destination?

It's a relief to consider that life is much larger than we are and that we don't have to be in a hurry.

It's a relief to consider that life in the flesh is short and that we don't have to worry a lot about things that aren't that important.

When we consider that our time here is short and that we're here for a reason, we're less likely to

worry about trivial issues and things that are out of our control.

We're here for a reason. We all have a purpose. God reveals our purpose to us, little by little, as we rely on him.

The Search for Meaning

Victor Frankl was a Jewish Psychiatrist who was held prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl explained that finding meaning in life was central to his survival and the survival of other prisoners he knew.

We all need a reason to go on. Especially during the hard times. Knowing that our life has meaning, even if we don't yet know what that meaning is, can give us great hope.

This doesn't mean that God will always save us from our physical suffering. There were likely many prisoners in those camps who received revelations from God about the meaning of their suffering, but died anyway. The point is that our lives *do* have meaning, and the mere revelation of that reality can be a motivational factor for survival.

I watched a show on T.V. recently featuring some of the surviving British soldiers from the D-Day battles. One of the men said many of his comrades had

“premonitions” about their death. “They knew they weren’t going to make it,” he said.

The soldiers who had premonitions knew their time in this life was up. God didn’t save their physical lives, but their lives had meaning nonetheless.

The Journey of Love

Life is a journey, and we learn as we go. Nobody has a complete understanding of the meaning of life. Ironically, that seems to be part of our purpose -- to learn about why we’re here.

I think the purpose of life has something to do with love. We exist *for* and *because of* love. There’s nothing more powerful or more mysterious in our human experience than love.

We’re here to learn about love. We’re here to learn how much we’re loved by God and how to *be* that love. I haven’t found anything better to live for or anything I’m more willing to die for.

I’ve tried living for personal pleasure and personal achievement, but those things only left me frustrated, confused, and unfulfilled. When we make life all about ourselves we set ourselves up for disappointment. Selfishness is misery. If we don’t have love we don’t really have anything.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

The kind of love I'm referring to is the kind of love that is self-giving. The kind of love where you desire to place the needs of others ahead of your own. The kind of love which forgives unconditionally.

Learning about this kind of love is the main purpose for our existence. It's the only thing that can give us any real confidence in a humanity that has been at war with itself for thousands, possibly millions of years.

This quote by C.S. Lewis makes for a fitting end to this short chapter:

“Life is short. The world is fragile. All of us are vulnerable, but we are here because this is our calling. Our lives are rooted not only in time, but also in eternity, and the life of learning, humbly offered to God, is its own reward.”

FOUR: PERCEPTION

What we think about, becomes our reality. What we dwell on can affect our actions, and our actions often produce feedback.

In other words, what we focus on has the potential to come full circle back to us and further shape our perception of reality.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said it succinctly: “life consists of what a man thinks about all day.”

House Of Thoughts

I once heard speaker and author Joyce Meyer say that each of us “lives in a house made of thoughts.” Just as any solid house needs a solid foundation, we need a solid foundation under our house of thoughts. We need to dig deep to see what the foundation of our house of thoughts looks like.

As John C. Maxwell wrote in his book *How Successful People Think*, “you can’t build a house in mid air.” Which is where a lot of our thoughts come from. Many of our thoughts are not built on the foundation of truth.

The first five years of a child’s life are the most important years of their psychological development. During these formative years we receive a lot of information before we’re able to differentiate reality

from fiction. Our parents are largely responsible for laying the foundation of our perception of the world, but as we get older we're more able to differentiate fact from fiction.

Our perception of reality is largely influenced by a culmination of many thoughts that we've had over the course of our entire life. The foundation of our thoughts is built on belief -- the things we believe to be true. If we believe something to be true, we're more likely to dwell on that very thing. And the more we dwell on it, the more we believe it.

At some point in our lives we need to ask ourselves what we believe and why we believe those things. If we discover that negative thinking is the source of many of our troubles we can agree with Albert Einstein who once said, "we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Words

We often underestimate the power of words, whether it's the words of another person or our own.

Speaking negative words causes us to think negatively, and thinking negatively causes us to speak in a negative way. Conversely, if we speak positive words we'll think in a positive way, and if we have positive thoughts we'll speak positive words.

It's a cycle that repeats itself and can get stronger through repetition. The more we hear something, the more likely it is we'll believe what is being said. This is true whether it's the words of another person or words coming from our own mouth.

We often repeat things we've heard others say without even knowing if those things are true. We're quick to believe things that *seem* true and things we *want* to be true.

We tend to repeat the things we believe, over and over in our mind, and to others. Sometimes with great conviction. But the truth is sometimes we don't have a clue what we're talking about.

We hear every word that comes out of our own mouth. The more we hear those words, the more we believe them. The more we believe them, the more we think about them. And before we know it, we're entrenched in a particular belief.

The Pretender

Isn't it interesting that sometimes thoughts seem to pop into our head out of nowhere? Sometimes they're thoughts we don't even agree with, and we feel ashamed for entertaining them.

There seems to be some sort of struggle going on for our attention -- a war, where our mind is the battlefield.

Television skits that depict a devilish figure standing on one shoulder and an angelic figure standing on the other, are a simple, but effect illustrations of the suggestive forces at work in our mind.

Although there are no actual angels or devils sitting on our shoulders whispering into our ears, these forces are no less real.

The Apostle Peter, in one of his letters, said the “adversary prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”. Of course, we know that the devil is not literally prowling around in physical form. It’s in our mind where our “adversary” attacks us.

Who or what is this adversary? Is it an actual spiritual being trying to deceive us? Who knows? Either way, it makes for a good illustration.

I once heard pastor Peter Youngren point out that the verse I previously quoted, states that the devil prowls around *like* a roaring lion. Youngren suggested this particular statement seems to indicate that the devil is merely a *pretender*.

Knowing ahead of time that not every thought that pops into our mind belongs to us and that we have the option of rejecting them (or better yet *ignoring* them), gives us a starting point for our defenses.

Many thoughts will come into our mind, some good and some bad, but the only thoughts that belong to us are the ones we choose to believe.

Herd Mentality

Our thoughts affect our view of the world. Another great quote illustrating this point is one I found in Dan Miller's book, *No More Dreaded Mondays*: "we don't see things as they are; we see things as we are." (Anais Nin)

We really do see things through our own lens. It's interesting how our views change over time. When I look back at some of the views I used to have I'm amazed at how much my perspective changes over time.

Something else Miller mentioned in his book was how cows frequently follow one another in a predictable pattern. He said they don't challenge the pattern even when it's clearly self-defeating.

He mentioned that scientists have likened this behavior to human thinking when it's unchallenged. It's known as "cow paths" in the brain. He also mentioned that these cow paths often keep us from seeing all there is to see.

We've all at one time or another been fooled into believing things that aren't true. It makes me wonder what things I believe right now that aren't true.

It's important that we examine the foundation of our thoughts. As Socrates said, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Influences

Societies define their own cultural standards and traditions, and the people are judged on the basis of their conformity to those standards and traditions. Generally, if a person is not willing to conform to popular opinion he or she is likely to be marginalized by the community.

There are also subcultures. Moving from one town to another. Working for a different company, etc. Sometimes there can even be cultural differences within a small family. If a person were to go against popular opinion within these subcultures, that person might find him or herself becoming unpopular among the people in the group.

Our perception is heavily influenced by cultural norms and traditional beliefs. For instance, my definition of religion might be quite different from how most people would define it. I define religion as *a set of rules that one must observe in order to earn favor with a God or Gods.*

I don't consider myself a religious person in that context, but others might label me religious simply

because I believe in God. But to me, believing in God is not a religion.

Look at Jesus. He was not religious. He was a revolutionary in a society where religion was the law. His radical claims about God were considered heresy. His message upset the religious leaders of his day so much that they crucified him.

Just as the definition of religion differs depending on who you ask, so does the way individuals define who God is. I hesitate to call myself a Christian sometimes, because people have different ideas about what a Christian is. There are hundreds, even thousands of different denominations, all with differing beliefs about Jesus and God.

Many people believe they need to be a member of a particular church in order to be considered a “real” Christian. For me, it was outside the walls of a church building that I learned about God’s true character.

At www.freebelievers.com there’s an article titled *The Battle for your Mind*, written by hypnotist Dick Sutphen. In the article, Sutphen describes how preachers, politicians, lawyers and salespeople have used hypnotic and subliminal messaging to manipulate people.

Sutphen specifically mentioned the eighteenth-century revivalist preacher, Jonathan Edwards. He

said Edwards stumbled upon some of these techniques and used them to convert people to Christianity. One of whom committed suicide and several others developed suicidal tendencies because of Edwards' preaching.

Edwards was known as a fiery preacher, who used guilt and the fear of hell to convert people to Christianity. Many preachers to this day have used Edwards' methods.

Many of these preachers probably don't know they are using manipulative methods. They're probably just doing what they were taught. And some of them may not be using them at all. The point is that these methods are being widely used. So beware.

Be careful about what you expose yourself to. Much of our perception is influenced by other people. If we want to know the truth and live with confidence we need to learn to listen to our inner-self. That's where we'll find the quiet voice of God.

My perception of God has changed a lot. I used to think that God would bless me if I did good and punish me severely if I did bad, unless I asked for forgiveness (and even then it might not be enough).

In the past, I was never quite sure if God actually forgave me. I would think that he had just barely

forgiven me and that I would have to show him how sorry I was.

It was outside the walls of a church that I began to see who God really was. I also began to notice things about other people. I began to see that much of what I had learned from others -- the negativity, the fear, the doubt, the gossip, etc., was mostly not true.

I began to see how much other people's opinions, culture, group mentality, and society in general affected how I viewed the world, myself, and God.

I was discovering that much of the things people say are backwards and how easy it is to get sucked into their way of thinking. My eyes were beginning to open for the first time.

FIVE: FOCUS

The most common thing that keeps us from doing the right thing is *fear*. Fear is what holds us back from following the path we know we should take.

We're all familiar with this fear. We all feel it and we're all disappointed about how often we give in to it. Probably the biggest fear for most of us, besides death, is the fear of what others think of us.

Fear is quite normal, but although we often *feel* fear, we don't always have to give in to it. Underneath our fears, exists a passion to do what we know we should be doing.

The times when we want something the most are usually the times when we're attacked the most by fear. When this occurs we have to choose to ignore the fear and step out in faith.

We all have a passion for something. Sometimes we have to jump in feet first, not knowing what the outcome will be. But usually doors will open for us eventually.

If we step out in faith and later realize that we were wrong, that wrong step may turn out to be a stepping stone to something better.

And sometimes the decision is the right one, but our projection of where it would lead was wrong. It makes me think of the proverb, “the mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

To quote Helen Keller:

“Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure.”

I wish I had the guts to live that way more often. You really have to fight for it. Fear will jump all over you when you try to live with that attitude.

Negative Thinking

Dwelling on everything wrong with the world doesn't do us any good. There's always going to be something wrong with the government, our job, co-workers, clients, friends, family, spouse, body, the weather, etc.

There will always be things that are wrong and things that will go wrong. There will be things that we don't like about certain events and certain people, but dwelling on the negative is a confidence killer.

How can we expect to live with any real confidence if almost everything we think about is negative?

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

We shouldn't ignore problems or put our head in the sand about important issues, but it doesn't do any good to constantly dwell on the negative.

I'm the type of person who likes to know the truth. Even when the truth is tremendously negative. I could speak at length about government corruption, but what good would it do? It's important to talk about it once in awhile to bring awareness to it, but it doesn't do any good to be obsessed with it.

There will always be corruption in this world. But we can still do and experience many good things in our life, and trust that God will work things out for our good, regardless of corrupt individuals.

We should give the majority of our attention to positive truths, rather than negative ones. That's where we'll find the confidence to move forward and remain at rest in the midst of a troubled world.

This also applies to how we think about the people in our life. What good does it do us to think the worst about other people? Nobody is perfect. I can find something wrong with anyone and anyone can find something wrong with me.

If you're married, how could you ever expect to have a peaceful marriage if you always focused on your spouse's flaws? What about all of the positive traits that you married him or her for? And all of the

positive traits that you've discovered since then? Dwelling on everything wrong with your spouse will surely lead to conflict.

We can't change other people, and in many ways we can't even change ourselves, but we do have the option of asking God to help us.

Being Realistic

There are many people who believe in the power of positive thinking. Positive thinking and positive self-talk can be very effective, but it has to be in-line with reality.

For example, if I'm trying to build a positive image of myself in my mind, but my motivation comes from a desire to impress other people, I'm not being realistic.

Why? Because I'm trying to become someone I'm not. I'm trying to find self-worth through the way other people view me.

If I decide to become a professional football player when I turn 40, but have never played a game of football in my life, I'm not being realistic.

The idea behind positive thinking and positive self-talk is to get our thoughts and words in-line with who we really are.

Our thoughts and words need to be true to our identity and our God-given potential. Otherwise we're likely trying to be someone else or trying to do something we're not meant to do.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of who we really are and what we're supposed to be doing. We need to ignore the negative comments made by others and the ones we sometimes make about ourselves.

It does us no good to have a negative opinion of ourselves. Being negative toward ourselves will get us nowhere and will only drag us down. Also, the more negative we are toward ourselves, the more negative we'll likely be toward other people.

Even if we can only find one good thing about ourselves to think about and talk about, at least that's a starting point. We can at least focus on the one thing we have identified. We can think about it and even speak it to ourselves if necessary.

Our own words toward ourselves are more powerful than the words other people speak about us. We know ourselves better than anyone else does.

Forgetting What Lies Behind

We can't change the past. What's done is done. We all make mistakes. Making mistakes is part of life.

Dwelling on former mistakes doesn't make them go away (but often we can learn from them).

There's not one person alive who doesn't make mistakes on a regular basis. Sometimes we make the same mistakes over and over again for years before we finally learn to overcome them. And there are some things that we'll never overcome in this life.

Sometimes we learn from our mistakes right away and sometimes it takes a long time. If it doesn't happen overnight, it's okay to give ourselves some mercy. We don't have to beat ourselves up about it. We just need to be determined to leave it behind and move on.

This doesn't mean we should make excuses for our failures, but the truth is we don't always learn to overcome them right away. And the only way we can make any progress is to leave the mistake behind and stop worrying about it.

Johnny Cash once put it this way:

“You build on failure, you use it as a stepping stone. Close the door on the past. You don't try to forget the mistakes, but you don't dwell on it. You don't let it have any of your energy, or any of your time, or any of your space.”

We'll never be perfect in this life. Dwelling on mistakes and shortcomings will make for a long

miserable life. It's better to recognize our shortcomings, admit them to ourselves and to God, and move on.

Don't get struck in the trap of self-condemnation and guilt. Keep moving forward.

Moving on doesn't mean that we don't care. We care, but we also recognize that dwelling on the negative doesn't make it a positive. It only magnifies it and often makes it seem worse than it really is.

Admitting our mistakes and sincerely asking God to help us, is a testament to the fact that we care. We'll all have to do that many times in our life.

Our failures do not dictate who we are. Or as Zig Ziglar said, "failure is an event, not a person." People may sometimes identify us with our failures, but those failures are not a true indication of who we really are.

Our willingness to confess our failures to God and trust him to use those failures as stepping stones to future success is a more accurate indication of who we really are.

Counting Our Blessings

It's easy to dwell on what we don't have and ignore what we do have. But dwelling on what we don't have ultimately leads to disappointment.

The habit of focusing on what we don't have comes from our insecurity. We think having more, will bring us contentment. We think that once we have more, *then* we can start enjoying life. But the truth is that once we have more we're still not content.

An unhealthy desire for more is the very source of our discontentment. It's by taking account of and appreciating what we already have that we can be content.

This doesn't mean we should never want more than we already have. But we should avoid an unhealthy desire for more. An unhealthy desire for more is the type of desire that seeks to fulfill what it cannot.

By focusing on what we don't have we not only make ourselves feel worse, we often don't get what we want either. Even when we do get what we want we're usually disappointed. We're like a child who whines for a new toy. We just can't live without that new toy. But we quickly tire of it after we get it.

If we were to win the lottery today or get a promotion at work we'd probably lose appreciation for it after awhile and start thinking about all of the things we still don't have.

As difficult as it can seem sometimes there's always *something* or *someone* to be thankful for. There's

always something good that can come out of a seemingly negative situation.

We have a habit of overlooking the little things in life. Little things that actually aren't all that little. They're only little insofar as we treat them as little. They're usually the things in life that are free.

Little things like being able to get out of bed in the morning under our own power. Is that a little thing? We treat it that way. We don't appreciate how important that ability is to someone who can't do it.

How about the ability to see? Or the ability to read and write? Or not having any major health problems? Or having food in the house and a warm dry place to sleep at night?

How often do we take these things for granted, as if they are rights rather than privileges? When did they go from being a privilege to being a right? It's important that we recognize them for what they are: *gifts*.

Everything we have is because of the grace of God. We haven't done anything, nor can we do anything to earn God's favor. But we can be more mindful of our blessings. That itself is a blessing.

Several years ago I contracted Mono -- a virus that weakens the immune system and causes extreme

fatigue. It was one of the lowest times in my life. It was especially difficult because of the length of time it took to fully recover from it -- almost a year. It was a long year and even though I eventually developed an appreciation for some of the “little things” that I had been overlooking I still spent a lot of time focusing on my problem.

Focusing on the problem didn't help one bit. I failed to realize there were many people in worse situations than I was. I felt like I was being cheated. I failed to realize that my health wasn't a *right*.

We don't earn good health. There are some things we can do to increase our odds of having good health, but at the end of the day it's out of our hands.

My health problem was quite minor compared to what many other people go through. Think of all the people who have had Cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, etc.

Think of all the people who one day were feeling fine, but the next day they couldn't move the left side of their body because of a stroke.

Things can always be worse than what we're currently going through.

While I had Mono, my grandmother was dying of liver failure. She was literally on her death bed. But I

was so focused on my own situation that I failed to see how small my problem was in relation to her's.

If we live with the attitude of getting more, while not properly appreciating what we already have, we're likely deceiving ourselves. We need to take account of what we already have before we can appreciate anything that we might gain later.

The best things in life really are the little things. The free things. The simple things.

Robert Louis Stevenson said it well:

“The best things are nearest: breath in the nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand, the path of God just before you. Then do not grasp at the stars, but do life's plain, common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things of life.”

Keeping It Simple

We often make things more complicated than they need to be. But a simple approach to life is the best approach. As Henry David Thoreau wrote, “our life is frittered away by detail . . . simplify, simplify.”

When we find ourselves getting confused and frustrated, that's a sign that it's time to simplify. It's a sign that it's time to get back to the basics.

We're constantly bombarded with information. It seems like the world is constantly trying to get our attention. Trying to conform us. Trying to get us to follow its rules. Now more than ever it's important to keep things simple.

When we simplify, we're better able to focus on what's most important.

One of the ways we make life more complicated than it needs to be is through excessive *reasoning*. When making a decision it's important to weigh our options, but when we continuously jump back and forth from one option to another we aren't making a decision at all. All we're doing is occupying our mind and keeping it busy.

Trying to reason everything out usually just leads to confusion and frustration. Often, we just need to keep things simple and move on.

One Step at A Time

We can't do everything all at once. And anything worth pursuing is likely big enough that it can only be realized one step at a time.

If I tried to write this entire book all at once I would be quite disappointed at the end of the day when I see that it's nowhere near finished and the quality of writing is below the standard I had envisioned. This

book has to be assembled, piece by piece, over an extended period of time.

We can't expect to produce anything of real significance, or learn something in depth, without allowing some time to unfold. Life is a journey taken one step at a time. And there are many steps.

As Albert Einstein said, "the only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."

Trying to do too many things at once will result in frustration. It's comforting to know that we don't have to figure everything out all at once. It's comforting to know that we can approach life one moment at a time.

Terry Fox illustrated this well. Fox was a Canadian athlete who lost most of his right leg due to bone cancer. Terry later set a goal to run across Canada on his one good leg and one primitive artificial leg.

His plan was to run from coast to coast, Newfoundland to British Columbia, in an effort to raise money for cancer research. Terry spoke of how he didn't focus on the enormity of his task all at once. Instead, he focused on one small milestone at a time:

"I broke it down. Get that mile down, get to that sign, get past that corner and around that bend. That's all I thought about. I didn't think about anything else."

SIX: REST

One of the most powerful things we can do is stay calm under pressure. Sometimes there's nothing we can do about our circumstances, but we can do something about what happens within us.

If we can remain calm during stressful situations, we have something those situations cannot take away from us. And this gives us power over them.

No matter what situation we find ourselves in, nothing can steal our peace unless we allow it to.

As the Psalmist said, "surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me."
(Psalm 131)

It's easy to lose sight of reality when we allow ourselves to become agitated. It's easy to lose sight of what's really important and become overwhelmed with negative thoughts.

We all lose our cool occasionally, inwardly and outwardly, but we don't have to let it drag on and ruin our day. It's best to attack it as soon as possible, learn from it, let it go and move on.

If it happens again an hour later or ten minutes later, press the reset button and do the same thing. If we

allow something to continue to agitate us, the longer we hang onto it, the worse it will seem. It will move further and further from reality and will suck the energy right out of us.

Casting Cares

The only effective way to keep ourselves from being agitated, or to *compose and quiet our soul*, is to “cast your cares”.

In other words, let God work out whatever is bothering you. Give your cares to God. It’s a matter of turning our focus away from our circumstances and turning it toward God, remembering that he’s in control and will work things out for our good.

Worrying doesn’t cause problems to go away. It only intensifies what we dislike about the situation. And as Jesus said, “who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?”

Worrying, is linked to our desire to be in control. We fear what might happen if we aren’t in control of our circumstances. But the truth is we aren’t in control anyway. We just think we are.

It’s a tough battle we all go through, to stop relying on ourselves and rely on God instead. I struggle with it every day, but I know God is the answer to all of life’s issues.

I've been down the road of self-sufficiency many times. It's a road that leads to nothing but confusion and frustration. It's a road that takes me nowhere but around in circles.

Giving Up

We don't need to have everything figured out. What we need is to just let it all go and give up. That type of statement goes against the grain of what many of us have been taught, but it's true. It's okay to give up sometimes. When you're wrong, give up. The sooner we give up, the sooner we win.

We tend to think of giving up as a sign of weakness, but sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's a sign of strength. Giving up is not inherently bad or good. What matters, is *why* we give up.

If you were on a road trip and found out halfway to your destination that you've been going the wrong direction, would you keep going that way? No, you would give up that plan and start a new one.

We need to give up trying to navigate the roads of life according to our own plans. We need to quit trying to find the way on our own, and let God be our GPS.

Living In The Now

Dwelling on the past can rob us of the present. The more we try to relive the past, the more difficult and frustrating it is to do.

It's nice to remember good times, but we can't go back and live there again. We have to live in the present. We have to rest in the moment.

We can't save up all of our past experiences and rest on them. We have to live in the now and move forward, ready to receive new pieces of life's puzzle.

As we move forward, the pieces of the puzzle seem to come together on their own. And the more pieces we get, the clearer the picture becomes.

As the puzzle comes together and the image becomes clearer, the more we realize how big the picture is and how many pieces of the puzzle we don't have.

If we don't enjoy the now, we won't enjoy it later either. Because we'll still be looking back at the past or worrying about what hasn't happened yet.

There will be new challenges in the future that we don't have right now. Once we eliminate one problem, another one is usually right behind it. So we might as well learn to appreciate the present moment.

Sir William Osler said it well:

“Live neither in the past nor in the future, but let each day’s work absorb your entire energies, and satisfy your widest ambition.”

As did Michael J. Fox in his book, *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Future*:

“I’m not suggesting we wander around slack-jawed and stupefied, stumbling from moment to moment without a process that takes into consideration history or the future. Still, what’s happened before and what may happen later can’t be as important as what’s happening now. There’s never a better time to celebrate the present. The present belongs to you.”

Listening

In Luke’s Gospel, there’s a great story about Jesus visiting the home of a woman named Martha.

While at the house, a woman named Mary was seated at his feet “listening to his words”. While this was going on, Martha was “distracted with all her preparations.” And at one point, she got upset about Mary not helping her.

Jesus replied, “Martha, Martha you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Aren't we usually like Martha -- distracted by our own plans, instead of listening for God's guidance?

Resting In The Storm

Another great story is the one about Jesus sleeping in a boat during a storm.

His disciples thought they were going to die. Jesus, seemingly unconcerned about it, awoke and heard them freaking out. He said "why are you afraid, you men of little faith?"

I love the implications of this story -- that we can rest even during the storms of life.

Keeping It Light

Sometimes all we can do is just laugh at our mistakes, our circumstances, our fears, and the dangers we encounter. Most of the things we take so seriously usually aren't as serious as we think they are.

We really have nothing to worry about if we've placed our trust in God. Nothing can harm us without God's permission, and anything that he allows to happen can ultimately be used for a greater purpose.

This is not to say that having a serious problem is something to be taken lightly, but we do often exaggerate our problems.

We can take some of the pressure off by choosing to look at things from a different perspective. Most of our problems stem from thinking about ourselves too much anyway. When we're thinking about ourselves all of the time, our problems can appear larger than they really are.

CONCLUSION

We tend to think that being hard on others will bring the best out of them. But the truth is that people will eventually rebel against what they feel is oppressing them.

We have a habit of putting the weight of guilt, expectations, and responsibilities on ourselves and on others, but what we really need is freedom.

You might be surprised that I used the word *responsibility* in a negative way. But the truth is we have no real responsibility other than to put our trust in God.

Before you declare me a heretic or a pacifist, consider this:

If we're *responsible*, that also means we're *accountable* if we fail to live up to our responsibilities. And if we're accountable, that also means we can take credit if we succeed in fulfilling our responsibilities.

In other words, instead of God being the one who did it, we would be taking the credit. The focus would be on *us* and *our* ability, rather than on what God has done for us or through us.

Conversely, if we're not able to fulfill our responsibilities we would feel guilty. Which again makes it about *us* and *our* ability. When you blame yourself for not living up to *your* responsibilities, that means you were trusting yourself instead of God.

That is our greatest struggle. Our desire to be in control. Our desire to rely on ourselves instead of God.

You might be thinking, "what about my responsibility toward my children, my spouse, my employer, or my clients? Aren't those *my* responsibilities? Aren't I accountable for what I do or don't do?"

My answer is this: trust God with those things. Trust God to give you the wisdom to raise your children. Trust God to show his love through you to your spouse. Trust God to help you at work.

Let God work through you and in your circumstances. God will guide you and work things out as you rely on him. That's our only responsibility. And that's what living with confidence is all about.

For more stuff like this visit
www.LivingWithConfidence.net