

LIVING FREE FROM COMPARISON
AND THE NEED TO PLEASE



authentically,
uniquely
you

JOYCE MEYER

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

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NEW YORK • NASHVILLE

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FaithWords
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
faithwords.com
twitter.com/faithwords

First Edition: September 2021

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2021939252

ISBNs: 978-1-5460-2634-1 (hardcover), 978-1-5460-2944-1 (large print),
978-1-5460-2635-8 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

INTRODUCTION

Being our authentic and unique selves in a world that seeks to conform us to its image or tries to make us something we are not is a challenge we will deal with most of our lives. We are all unique, and that is good. The qualities that make us special benefit us and bless others in many ways. According to God's design, no one person is precisely like anyone else. Even identical twins have different fingerprints and different iris patterns in their eyes. Their DNA is very similar, but not *exactly* the same.

There is no one else in the world exactly like you. This not only makes you unique; it also makes you very special. One-of-a-kind things are usually very valuable and highly sought after. This makes me wonder why so many of us try to be like other people. Many of us put great effort into trying to be—or appearing to be—someone or something we are not. I believe we do this because we have not accepted and embraced ourselves, and we fear that other people will not accept us either.

I suffered for many years trying to be like people I admired—at least I admired the traits I saw in them that I did not see in myself. I had not yet learned that God gives each of us unique traits, but He does not give us all *the same* unique traits. We are all good at some things, but no one is good at everything. Accepting this is the first step toward being at peace with ourselves and with other people.

It is possible to try so hard to be like so many other people

that we forget who we are. During his acting career, Peter Sellers played so many roles that he sometimes lost himself in the characters he played. When approached by a fan who asked, “Are you Peter Sellers?” he answered briskly, “Not today,” and walked on.

When we allow other people to pressure us to be someone we are not, we can become frustrated. The people around us can become equally frustrated when we expect them to do things they are not gifted to do or to be anyone other than themselves. Jesus came to set us free, and part of the freedom He offers is the liberty to be and enjoy who we are without comparing ourselves to or competing with others.

People who are authentic have accepted their uniqueness and have learned to enjoy themselves as they are. They do not struggle to be what other people want them to be but desire to be who God has created them to be and to have the courage to follow their own heart as He leads them. They have no need to pretend or be hypocritical. Instead, they have pure hearts and right motives for all they do. They like who they are, and they enjoy being at peace with themselves.

We all have room for improvement in our character and in our behavior, and we can and should work with the Holy Spirit to make the changes that are needed in our lives. But we also have many qualities that, although we may not like them, we cannot change because God has made them part of who we are. For example, I spent years not liking my voice because it is deeper than most female voices, and I am often mistaken for a man when I call people who don't know me. However, eventually I realized that God gave me my unique voice for His purpose, and I learned to accept and enjoy it.

We might be tempted to worry about the aspects of ourselves we would like to change, but Jesus says that worry cannot add a

single hour to our lives (Matthew 6:27). God has already thought through the shape of our lives, and no amount of work or struggle can ever change them.

More than forty years of experience in ministry has taught me that unhappy, frustrated people are usually that way because they don't like themselves. Instead of accepting themselves and becoming all that God wants them to be, they continually strive to be what others want them to be or what they imagine they should be. We all want to please people, and God's Word tells us that we should strive to live in harmony with others, even when it comes at a cost (Romans 12:16 and 15:1). However, if pleasing people causes us not to please God, then we must obey God, not other people (Acts 5:29).

One of the best gifts you can give yourself is to accept yourself and believe that God created you with His own hand in your mother's womb. All of His works are wonderful—and that includes you (Psalm 139:13–16). I pray that, as you read this book, you will learn to embrace your unique self and live authentically and that you will find freedom from comparing yourself to others and from trying to please people in unhealthy ways. I also pray that, in your life, you will set boundaries that keep you safe from letting others control or manipulate you and that you will find the freedom to be the amazing person God intends for you to be.

PART 1

Believing the Best about Yourself

CHAPTER 1

Learning to Love Who You Are

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:39

Learning to accept and love ourselves is the pathway to authenticity, because if we reject ourselves and refuse God's love for us, we will not be free to be ourselves. Instead, we will live a life of pretense, choosing to do what we think will make us acceptable to others rather than what we honestly believe we should do. Even though our hearts scream no in certain situations, we will find our mouths saying yes to the things people want us to do.

Let me ask you: Do you love yourself? To love yourself is to accept the unconditional love of God with your whole heart, to see yourself as He sees you, and to rejoice and be at peace with who He has created you to be. I am not talking about loving yourself in a selfish or self-centered way, but loving the unique *you* that God created you to be. This healthy self-love is not based on what you do right or wrong, but on who you are in Christ. Truly believing that God loves you unconditionally is the foundation for relationship with Him, with yourself, and with others.

No one will love everything they do, but we should all love who God has made us to be. Depending on the translation, the Bible says at least eight times that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It is so significant to God that we love ourselves

that He based another of His most important instructions to us—to love others—on this foundation. And He didn't say it just once, but multiple times.

Why is it so important that we love ourselves? First, if we don't love ourselves, we reject God's love for us. Second, if we don't love ourselves, we cannot love God or anyone else. The Holy Spirit fills us with God's love, and He wants us to let that love flow through us back to God and out to others. God's Word says that we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). If we have not received God's love, we have no love to give to anyone else, because no matter how much we want to love people, we cannot give away what we do not have. I spent many frustrating years as a Christian trying to love others and failing until the Lord showed me that my problem was that I had never truly received His love for me.

After receiving this revelation, I spent one year studying, meditating on, and confessing aloud God's love for me. At that time, I had a forty-year history of not liking myself, let alone loving myself, so renewing my mind in this area took time. At first, I felt guilty trying to love myself because I was keenly aware of my flaws, but eventually I learned that I could love who I am without loving everything I do. We can all work with God toward positive change in our behavior without rejecting ourselves or viewing ourselves as a failure because of our imperfections.

I learned that I could love who I am without loving everything I do.

For many years, I tended to do what I thought would please other people instead of what I genuinely thought I should do or wanted to do. Since I didn't love myself, I desperately tried to get the love I was missing from people by allowing them to control

and manipulate me. I thought that as long as I did everything they wanted me to do, I would have their love and acceptance, but I soon found that the minute I didn't please them, they rejected me. This experience helped me understand the importance of receiving God's love for me and loving myself in a healthy, biblical way.

Being able to love yourself is the key to much joy, peace, and confidence in life. Right here, before you read any further, I encourage you to ask God to use this book to help you love yourself more than ever. It will make a wonderful difference in your life.

Being able to love yourself is the key to much joy, peace, and confidence in life.

Self-Acceptance Leads to Power

God wants us to have confidence in His unconditional love for us. We are mistaken if we think that disliking or hating ourselves is an expression of humility, because it is not. The apostle John had a deep revelation of how much God loved him. He repeatedly referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 21:7, 20). This may come across as prideful, but it actually reflects the way God wants us to think of ourselves. Knowing and abiding in God's love makes us powerful.

Knowing and living in the love of God makes us powerful because it sets us free from self-doubt and enables us to trust God to do great things in us and through us. It also liberates us from caring too much about what other people think about us and allows us to seek to please God alone, instead of trying to please other people. It makes us feel strong and able to follow our hearts, express ourselves, and live the lives God intends for us. It helps us focus on what is right and good about us, not what is

wrong with us. When we live with the awareness that God loves us, and when we love ourselves, there's no limit to what God can do through us or to the enjoyment we can find in our lives.

Be at Peace with Yourself

First Peter 3:11 is one of my favorite scriptures: “Let him search for peace...and seek it eagerly. [Do not merely desire peaceful relations with God, with your fellowmen, and with yourself, but pursue, go after them!]” (AMPC).

Pursue is a strong word. It requires action. To pursue peace is to do whatever it takes to maintain peace in our lives. It means not always getting our way or having the last word in an argument. It requires us to trust God with the people in our lives instead of trying to force them to be what we want them to be. But it's all worth it because it brings peace, and peace is one of the most valuable qualities we can have.

Here are some ways you can cultivate peace with God, yourself, and others:

1. *Receive God's forgiveness.*

Peace with God is the foundation for peace in every other area of our lives. Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and only through a relationship with Him will we ever experience true contentment.

When we sin, the best way to respond is to repent, ask God to forgive us, and then choose not to allow feelings of guilt to torment us. Guilt is useless. Constantly feeling guilty actually weakens us and causes us to fall into more sin.

I encourage you to read and meditate on 1 John 1:9: “If we

[freely] admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just . . . and will forgive our sins [dismiss our lawlessness] and [continuously] cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (AMPC).

2. *Make the decision to like yourself.*

This question may seem unusual, but what kind of relationship do you have with yourself? You can't get along with anyone else until you get along with you. Eleanor Roosevelt rightly observed, “Before we can make friends with anyone else, we must first make friends with ourselves.”

What kind of relationship do you have with yourself?

For years, I dealt with self-hatred because of the sexual abuse I endured growing up. Because I didn't like myself, enjoying peace with anyone was almost impossible for me. However, as I spent time in God's Word and asked Him to change me, I eventually began to see myself the way He sees me. I began to like myself, and eventually love myself!

I encourage you to find out what God says about you in His Word. Ask Him to help you change your self-image, because enjoying life and enjoying other people begins with knowing who God says you are and loving yourself in a balanced way.

3. *Don't compare yourself to others.*

Comparing and competing with other people puts you on a fast track to losing your peace and joy. There is such freedom in learning to be happy with who you are without being jealous of someone else's skills or achievements.

I have a friend who likes to memorize parts of the Bible. There was a day when I would have been threatened by that, feeling that I should do it too. I know a lot of Scripture, and I have even memorized several verses, but memorization has never been my strength, and that's okay. It doesn't mean I am less spiritual or somehow not as good as my friend. It just means I am being myself.

4. Accept other people just the way they are, not the way you want them to be.

I almost wore myself out trying to change people until I realized everyone is not supposed to be like I am. We are all born with different God-given temperaments, and we were never meant to be the same.

My husband, Dave, is easygoing and has the ability to enjoy just about anything he does. I'll never forget our grocery trips as a young married couple. I had my list and was serious about accomplishing our mission. Dave, on the other hand, was pushing the kids around in the cart, laughing, and having a great time. That behavior infuriated me! Usually, when people are miserable, they resent those who are joyful.

Dave has always been a very wise and responsible man, but I wanted him to be "serious," like I am. When I finally stopped trying to change him, it brought tremendous peace. Now, I truly enjoy and value Dave's personality. In fact, through the years the Lord has helped me to enjoy my life and be more like Dave is, even though I have not consciously tried to do so.

We all have areas in which we truly need to change, but only God can change us. The best gift we can give to others is to pray

for them and accept them as they are. We may need to confront certain bad behaviors in them, but if we constantly find fault with others, then we need to look at our own attitude instead of their behavior.

5. *Let God have control of your life.*

Proverbs 16:9 says, “A man’s mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps and makes them sure” (AMPC). I used to have a plan for everything—including my husband, my children, and my ministry—and sometimes grew frustrated if every aspect of it didn’t go accordingly. In other words, I wanted the Lord to do things my way! However, God is smarter than we are, and He wants us to place our trust in His great plan for our lives.

I often say that trust requires unanswered questions. In the moment, we may not always understand why, but as David says to God in Psalm 31:15, “My times are in your hands.” Even though we may not understand something that is taking place in our lives, we will later look back and discover that the Lord had our best interests in mind all along.

I encourage you to continue trusting God even when things don’t make sense. It’s one sure way to enjoy your life and experience more peace than ever before.

Self-Rejection Leads to People-Pleasing

When we reject ourselves, we assume other people will reject us too. When we struggle with self-rejection, we don’t wait to find out how they will treat us, but we proactively think and believe they will reject us. This causes us to behave in ways that will

guarantee their rejection, which confirms our belief that we are not likable or lovable. If we fear that people will reject us, we lose our authenticity by trying to please them in order to gain their acceptance. This sets up a cycle that continues until we break it.

There are people in the world who like to control and prey on people who are insecure and are easily manipulated. They take advantage of the fact that these people are starving for friendship, love, and companionship. But people who are confident and love themselves as God loves them won't put up with those who seek to control others for their own self-gratification. People who have a healthy self-confidence and self-love will confront these unhealthy people and set boundaries that must be honored if their relationship is to grow.

My father was a controller, and because of our fear of him, everyone in our family allowed him to take the lead in everything from what we watched on television, to what time we went to bed and got up, to who our friends could be (if we were allowed to have any), to what meals consisted of—down to the tiniest details of our lives. When people are allowed no freedom of choice, their souls are damaged in ways that often require years to heal.

Because my father was never satisfied with me, no matter what I did, I learned to never be satisfied with myself. Therefore, I certainly could not believe that God, my heavenly Father, was pleased with me as Scripture says that He is. If you grew up with controlling parents, you know what I am talking about. Let me encourage you; instead of basing your beliefs about yourself on what others have told you or how they have behaved toward you, find out what God says about you in His Word and believe it.

For example, He says:

- You are the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8).
- You are chosen by Him (1 Corinthians 1:27; John 15:16).
- He will never reject you when you come to Him (John 6:37).
- His love is everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3).
- You are special, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9).
- You have gifts, skills, and talents (1 Peter 4:10).
- You are made right with Him through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Lord makes many other wonderful statements about you in His Word, and believing them will change your life.

If God—who is perfect—loves and accepts you, there is no reason for you not to do likewise. We usually determine whether or not we are lovable based on how we feel, but our feelings are always changing. Therefore, we cannot trust them to represent the truth. God and His Word are truth, and it is impossible for Him to lie (John 14:6; Hebrews 6:18). We can depend on Him completely.

Ask Yourself

We all need to face our struggles in order to be set free. I'd like to ask you a few questions to help you face any issues that may be holding you back.

- Do you believe that God loves you?
- Do you love and accept yourself?
- Are you a people-pleaser?
- Are you at peace with yourself?

- Do you fear rejection?
- Do you compare yourself with others?

Simply taking a few moments to ponder these questions before you keep reading will help you identify areas of your life in which you may need help.