



Am I My Own Worst Enemy?

Romans 7:15: (NLT) *I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.*



Life can be difficult. We are surrounded with issues, events, opinions, politics and posts that continuously bring us stress and strain. As if this is not enough, we add to the frenzy by putting up self-designed roadblocks to block our own way! Why would we do that? Why would we make things harder for ourselves? Turns out that this is a common thing. The imperfect human mind can create all kinds of coping mechanisms that keep us from dealing with *perceived* trouble. While this sounds good, the problem is

that our avoidance of perceived trouble often leads us directly into the path of *real* trouble. Essentially, we can at times become our own worst enemy. The bad news is we easily and often sabotage ourselves. The good news is, because we do this to ourselves, we can also learn how to change that behavior.

Today's episode will feature seven specific points from *The Self-Esteem Workbook* by Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD. We will look at these seven "Automatic Thoughts and Distortions" with biblical examples and solutions in hand.

First, let's consider the issue of enemies because we are talking about ourselves being our own worst enemy.

Satan is our primary enemy:

1 Peter 5:8: (NASB) *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

The world and its influences are our enemies as well:

James 4:4: (NASB) *...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

As the Apostle Paul told us in our theme text, we are also our own enemy:

Romans 7:15-19: (NLT) *¹⁵I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. ¹⁸And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.*

This definitely sums up our lives! We have this confusion; we are a paradox within ourselves.

We will focus today on how to recognize and replace our own self-defeating thoughts. This is such an important exercise because we all want to be useful in the hands of God. There is great work to do in spreading the gospel, being a light in the world and helping others. If we are wrapped up in our own perceived inadequacies and crushing unworthiness, we are blocking our ability to be used by God to our fullest capacity.

We want to be readily available as tools in God's hands. When we think we are unable to do certain things, we take ourselves out of His hands.

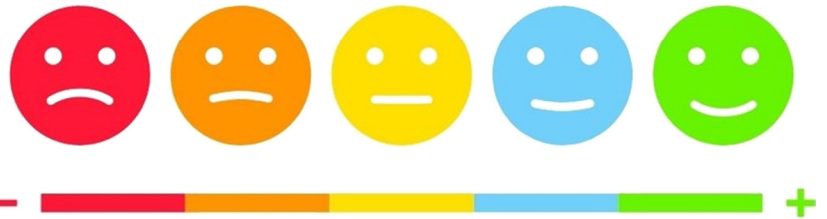
Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

Making Feelings Facts

Making feelings facts is taking one's feelings as proof of the way things really are.

For example:

- I feel like such a loser. I must be hopeless.
- I feel ashamed and bad. I must be bad.
- I feel inadequate. I must be inadequate.
- I feel worthless. I must be worthless.



Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD

Facts become *inconvenient* when our feelings are in control. We need to learn how to separate facts from feelings and understand the value of relying on the facts without allowing our feelings to influence our perception.

When looking at a situation, we should ask ourselves: *is this a fact or a feeling?* We will have to dig down and really distinguish what is fact, moving our feelings out of the picture. We have to rise above letting our feelings drive us. Making feelings facts takes us away from the ability to see reality.

What about if we have held a doctrinal position all our lives and are shown something scripturally different? We may feel so strongly about holding onto tradition that we shut ourselves off to learning and growing in our knowledge. The scriptural truth of hellfire, for example, is one that some people want to cling to regardless of scriptural reasoning.

Facts vs. feelings: When we find the Scriptures do not teach this doctrine, sometimes our feelings make us afraid to let go of it out of fear that we will burn. We can certainly understand the strength of these feelings, but the facts are what should drive us - especially as Christians - and especially when it comes to scriptural truth.



Insecurity and anxiety can reframe our reality in such a way that we instinctively seek to deny that reality. These feelings override truth and are fundamentally destructive.

When Peter denied Jesus three times, his *distorted perception* of the truth of his situation caused an overwhelming fear that produced in him a sense of hopelessness.



This is one of Peter's lowest moments:

Matthew 26:69-75: (NASB) ⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said; You too were with Jesus the Galilean. ⁷⁰But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you are talking about. ⁷¹When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, This man was with Jesus of Nazareth. ⁷²And again he denied it with an oath, I do not know the man. ⁷³A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away. ⁷⁴Then he began to curse and swear, I do not know the man! And immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly.

ALL FOUR GOSPELS
RECORD THIS EVENT



Peter lied and denied three times. Why? He lied because of his fear. His fear overrode the facts of what Jesus had told him was going to happen. Jesus told him he would deny him, but that he, Jesus, had prayed for Peter, and Peter would be okay. The fear was too big. As in Peter's case, making feelings (or fear) fact, we respond to the feeling rather than the fact, getting ourselves into deeper trouble.

The distortion of our feelings overriding and replacing facts inevitably brings us sorrow and pain. We have to be very careful.



We can face these destructive feelings and reduce their influence, but it takes work and humility. Forgiveness and truth are inherent in our Christian walk if we are willing to accept them.

Like Peter, we need to learn how to reduce the influence of our feelings.

Possibilities and forgiveness are provided. Peter needs to step up and receive them:

John 21:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, tend my lambs. ¹⁶He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, Shepherd my sheep. ¹⁷He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, tend my sheep.

These three questions would have reminded Peter of his three denials, but here Peter was being recommissioned to do the work of the gospel. He could not let the mortifying guilt and shame prevent him from moving forward. Jesus was putting him back together! Jesus was establishing the facts, putting feelings aside and giving Peter new responsibilities to do the Lord's the work.

The same for us. We do not need to deny that we have the feelings, but we also do not have to follow those feelings just because they exist. It comes down to following the facts - following the truth. Peter's truth was that he was of VITAL importance to Jesus and to Christianity! THAT was the fact, and Peter did learn to live up to this fact.



Now we need to learn how to neutralize these distortions. We might not be able to get rid of them, but we can render their effect less dramatic by refocusing on reality.



**NEUTRALIZING
DISTORTIONS**

REFOCUSING ON

& Reality



I will work at distinguishing and separating my feelings from the facts of my experiences. As a Christian, I will stand in the FACT that the forgiveness I have comes through Christ. I will, therefore, put my best foot forward as I respond to REALITY.

Romans 6:16: (NASB) *Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

Am I a slave to feelings or a slave to truth? If we admit we are a slave to our feelings, then we need to work on moving up to being a slave to truth. This will drive us to a better approach to life.

It is a scary thought to picture ourselves as slaves to our own feelings. This is a wake-up call!

**What about when things in my life really *do* look bad?
How do I keep from making them worse?**

This is a question that brings us to a lot of traps that look like answers. We often have pre-conceived notions about what to expect from life. These ideas feed our ability to see things positively or negatively. Unfortunately, we often adopt a distortion that buries any positive perspective.

Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

Rejecting the Positive

Dwelling on the negative overlooks positive aspects. Here we actually negate positives so that our self-esteem remains low. For example, someone compliments your work. You reply "Oh, it was really nothing. Anyone could do that." You discount the fact that you've worked long and effectively. No wonder accomplishments aren't fun. You could just as easily have replied, "Thanks" (and tell yourself, "I do deserve special credit for doing this difficult and boring task"). You would give a loved one or friend credit where it's due. Why not do yourself the same favor?

Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD



Christians are taught not to think more highly of ourselves than we should, to beware of ego. For some, it is hard to accept a compliment because we downplay our accomplishments.

However, when someone is giving you a genuine compliment, there is an answer that always works, "Thank you." Or, "Thank you, by God's grace I was able to do that...", or "Thank you, so-and-so helped, but we appreciate you noticed." Do not take away the compliment when someone was gracious enough to give it. We need to accept that God is using us through Jesus to accomplish His plan.



And if God is working with us through His son, then really, any compliments are because of Him, so we can give God the credit if we are uncomfortable with taking it ourselves.

Our family has a “problem” with gift-giving. We joke about it, but it is very real. We “pre-apologize” for our gifts. As I am handing you your present, Rick, I am saying, “I’m very sorry that this probably isn’t what you want. I tried, but I’m just not sure. I’m sure it’s the wrong color, but there’s a gift receipt - you can take it back. In fact, why don’t you not open it and I’ll just take it back now.” If the person does open it and likes it, I’m still downplaying it. It is bizarre! This happens with nearly every gift I give.

You are trying to make sure you do not make a mistake, and you are pre-setting up the response. After all, what else are they going to say: *Oh, this is perfect!* A better approach would be for you to say, “I hope you love this!” Then just let it be; if they do not like it, then you can apologize.



We give credibility to our minimized view of the facts, as this feels safer and more comfortable than facing the larger and more realistic picture. Simply stated, this is self-defeating and *keeps us from being a useful tool in the hands of God.*

After the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus puts the disciples on a ship while he goes to a mountain to pray. Sometime after 3 a.m., a bad wind kicks up (Matthew 14:24-26). They see a shadowy figure on the water and are terrified!

Peter took a giant step of faith then lost his focus on Jesus while walking on the water and promptly began to sink:

Matthew 14:27-30: (NASB) ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid. ²⁸Peter said to him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. ²⁹And he said, Come! And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me!

The wind and the waves were there before Peter focused on them. We tend to get what we focus on. If we reject the positive possibilities, we will succumb to whatever we focus on, and it is rarely good. Peter ignored what would keep him afloat and paid attention to that which would sink him. The wind and waves were there in the beginning; they were all worried. When they saw Jesus walking on the water, there were still wind and waves. When Jesus says, *Come*, there were still wind and waves! Peter climbs out of the boat and walks on the water despite the wind and waves. But then he stops looking at Jesus and instead looks at the wind and waves that had been there the whole time! He begins to sink - he focused on that which would sink him. Peter rejected the positive - we need to keep our focus on Jesus and what he wants us to do.





Our lives can be tumultuous. In spite of our troubles, our Lord and Master can hold us up in our storms if we allow ourselves to focus on his presence in those experiences.

Matthew 14:31-33: (NASB) ³¹Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, you of little faith, why did you doubt? ³²When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³And those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, you are certainly God's son!

Focusing on Jesus and on the positive brings us to safety. This does not mean we will miraculously end all trauma. It means we will have the help and encouragement we need through that trauma if we decide not to reject the spirituality in our lives. It is so easy to reject the positive because for some reason, we are more comfortable with dwelling on the negative. We dwell on what cannot be rather than on what "is" by the grace of God. We keep seeing the wind and waves instead of Jesus and his possibilities for us.



**NEUTRALIZING
DISTORTIONS**

REFOCUSING ON

& Reality

I will work at being mindful of God's grace and providence in my life, especially when I am overwhelmed. To focus on His grace and providence is to focus on the most positive view possible of my troubled experiences.

What should I focus on in the middle of my troubled experiences? Focus on the fact that His grace and His providence is at work. This will not change the experience, but it changes our view of the experience.

Accepting the positive yields strength, courage, fortitude and even enthusiasm!

Romans 8:28: (NASB) *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

God can use me for His purposes *if* I accept the reality of His providence! His purposes are there for us to work, but we must accept His providence. This means we have complete faith that our steps are being overruled. If God is allowing this experience to happen in my life (His providence), then it is an experience I need to learn.

Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

Catastrophizing

When you believe that something is a catastrophe, you tell yourself that it is so horrible and awful that "I can't stand it." In telling ourselves this, we convince ourselves that we are too feeble to cope with life. For example, "I couldn't stand it if she were to leave me. It would be awful." Although many things are unpleasant, inconvenient and difficult, we really can stand anything short of being steamrolled to death, as psychologist Albert Ellis has said. So one might think, "I don't like this, but I certainly can stand it."

Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD





We easily fall into Catastrophizing. Our minds jump to the worst possible scenario.



I counseled a wonderful, faithful Christian sister a while back. She works hard and is a very good single mom. Somehow DCF, the Department of Children and Families, got involved in her parenting and she panicked thinking they would take away her child.

- We had to stop and talk to remove the panicked feelings, replacing them with facts.
- She had to accept the positive of her good parenting.
- She had to realize the catastrophe she was focused on was not real.
- We talked about that when DCF would come, she needed to work with them - show them everything she was doing, answer everything honestly and watch what happens.

It was a long process, but the end result was that the people in that department admitted they did not know why they were there in the first place. They could not find a reason and closed the case.

It is extremely rare that the worst possible thing happens, but that is where our mind automatically jumps.



We want to be sensitive to people experiencing cognitive disorders and not blame them for their feelings. For those who have suffered great trauma, for example, simplistic advice like, "Just don't think that way" will not work.

If, however, there is a need for professional help due to cognitive disorders or life tragedies, there is no shame in seeking it. There is great value in counseling and medication to be able to cope and move forward when needed.



Because we do not know what our immediate future will be, we assume the worst. We create a set of *future conclusions* that frame our *present challenges* as unbearable and we fold under their *perceived pressure*.

Just like pre-apologizing, here we "pre-fold" under pressure from an imaginary catastrophe that has not happened (and maybe never will). That puts *more* pressure on us and it is not even real! Catastrophizing makes what is not real overwhelmingly scary.

The apostles depended on Jesus, but even when he was with them, they sometimes catastrophized their immediate future. Let's go back to the Sea of Galilee...



One night, a storm suddenly arose on the Sea of Galilee:

Mark 4:36-38: (NASB) ³⁶Leaving the crowd, they took him along with them in the boat, just as he was; and other boats were with him. ³⁷And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. ³⁸Jesus himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?

Fear can magnify our challenges to the point of *burying* our faith. The expectation of the apostles was that they were dying. Yet, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is on the boat with them. They did not put this together.



We have been bought with the price of the sacrifice of Jesus. Therefore, whatever catastrophe we perceive to be overwhelming us, let us be aware that this experience is by God's own permission! He knows us and loves us and will NOT leave us unprotected. *His son is with us in our boat.*

Mark 4:39-41: (NASB) ³⁹And he got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Hush, be still. And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. ⁴⁰And he said to them, Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? ⁴¹They became very much afraid and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Jesus not only calmed the sea, but he slept through the storm while the apostles were panicked for their lives. Why? Jesus *lived in God's providence*. He knew what he was here for; he knew his time was protected. He had not deliberately tempted God by sailing into a storm, so he knew God's protection was there. The apostles had not yet learned how powerful that providence could be. Like the apostles, we need to grow and mature as Christians so we do not catastrophize. We need to learn to lean on the providences of God because we are in His hands.



I will strive to keep my awareness of God's powerful and loving providence vital as I face those things that look like catastrophes. I will stay in the present and let God handle my future.

This takes away our permission to catastrophize. When we do not allow ourselves to obsess with the future, we do not create a false catastrophe. We just have to deal with the present. If we jump into future catastrophizing, we are saying we know better than God.

1 Corinthians 10:13: (NASB) No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

When catastrophes do happen, then they are real. This Scripture tells us when a catastrophe does happen, it will not be bigger than we can handle.



We do not need to create catastrophes in our minds, but let us deal with real ones that actually happen in life and rely on the providence of God to walk us through them. There is no better life and health insurance than God's providence, and we cannot find that anywhere else but through the Bible and through Christ. We need to apply it!

Catastrophizing takes reality away and replaces God's ability to work with us with our own imagination. Which would you want in charge of your life - God or your imagination?

Some of the greatest catastrophes of our lives happen because we buy into a future that does not happen!

How do we manage our self-defeating thoughts when it comes to comparing ourselves to others?

Here again we need to be very cautious! Our tendency can be to draw illegitimate comparisons that have no chance of being helpful. It is convenient to view others and ourselves through a lens that unfairly picks and chooses the comparison criteria. The end result is self-defeating thoughts.

Automatic Thoughts and Distortions Unfavorable Comparisons

Suppose you had an unusual magnifying glass that magnified some things (like your faults and mistakes, or the strengths of others) and shrunk others, like your strengths and the mistakes of others. In comparison to others, you would always seem inadequate or inferior - always coming out on the short end of the stick. A way to challenge this is to ask, "Why must I compare?" "Why can't I just appreciate that each person has unique strengths and weaknesses?" Another's contributions are not necessarily better, just different.

Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD



Remember how we read our theme text from Romans 7:15-19 in the New Living Translation where the Apostle Paul said in part, *I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.* How can we hope to be better than the great Apostle Paul?

God did not call us to become Paul. He called us to be the best "us" He could help us become. Comparisons to make us look bad distort reality. This feeds a nightmarish fantasy, removing us from fully being used by God.



Social media is a tremendous place for unfavorable comparison. People look perfect on social media and they are not, of course. Our digital selves are carefully curated to highlight preferred characteristics.

Social anxiety is created when we compare ourselves to others who we perceive are better than we are, look better than we do and are having a better time than we are.



It is not uncommon for people to Photoshop themselves into exotic locations to impress others online. There are companies who will digitally alter your photos to make it seem like you are living a glamorous, well-traveled life, even telling you what outfit to wear to make the fake background more believable.

How sad this is. We attempt to fool ourselves while we attempt to fool everybody else. This kind of behavior makes everybody else feel bad, and consequently does not make us feel good. It is just a lie about our lives.



I am simply not as good as others. I just take up space. There is always someone with better knowledge, more wisdom, better looks, more experience and better ideas than me.

We can find them all on social media. Do not fall for the trap of looking at a little glimmer of somebody's life they put online because no one wants to show the bad parts of their lives. We avoid reality and put forth false perceptions.

How do we deal with unfavorable comparisons?

1 Corinthians 12:14-16: (NASB) ¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.



First News Flash: There IS someone better than you!

Second News Flash: It is supposed to be that way!



God does not judge us by using others as a measuring stick. Rather, God blesses us with an ability to contribute in a way for which we are suited. It does not matter for what others are suited for, as we have a unique place in God's plan.

1 Corinthians 12:17-20: (NASB) ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰But now there are many members, but one body.

If my place is as the spleen, I want to be the best spleen I can be because the only one I want to please is God. Once we stop comparing and instead accept the *grace* of our calling, we can then focus on the *value* we can give and receive. The value is lost when we unfairly compare ourselves to each other, and we become nothing in the hands of God instead of a valuable tool. We do not want to argue with the Architect about our placement in the body!



REFOCUSING ON NEUTRALIZING DISTORTIONS & Reality

I will focus on playing *my* part. Further, I will also focus on encouraging others to play *their* part, because the better we all are in fulfilling our roles, the more effective the body of Christ will become.

If I focus on doing what I can in my capacity, I get out of the comparison trap. Let me encourage others to do the best they can as well.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29: (NASB) ²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God.

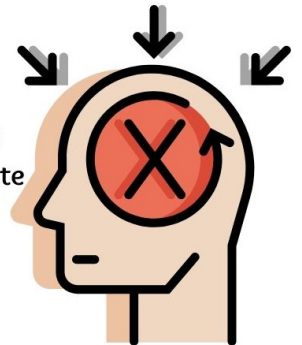
God chose us even though we are weak, so even if we seem to be “less than” others, we know He has a purpose for us. Let us develop in the way God would have us develop - into powerful workers in His purpose.

Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

Overgeneralizing

Overgeneralizing is deciding that negative experiences describe your life completely. For example: “I always ruin everything.” “I always get rejected in love.” “No one likes me; everybody hates me.” Such global statements are unkind, depressing and usually inaccurate to some degree. The antidote is to use more precise language: “Sometimes people don’t approve of me (sometimes some people do).” Be a healthy optimist: expect to find small ways to improve situations and notice what’s going well.

Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD



Overgeneralizing can be a serious issue. It can develop into a mental game where we think we are worthless and the world is somehow better off without us. Such thoughts are dangerous. We might get to the point of not being able to find our self-value, which is incredibly self-destructive. Some become suicidal if they get to the point where they no longer see their value. *Do not ever forget we are valuable before our Father.* For those prone to overgeneralizing in the extreme, please talk to someone you trust who can help you find yourself again.



I feel that I am always a disappointment because I can never measure up to God’s standards. Such a perspective makes us doubt that we have any value, especially in the eyes of God.



While we are not providing a specific scriptural example for this distortion, we do have lots of scriptural “ammunition” for it.

It is easy to take a part of Scripture and flash it as “proof” of our feelings of unworthiness:

Romans 3:23: (NASB) *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

See? There it is! I am unworthy.

Isaiah 64:6: (NASB) *For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

I am too far gone before God. I should just disappear like dust in the wind.

Romans 12:3: (NASB) *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think...*

Here is proof that my negative self-evaluation is right! I must not think more highly of myself.

Unfortunately, we can take pieces of Scripture and feed the negative feelings of overgeneralizing.

But let’s finish the text:

...but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Overgeneralizing can take us to a place of, “What is the point of trying? I’ll never be good enough for God.” *That takes away all options for success.* We make it so it is not possible to succeed, where even a light at the end of the tunnel is just a train coming the other way. We are doomed...



Of course we are not good enough for God - that is why we have Jesus! This is the whole point, why we need Jesus who died for us and will cover us with his righteousness. We are NOT good enough, but here is the reality:



We were all sinners destined for death before God, until Jesus bought us back from the sin of Adam. We should generalize the power of the ransom of Jesus and use this FACT to accurately assess where we stand.

We quoted this earlier:

1 Corinthians 1:26-29: (NASB) *²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God.*



We want to revisit some of those points. *Consider your calling* - we are called because God sees value in us. He sees this even though He calls *not many wise... not many noble*. He calls those with a heart for God. Why? *So that no man may boast before God* - He is seeking the humble. We are ALL sinners. We are not worthy, period. Only through Christ are we valuable in the hands of God.

God has in the past, does in the present and will in the future use those who are less esteemed in the world for HIS divine purposes. Let's not overgeneralize our unworthiness; let's maximize Christ's worthiness and the position we are granted by grace in him.

In spite of our weakness, we can do wonderful things through Jesus, and that gives God the glory. By not accepting this role, it could be insulting to our Creator.



When I pronounce my self-worth through negative generalizations, I usurp God's authority and judgment in my life. I will work on giving God the glory every day by trusting that His care for me is because He sees me as valuable.

Do we want to usurp God's authority in our lives or do we want Him to stay in charge? Replace the overgeneralization with a higher fact. What do we specifically know to be true?

Do not dwell on the past - *reach forward*:

Philippians 3:13-14: (NASB) ¹³*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

- Leaving and forgetting those other things behind.
- Pressing on towards those things that lie ahead.
- Relying on God's grace for help in all our times of need.

This is how we cope! We all know we are not good enough, but Jesus *is* good enough. We all have a position in him to fulfill.

The more we uncover how easily we defeat ourselves, the more we need to seek out God's grace for help.

**How do we protect ourselves from ourselves
when it comes to placing blame for issues in our lives?**

Blame can be a powerful tool. Put it in the right place and it can be a tool of reconciliation and healing. Put in the wrong place, blame becomes a deceptive tool. It creates a false sense of security. Blaming inappropriately treats others unfairly, and we then approach reality in an ungodly manner. Blame is difficult to deal with because many times we do not even think about it - it just happens. It is a knee-jerk reaction to accusations from others.

Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

Blaming

Blaming puts all the responsibility for negative events on something outside of yourself. The problem with blaming, much like catastrophizing, is that it tends to make us think of ourselves as helpless victims who are too powerless to cope. The antidote to blaming is to acknowledge outside influences but to take responsibility for your own welfare. However, when one takes responsibility, it is for a behavior or a choice not for being bad to the core. There is no judging the core self here, only behaviors.

Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD



Blaming is the opposite of personalizing, where we take all the blame - "It's *all* my fault." With blaming, it is *never* my fault. Blaming shows up a lot within marriage and divorce. We want to take *realistic* responsibility for our experiences. This is difficult for many of us. Blame is acceptable when it is appropriately placed. Will I be able to accept that more often than I would like to believe, I am the one to blame? When are those times? Will I be able to rise up as a true Christian, accept this and work on correcting it when I am responsible?

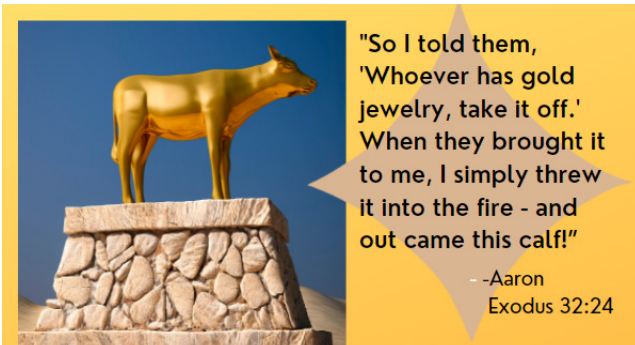


The "It is their fault I am the way I am" reaction takes our personal responsibility and lays it on anyone or anything else. This presents us with a false sense of relief regarding our circumstances and kindles a fire of resentment, jealousy and anger.

Blame inappropriately placed is destructive. We need to be careful that we are appropriately accepting our personal responsibility.

Aaron caved under the pressure of the people and gave them an idol to worship in the absence of Moses:

Exodus 32:19,21-24: (NASB) ¹⁹*It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.* ²¹*Then Moses said to Aaron, What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?* ²²*Aaron said, Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil.* ²³*For they said to me, Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.* ²⁴*I said to them, whoever has any gold, let them tear it off. So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.*



Poor Aaron. Give me the jewelry, and poof - a calf! Aaron is rationalizing and minimizing sin AND blaming the people for his own failure in letting this happen. He was the leader left in charge. He did report truthfully but did not include his personal and sinful role in his report to Moses. He let the others look like they were all to blame. That was not the reality!



There is no escaping accountability. If you are placing blame incorrectly, it will catch up with you. It will come to us sooner or later and the sooner we accept the results of our thoughts and actions, especially when we place false blame, the better off we will be.

Aaron WAS at fault for his lack of leadership. The consequences of the sins of the people would be severe as a result:

Exodus 32:25: (NASB) *Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control - for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies.*

Many of the people died that day. Aaron allowed this to happen. He also was held accountable for what he did because he did not rise up and take responsibility. It had to be shown to him in a forceful manner. We sometimes need the proverbial slap in the face to make us stop and see where we are going, and say, "Look what I have done."

This is hard. Remember King David after his sin with Bathsheba? He was going along his merry way and the prophet Nathan came to him in 2 Samuel 12 and told him a parable about a rich man who stole a poor man's only ewe lamb. David was appalled and said *that man needs to die!* Nathan had only to say, *you are that man!* This brought David's sin to his full attention, affecting his repentance.



**NEUTRALIZING
DISTORTIONS**

REFOCUSING ON

& Reality



When I spread blame that belongs to me, I am speaking and acting dishonestly. I will fight these actions and thoughts as I look above for help and guidance. I will remind myself that my life rests solely in the hands of God.

We do *not* want to act dishonestly. We really have to pay attention to what we say and do when we are in an emotionally-charged situation because our defense mechanisms kick in almost involuntarily. *I did not do it!* We need to make sure we are looking in that "Christian mirror" we talk about.

Colossians 3:2-3: (NASB) ²*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.* ³*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Accountability comes so much easier when we are looking to do God's will and we have *our minds set on the things above!* If we are humble before Him, we can get to the position of accepting responsibility for the things we should.





Automatic Thoughts and Distortions

The Fairy-Tale Fantasy

The Fairy-Tale Fantasy means demanding the ideal from life. "That's not fair!" or "Why did that have to happen?" often means, "The world shouldn't be the way it is." In reality, bad and unfair things happen to good people - sometimes randomly, sometimes because of the unreasonableness of others, and sometimes because of our own imperfections. To expect that the world be different is to invite disappointment. To expect that others treat us fairly, when they often have their own ideas about what is fair, is also to invite disappointment.



Source: Excerpt from *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD

We could easily do an entire podcast on how life does not meet our expectations. We would dedicate an entire segment to romance and how your "happily ever after" isn't. If you are single you want to be married, if you are married, you wish you were not. Your job, your kids, your health, your stress, your boredom, your pain - this is not how you would write your story. See, I was promised a white horse and a big shiny castle with cute mice and a fairy godmother. Why is life so unfair?

The Fairy-Tale Fantasy takes us out of the expectation of what reality can bring and puts us in a place where we are bound to be disappointed and frustrated. It takes us away from the true beauty of our reality. This is a diabolical distortion that happens much more than we would like to think.



I follow Jesus so I should be able to have what I want.
This will make me happy.



This distortion is that we see God as a magic lamp to give us everything we want that WE think will solve all of our problems. This means we get to control God, right? After all, Aladdin got to control the lamp!

A good example of this came up among the apostles of Jesus:

Mark 10:35,37: (NASB) ³⁵James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. ³⁷They said to him, Grant that we may sit, one on your right and one on your left, in your glory.

This sounds like little kids! *Whatever we ask, we want you to say yes...* This is a BIG request. We want to be in the two highest symbols of power and authority in heaven. Such a request shows a lack of maturity. The Fairy-Tale Fantasy is always a lack of mature thinking. We want the best rewards without considering the cost.



I am called to serve. That is what Jesus did.
Let me acquiesce to Jesus' kind of service and
leave the rest to God. That is what Jesus did.



Jesus handles this childish request with grace and love:

Mark 10:38-40: (NASB) ³⁸But Jesus said to them, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? ³⁹They said to him, We are able. And Jesus said to them, the cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. ⁴⁰But to sit on my right or on my left, this is not mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.

He gently says they do not know what they are asking. They have no idea of the difficulty of the road they were about to embark on. *Are you able* to bear what is to come? He assures them they *will* experience this cup of trial. Even so, it is not up to Jesus to grant such a request; the Father decides this. Leave the future in God's hands! Do not *catastrophize* it and make it worse than it has to be, do not construct a *fairy-tale fantasy* and make it bigger and more romanticized than it will be. Just do the work and *let the rest remain in God's hands*.



I will not demand the ideal from life; instead, I will focus on putting my own best effort into walking in the footsteps of Jesus, wherever they may lead. If I am faithful to this effort, it will produce my ideal life.

1 Peter 4:12-13: (NASB) ¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exultation.

In this episode, we looked at several distortions which easily and regularly happen to us. We can fight them and put them in perspective, but we have to be scriptural, honest with ourselves, and above all, humble. If these distortions of the facts are overwhelming us, maybe we need some extra help. If so, it is essential that we seek it through somebody we trust and together find the needed help. For the rest of us, we need to make sure we are focusing on THE most important thing - to honor God in our thoughts, words and deeds, and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We are valuable in the hands of God. We *know* that because He called us.

Let this value ring true in your daily life.

**So, am I my own worst enemy?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**



Join us next week for our podcast on June 7, 2021
Ep. 1181: Is It Ever Right to Judge Your Brother?
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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Why is it that we don't worry about a compass until we're lost in a wilderness of our own making? — Craig D. Lounsbrough

The full context of our theme text:

Romans 7:4-25: (NLT) ⁴So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. ⁵When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. ⁶But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit. ⁷Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, you must not covet. ⁸But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. ⁹At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, ¹⁰and I died. So I discovered that the law's commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. ¹¹Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me. ¹²But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good. ¹³But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes. ¹⁴So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. ¹⁸And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. ²⁰But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²²I love God's law with all my heart. ²³But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Here is another example of how looking for a fairy-tale ending ended in sadness. In this case, it was having real power that was beyond the individual's capacity:

Acts 8:9-24: (NASB) ⁹Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, This man is what is called the Great Power of God. ¹¹And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. ¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. ¹⁴Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit. ²⁰But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You



have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity. ²⁴But Simon answered and said, Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1180: Am I My Own Worst Enemy?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1180-worst-enemy/>

See:  **CQ Rewind**
SHOW NOTES

1. As footstep followers of Jesus Christ, who are our main enemies? (See Romans 7:15-19, James 4:4, 1 Peter 5:8)
2. What can Peter's denial of Jesus teach us about how feelings can distort perception? How can we refocus ourselves? How did Jesus refocus Peter? (See Matthew 26:69-75, John 21:15-17, Romans 6:16)
3. How does Peter's experience walking on water relate to the times we reject positives in our lives? If we focus on God's grace and His providence working in our lives, what do we gain? (See Matthew 14:27-33, Romans 8:28)
4. What is "catastrophizing"? When did Jesus' disciples fall into this kind of thinking? How can we combat these thoughts? (See Mark 4:36-41, 1 Corinthians 10:13)
5. How can unfavorable comparisons distort our perception of ourselves? How does 1 Corinthians 12:14-20 help us gain perspective? (See also: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29)
6. Why is "overgeneralization" such a serious issue? How does looking at ourselves as God sees us help with thoughts of overgeneralization? (See Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:23, 12:3, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Philippians 3:13-14)
7. How did Aaron blame others for his own sins? Do you find yourself minimizing your accountability in situations of this nature? How can we use the dishonesty of his experience to remind us of our responsibility and focus? (See Exodus 32:19-25, Colossians 3:2-3)
8. What can we learn about the "Fairy-Tale Fantasy" from James and John's request? How should we structure or restructure our view of *our* ideal life? (See Mark 10:35-40, 1 Peter 4:12-13)
9. Is your perception of your experiences, your self-value, your contributions, your ideal life or of your responsibilities being distorted by your thoughts? If so, what is causing the distortion? How will you combat this perception distortion?