

# Loving Yourself for the Right Reason because God has made you who you are

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier ([www.thefaithkit.org](http://www.thefaithkit.org))  
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# Loving Yourself for the Right Reason

## because God has made you who you are

Dear reader,

I met Ed my very first day as chaplain at Northern State Prison. He had already served fourteen years on a life sentence for the murder of two people, including a child.

From that day on, he came to see me every week; and it was from these conversations that I came to know that Ed had developed a real and deep faith. He said that he had experienced a conversion soon after entering prison.

Now, seven years later, Ed was released to a halfway house. As part of the terms of his release, he needed to do two hours a week of community service. He asked me if we could use him at my church of St. Rose. I said yes.

I said yes but I did not want Ed to walk around and pick up litter. For one thing, he was already in his fifties. Besides, I had a better idea. Knowing he could write—he had developed something of a writing ministry while in prison—I commissioned him to write the story of his conversion. I would give him a room, paper, pen, and time.

Every Saturday he started coming. He wrote for two hours, gave me his text, and went back to the halfway house. And so it went for months.

One Saturday he did not come. I did not think anything of it. He had missed before. He would sign out to come to St. Rose—and then go to the track. He would tell me about it the following week. I didn't mind.

This time, however, I heard about it sooner. On Monday I received a call from the woman in another state with whom Ed had fallen in love by correspondence. She told me Ed had died. On Saturday. He was on his way to his appointment with me; he had a flat and even though he was getting help to change it—one of his former jailers had recognized him on the road—he had a heart attack and died.

Even before I put down the phone I was already reaching for my files. I had to find out how far Ed had gotten with his story. This is what I found:

He had made his first communion in St. Rose! It was, apparently, the last good thing that was to happen to him for a long, long time.

Insisting that he was not blaming her for his own choices, Ed did tell about a bad relationship with his mother whom he could not please. In retrospect, he felt he came to hate himself. He clearly remembered that he started to get into trouble. He quit school as soon as he turned sixteen. He left home and started to live on his wits. Some stealing. Some gambling. Lots of drinking. And chasing women.

Finally, he says, he found a woman who wanted to take care of him. He didn't love her but he moved in anyway. By her he had three children, one girl and twin boys. Nonetheless, he kept hustling and he kept drinking and he kept chasing other women and eventually he left.

One night, real drunk real early, he got it into his head that one of his "ladies" was doing him wrong. He went to find her. In his drunkenness, he went to the wrong apartment and shot and killed the two people who were there. One was a little boy named Christopher. Then he went home and passed out.

Ed was arrested the next morning. He denied ever leaving his apartment. But he had been seen and so he was convicted and sentenced to life.

Soon thereafter he was taken to Trenton State Prison and tossed into a cell where, ostensibly, he was to spend the rest of his life. He went in with the intention of finding something with which he could kill himself. But there was nothing. There was nothing in that cell except one dusty paperback book that the previous occupant had left and no one had removed. It was *The Imitation of Christ*. Since he could not kill himself with that, Ed sat down and read it. While reading he was hit with a blinding insight that dropped him to his knees where he spent the night in tears. The next day he requested a priest, confessed his crime, and went to church. "Unbeknown (sic) to me," he wrote, "this was the start of my spiritual journey."

These were Ed's last written words.

And just in case you were wondering: What was the blinding insight that changed Ed's life, and allowed him to thrive spiritually during twenty-one years in prison... in case you were wondering: Did he have time to record it...? He did. This is what God told him: You don't have to earn love, you just have to accept it. *You don't have to earn love, you just have to accept it.*

The purpose of this little book is to help people to do just this—to accept God's love. More precisely, the purpose of this little book is to help people to believe that God loves them, for being the people He made them, so that rightly they will be thrilled to be who they are.

I conceive this little book in the form of a conversation with you, dear reader, or perhaps a short speech to which you are willing to listen. I thank you in advance.

Let's start by taking a look at some of the reasons that so often the love of self is lacking. We will look first at some of the extraordinary reasons people do not love themselves and then we will look at some of the ordinary reasons people do not love themselves.

The following are ten extraordinary reasons people do not love themselves:

1. We come from less than noble parentage—or from a family that is perceived as no good—and instinctively we feel “we are what we come from.”
2. As children we were abused and thereby made to feel worthless or worse.
3. As children we were abandoned, and maybe more than once. (Children feel something similar when someone they love dies.)
4. We were raised in an unloving, and maybe brutal home.
5. We were, we think, outshined by a brother or sister who was, we think, more loved by mom or dad.

6. We were rejected by someone we think we loved.

7. We were betrayed by someone we deeply loved.

8. We have some physical defect and thus feel ugly. (Almost all of us are aware that we are much affected by how others look to us. Thus it is that almost all of us are aware that others are much affected by how we look to them.)

9. We have done something very bad and so we think we *are* bad.

10. We are bad at something and therefore think we are no good.

These are some of the extraordinary reasons people might not love themselves. They are extraordinary in the sense that they do not apply to everyone. There are, however, ordinary reasons that people do not love themselves—reasons that *do* apply, to some extent, to everyone. There are several such reasons:

For one, people judge themselves backwards. This is what happens: We are born. We can do little more than nothing. We know nothing, and we are utterly self-centered. Yet, in seven short years, we get to the point where we can hear the word “perfect” and have some idea of what it means. So, how does this make us feel? Do we rejoice because we have come so far? No, immediately we begin to get down on ourselves because we are not perfect.

As if we *could* be perfect. As if we know what perfect is. The fact is: We cannot know what perfect is. Perfect is what God will make us when we die. Right now, this is more than we could ever imagine. (And the more we grow, the better we know this.) In any case, on the road to perfection we do not know how much farther we have to go.

But we do know how far we have come. All of us were born as babies. Now we are so much more. It is this that should get our attention. After all, it is growth that is remarkable. Grow is what we have actually done. And we should be happy about it rather than miserable about the growth that has yet to come.

But this is not how we see things. We judge ourselves backwards. And there are other reasons people are rarely happy with who they are.

Here's one: We were raised by constant correction. It could not be avoided. Babies have to be stopped if they get too close to something hot or something they could break; and being corrected is how we learn to speak. More to the point, it is much more urgent that we be corrected than praised. (If a child is playing quietly with his blocks you leave him alone!) But if correction was mostly what we heard, most of us were bound to get the idea that "there is something wrong with me."

Here's another reason people are rarely happy with who they are: Almost everyone around us has the same problem. Thus, we are surrounded by people who have difficulty acknowledging the goodness in others and act as if there's none to see.

Here's the biggest reason people are rarely happy with who they are: They are not trying to believe in themselves for the right reason: because God has made us who we are.

If we do not believe in ourselves because we believe that God has made us who we are, we are bound to get our idea of ourselves in two wrong ways:

- 1) From the opinions of others.
- 2) Comparing ourselves to others.

Either of these ways will lead us into trouble.

If we get our idea of ourselves from the opinions of others, we live at the mercy of their opinions right *or wrong*. We will be getting our idea of ourselves from people who do not see our soul, do not understand our part in God's plan, do not see the person we are going to be in heaven, and often have their own self-centered reasons to like someone or not. Even if they seem to like us—and, of course, we never know—we will still feel insecure. After all, they like us only while we please them.

If we get our idea of ourselves by comparing ourselves to others, we are sure to put us down. This happens for one or more of the following four reasons:

First of all, we compare our insides with other people's outsides. In other words, we are all too aware of our own imperfection. What we do not see is the inner struggle of others.

Secondly, we compare our-selves to other people's *things*. We think of ourselves as less if someone else has more things, money, talent at something, fame, or power. We do not pay attention to the fact that who we are is who we are as persons best described in terms of the qualities of our hearts.

Thirdly, we compare ourselves with the people we see on television. It does not occur to us that what we see has been carefully staged to make the people we see look good. We even compare ourselves with fictional characters whose abilities or adventures are really had by no one. (Who has a new adventure every week?)

Finally, we make no allowances. We rarely take into consideration differences in ability or opportunity which no one brought upon themselves. (When you consider how little some people were given, it's amazing how far they've come.)

God, however, always makes allowances. He judges us rightly because everything that has ever happened to us has followed His plan.

This has to be true because God is God. God is behind all things. Nothing happens apart from His will. He made us to love us, and certainly He has not left our destiny in the hands of fortune, or other people's badness, or anything else. No, when He made the world He put into action a plan for everything that would ever happen, including all the events of all of our lives. He did this knowing how we would respond to these events. In this way, we become people He can love forever, while, in the process, each of us still becomes our own person.

Actually, what we become is the seed, just the seed of the person God needs us to be, a seed that He transforms when we die and brings to the full life of heaven.

It was to form this seed that God gave us our starting point in life, and the struggles which have made us who we are so far.

What is more, into the making of this seed, God has put just as much love as He has put into the making of the seed of anyone else.

This has to be true because God is not like us. We are only human, limited in every way. We have only so much time, energy, and money. If we give, we have less to give to someone else. Therefore, we must divide up what we give, and frequently we give more to one than to another. God, however, is not like us. God is infinite. He could put His whole self into the making of each and every one of us. We know that He did so because He is God, because He is good, and because He had no reason not to.

Instead, He *did* have reason to put His whole self into the making of each of us—so that He could love us the only way He wants to—with all His heart. He put His whole self into preparing each of us to see Him as no one else will be able to see Him and from this sight to gain what we will have to share with the rest of the family that we will be in heaven. He put His whole self into His plan for our lives—and this means no less than He has put into His plan for anyone else's life—so that we would play the role He needed us to play in making us the family that we will be. (Other people may not be able to see this now, but they will see it later, when we are together in heaven.)

God has put His whole self into the making of each and every one of us. He has made each of us absolutely and no less special than anyone else. He loves each of us with all His heart. Indeed, *God could not love you more if you were the only person He ever made.*

If we believe this, that we are so loved, that God sees goodness within us, our goodness comes out.

If we believe that we are good, we feel good. If we feel good, we do good; we love. This is how our goodness resembles God's. His goodness had to be expressed; He made us. If we feel good, we too will care about more than just ourselves.

If we care about others, we will feel better; we will do better, and we will feel better still. This is how love grows.

If we do not see the goodness in ourselves, however, we cannot afford to see the goodness in others. The goodness in others will make us feel bad about who we are. We cannot love. (We can be nice to those from whom we want something, but this is not love and it does not last. We can do good in order to feel that we are good—that we are not bad—but we will not feel good doing it.) Not loving, we will feel worse about who we are, and so it goes.

Not loving, being insecure, we will be unhappy.

Not loving, being insecure, we will easily fall prey to manipulation of all sorts. We will waste our time and money on things that cannot give us worth or make us happy, suffer desperately over relationships, and make lots of mistakes looking for love or maybe just power.

But, we can also know this: Since everything that happens follows God's plan, we cannot lose His love. No matter what we do, no matter why we say we do it, God had His reasons we had to go through it.

Knowing this never inspires evil. Rather, if we really believe that God loves us for who we are—not for what we do—we will feel the need to love God back. And we will not be satisfied unless we believe we are doing the best we can.

This is God's way of bringing about holiness, not by fear—how would that bring about holiness?—but by love which, by His design of our nature, inspires love.

And the more we love, the more we grow in love. And the more we grow in love, the more will have to share with the family we will be in heaven.

At this point, let's go back and take a look at what faith has to say to the extraordinary reasons people do not love themselves.

To those who might have come from less than noble parentage: You *are* what you have come from. And if you have come very far from what you have been given, this is great indeed!

To those who might have been abused: Hear this! If children have been abused, especially sexually, they consider themselves both guilty and dirty. They consider themselves guilty because, in their self-centeredness, children consider themselves responsible for everything that happens around them. They consider themselves dirty because they were involved in something so unclean. The fact is: Small, inexperienced children are never guilty of what was done to them by a big, experienced adult—especially an adult they had been taught to trust. Once it starts, confusion and shame make it almost impossible to stop. Making matters worse, people judge their response as children from the point of view of what they now know as adults. It is also wrong that they feel dirty. Those who were abused never wanted nor gave themselves to what happened. It neither reflected nor involved them as persons in any way.

To those who might have been abandoned: Please remember, human parents are human. And so were their parents! They did not get the benefit of a perfect upbringing. They have to struggle with things they can't always handle. Their behavior does not always reflect the truth. But the truth is always reflected in the love of God, our heavenly parent.

To those who might have been raised in an unloving, and maybe even brutal home: See the above.

To those who might think that they were outshined by a brother or sister whom, we think, was more loved by mom or dad: Please believe your parents when they almost always say that their love for their children is different, yes, but absolutely equal. This is one time when our human parents are just like our heavenly parent: They experience each of their children as absolutely unique and irreplaceable.

To those who might have been rejected by someone they think they love: Please understand that your rejection is always someone else's "fault" in the literal sense of that word which means "something missing." We can say this because He who knows us best loves us best. Other people don't love us to the extent that they don't see what God does.

To those who might have been betrayed by someone they love: Please notice that the very sin that hurt you shows that the person who did it has something wrong with him or her. A terrible weakness has been exposed; there was a failure to cope or grow. This says nothing about the worth of you.

To those who might have some physical defect and thus feel ugly: In God's name I say this: You are not ugly. The "who" you are is beautiful, and no one out there is more so. God sees it right now; the rest of us will see it soon enough.

To those who might have done something very bad and so they think they *are* bad: Please understand that God does not keep score. He sees us as persons who can learn and when we have learned we have turned something bad into something good, and now we are more, not less, because of what we've done.

Finally, to those who might be bad at something and therefore think they are no good: Please think about it: "Things" we can do are *things*. What really matters is who we are as people. And we are much greater as people when we accept the limitations that God has given us to work with.

This last point helps me to bring up an issue that just might be lurking within you. After all, to love ourselves for the right reason, because God has made us who we are... it sounds so easy; what could it be worth?

The fact is: To love ourselves because God has made us who we are is far from easy. After all, to love ourselves because God has made us who we are is to accept our limitations. It is to accept the things about ourselves that we would like to change but can't. It is to accept that, right now, we have less than others.

This takes a lot of faith. It takes a lot of faith in God—that God knows what He's doing—and it also takes a lot of faith in ourselves. We need to trust our judgment about something that is very important to us. We need to trust our judgment about something that is far different from the way the world sees it.

This judgment is an act of our whole self.

We cannot say the same about some accomplishment in art or science or sports or politics. Though some of these accomplishment are, indeed, admirable, they involve only part of a person's spirit, and sometimes they are motivated by a person's weakness—a need for fame, for example—or a narrow view of what is important.

On the contrary, the love of self is an act of our whole self, and it is motivated by no weakness.

One might notice that the very difficulty in actually doing it, and living like we do, should show a person that he or she is great. Yet, the process is not complicated. **All it takes is to think things through and say “yes” to the big picture, the big picture of where we're from, why we're here, and what really matters in the end!**

To love yourself for the right reason, because God has made you who you are, is one of greatest things a person can do, and it is available to absolutely every person who is capable of reading this piece.

You don't have to earn love, you just have to accept it.

# No2C's

## How We Practice the Love of Self

The two c's are comparing ourselves to others and criticizing ourselves for what we cannot do, or have done and cannot change. We say "no" to this on account of our faith.

Clearly and absolutely, our faith proclaims to us that God's plan for everything is also God's plan for us, and that He has put His whole self into making us, and no less than He has put into the making of anyone else.

Yes, our life is a struggle, but it's a special struggle that is meant to form us into the seed of a special person who will have a place in heaven no one else can fill.

And it does not matter that the world cannot see this—now.

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