

Discovering the Real Me: Student Textbook # 12 on Preparing for Life in Society

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INTRODUCTION

The final year of high school marks an important stage in a person's life. For many students it is the final year of a long period of formal schooling going back almost as long as they can remember. It's hard to imagine life without school!



This senior year will bring one phase of your life to a close and lead you into another in which you will be more and more a part of general society. When you finish this academic year, your entire life will stretch before you. The question is: what will you do with it?

Of course, some will extend their schooling by going on to college. Yet this will be different from the schooling they are used to. There is more freedom, more responsibility, and there are more choices. At college, fellow students and teachers will treat you as an adult. You may move out of your parents' home to live with other students, either on or off campus, and assume the responsibilities of living on your own.

The theme of this course, therefore, is Preparing for Life in Society. The past few years have already been marked by a growing independence as you matured and became more responsible. This process will continue even further. As it does, these basic life goals are important: to become a fully mature and responsible individual, to develop loving relationships with others (especially in your family) and to make a positive contribution to your world. These are the goals experts have determined lead to a satisfying and fulfilled life. This book offers some thoughts in each of these three areas.

The first seven chapters focus on issues related to the first life goal. They discuss emotional life—why we feel the things we do and the struggles we all face in trying to understand who we are. We take another look at the “enemy within”—that part of ourselves that seems to be working against our better interests and how to deal with it. We take up the deeper question of finding meaning and purpose in our lives. What makes life worth living and how do we find the strength to overcome its challenges? We end this section by considering the importance of the choices we make and, through them, the destinies we create for ourselves.

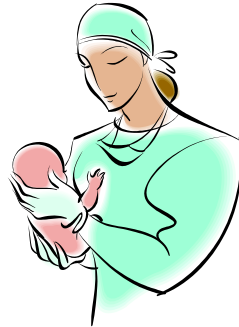
In the next six chapters we deal with second life goal issues: friendships, love relationships, marriage, and family. We discuss the importance of commitment and loyalty towards our friends, neighbors, and family members. We discuss functioning effectively in a group. How to bring the ideal of altruistic love—living for the sake of others—down to earth and make it work in everyday life is also covered. We consider the reality of broken families and the reasons for failure. Finally, we look at the individual and family in relation to society, and the importance of loving, stable families.

The final four chapters are devoted to the third life goal—our personal contribution to society. Here we return to the issue of leadership, focusing on some examples of individuals who developed their leadership abilities while facing tremendous opposition. We discuss how one person can make a difference in his or her community, society, and the world by practicing the principle of living for the sake of others. We bring this course to a close by asking the most fundamental question of all: what is a life worth living? Finding the answer to this question is the key to a good and fulfilling life.

We hope that you will find this course valuable for your life as you journey into the world of adulthood and society.

CHAPTER 1: Our Emotional Life

From the moment we are born we start having emotional experiences. The cry of a newborn baby is an expression of discontent at the sudden change of environment from the coziness of the mother's womb to a relatively cold outside world. At the same time, it is a proclamation of the existence of a new human being.



At two months, a baby begins to smile, expressing its pleasure at communicating with the parents. As time goes on, individual differences begin to show: some children show strong, even violent, emotions; others are emotionally reserved. A child's nature is both provoked by and provokes reactions in the people around them, which further influence the child. A child with an emotionally difficult background is usually less able to study, for instance, than a child who has had positive emotional experiences. Hence, our overall character and even our intellect is influenced by our emotional experiences in childhood. The better our emotional experiences, the more our personality can develop.

Basic human emotions

Most scientists distinguish three basic human emotions: pleasure, fear, and anger. The rich variety of human emotion is all based upon these three.

Although the entire human brain is involved in emotional states, some leading centers of emotion have been discovered. The most important of these brain structures is the *hypothalamus*, which is involved in regulating the body's *metabolism*. Experiments have shown that stimulating the hypothalamus in a laboratory can produce pleasure, fear, and anger. The hypothalamus is closely connected to the *pituitary gland*, which influences our growth, metabolism, and maturation. It is also connected to other parts of the brain that are involved with *hormone secretion*. Thus, stimulating these key centers affects the whole person, emotionally and physiologically. It affects the heartbeat, breathing, and causes us to sweat. The face may grow flushed or pale. The entire body may "jump for joy" or "shake with fear."

Science knows a lot about human emotions. But science only studies the effects of a person's environment on his emotional state physiologically. We know, however, that human emotion is not only physiological but is centered in the nonphysical "heart". This is why our emotions play such an important role in the development of our inner life and character.

The positive is more powerful than the negative

Of the three basic emotions, there is considerable evidence that pleasure is much stronger than fear, anger, and other related emotions such as hatred, resentment, aggressiveness, shame, guilt, and grief. It is the power of love which gives rise to feelings of joy and pleasure. So the old saying that love is the greatest power in the universe is scientifically true!

Yet much of what we read, hear, and see about human emotions focuses on the negative. Numerous TV shows are about solving murder mysteries. Many books, plays, and movies deal with despair, adultery, tragedy, and death. Newspapers are full of accounts of war, death, and horror. History also seems to be a record of people's negative behavior instead of a record of the positive aspects of human emotional life.

In everyday life, we also seem to pay more attention to negative emotions than positive ones. We remember vividly the time our teacher exploded at us in anger; we forget or ignore the hundreds of other days he treated us with kindness and respect. Thus, we may get the impression that negative emotions are more powerful in human life than positive emotions. However, this is not true.

Anger, fear, aggression, hatred, and grief may make for great drama, but they are not the dominant forces in human life. They are interesting in stories and news accounts *because* they are unusual. The norm is human cooperation, friendliness, helpfulness, peacefulness, and respect for the rule of law. Human progress has been powered by the positive emotions of life, the root of which is love. Love and the joy and pleasure that flow from it are much more powerful than the negative emotions.

The problem has been finding people who believe this and practice love in the face of all the emphasis on negative emotions. History shows that when people have done so, they have unleashed monumental changes for good in the process.

Positive feelings

Emotional experiences shape who we are and give rise to the feelings we have as we face everyday life. Positive emotional experiences will bring out many kinds of positive feelings, which will impact our personal relationships, our lives, and our interactions in society in general. The following is an incomplete list of positive feelings:

1. Religious feelings: the joy of coming closer to God.
2. Altruistic feelings: the result (or cause) of helping others.
3. Feelings of companionship: an emotional attitude toward those we feel close to and comfortable with.
4. Feelings of satisfaction: the result of successfully completing a task.
5. Feelings of exhilaration: the result of successfully overcoming barriers, dangers, or difficulties.
6. Romantic feelings: an attraction for someone of the opposite sex, involving tenderness.
7. Feelings of intellectual excitement: the stimulation of learning something new, discovering a new theory, inventing a new machine, or solving a complicated intellectual puzzle.

8. Aesthetic feelings: appreciating the beauty of nature or art.
9. Sexual feelings: when in an intimate physical relationship.

When we experience one of these positive feelings, it produces an overall feeling of happiness, sometimes flooding our whole being in joy. We have an inborn desire to be happy—indeed to be intoxicated with joy--and we are forever pursuing the positive feelings which are the basis of that happiness.



Personal relationships are happy only when they are permeated with positive emotional experiences. This is why expressions of anger or fear are destructive to family life. Marriages are strongest when both husband and wife experience positive emotions in their relationship. This is one reason that marital therapists urge long-time married couples to start "dating" each other again—making time for pleasant, fun times together so that they associate one another with pleasure. The same is true for relationships between parents and children. Positive experiences—it can be as simple as making a cake together in the kitchen or going to a special event together—lead to close bonds and mutual happiness.

Can we control our emotions?

If positive emotions are stronger than negative ones and more desirable, the question comes up: Can we control our emotions?

Emotions sometimes seem overwhelming and out of control. A person with a bad temper sometimes feels that he or she will never learn not to shout, not to abuse others, not to experience the rush of anger that keeps coming back as memories of the triggering incident return. A fearful person may feel he or she will never be able to compete, never venture into new things. Some people are so fearful, they never leave their houses!

Sexual attractions and romantic feelings may also seem out of control. In fact, many popular songs compare falling in love to "being crazy about you" or "losing my mind over you" or say, "I'm about to lose control." Sexual desire can seem almost overwhelming at times.

Fortunately, we have a powerful weapon on our side when our emotions threaten to take over our lives. We are rational, thinking beings. We can think our way out of some emotional storms.



For instance, angry people might find themselves feeding their anger with their own thoughts, even as they blame another person for making them angry. They might not have seen or talked to the other person for days, even years (the person who made them mad may even be dead!), yet they are still seething in anger due to the way they are thinking about the other person. Often emotions like compassion, forgiveness, and love can blot anger out, so the key is to use our rationality to cultivate these good emotions.

Some psychologists have developed a training programs to associate the negative emotion of anger with the positive emotion of compassion. One program does this by linking anger and compassion deep in the person's mind and heart through repetition and training. Another program helps New York City bus drivers be less angry with their customers by changing their thinking about the customers. A film showed the drivers that their customers' most annoying behavior might be related to causes that could evoke compassion rather than anger. For instance, a seemingly drunk and dizzy customer was shown to have taken some medicine for a heart condition that was affecting him. His stumbling on the bus and slurred speech were due to medication rather than alcohol. The bus drivers then felt sorry for the customer instead of angry and impatient with him. Changing their thinking helped the drivers feel more positively toward their customers.

A fearful person can fight fear with positive affirmations: "I can do this. I am a good and worthy person. I've done this before and done well at it. There's no reason to fear this. I can choose not to feel fear in this situation." There are also psychological techniques, called de-sensitization techniques, where a fearful person imagines things that frighten him or her in a therapeutic, relaxed setting. Doing a series of muscle tightening and relaxing exercises, the fearful person learns to identify relaxation and associate it

with a fear—say, a fear of public speaking. Soon, the thought of public speaking becomes associated with a wonderful feeling of relaxation, and the fear goes away.

Sexual attractions and romantic feelings can also be controlled by our rationality. We'll examine this in a section by itself.

Love and sexual attraction

In our teenage years, most of us have experienced the joy of falling in love with someone of the opposite sex. Often, this may occur with someone who is totally wrong for us: a teacher, an older teenager, someone who doesn't share our values at all. We may fall in love with someone we can't even meet—a movie star or model or singer. We may fall in love with a pretty or handsome face and take a long time to "wake up" to the person's true personality. Some high school students experience many boyfriends and girlfriends by the time they graduate. Once they find out what the other person is really like, they break up and go on to the next.

Imagine if in all these relationships of "love," they had acted on their emotions by engaging in numerous sexual experiences. No wonder sexual diseases are epidemic in some countries! No wonder there are so many unwanted pregnancies. No wonder depression and psychological problems are so common among teenagers. Better to control our emotions with our rationality so that we don't get hurt—physically, mentally or emotionally—when it comes to relating to the opposite sex.

Sometimes an older person's rationality can guide us when our emotions are going out of control. The story of Lucy demonstrates how this happened for her.

Lucy learns a lesson

Lucy was absolutely crazy about Anton. He was so cute! And funny and nice. The wonderful thing was, Anton seemed to feel the same way about her. She was on "cloud nine." The couple met constantly throughout the school day and said they were boyfriend and girlfriend.

But something puzzled Lucy. Anton could never see her on weekends. Anton told her he was busy with his family on weekends.

Soon, though, friends started mentioning that they had seen Anton on the weekend with a blonde girl named Marietta from another school. They saw him in the park with her, at the movies, and window shopping downtown together. They couldn't be sure, but they thought the couple had been holding hands.

Anton got mad when Lucy brought it up. He said that Marietta was a friend of one of his cousins. "You're just jealous!" he accused her.

Upset, Lucy turned to her aunt for advice. She really wanted to believe Anton. Maybe he and Marietta weren't holding hands. Maybe they were just in a group of cousins together. Was she just being jealous, like Anton said?

When Lucy's aunt heard that several of Lucy's classmates had seen Anton with Marietta on several different occasions, she said it didn't sound to her like Anton was being completely truthful. Why did he never ask Lucy along on these group outings with his cousins if it was okay for Marietta, who was also no relation, to be there? Lucy's aunt advised Lucy to cool off her relationship with Anton a bit and take a good hard look at the situation.

It was painful, but Lucy explained to Anton that she needed some time and distance from their relationship. She did not accuse him but said she needed to work some things out on her own. If she was too jealous like he said, she needed some time to work through that.

Lucy went through several lonely and painful months, but when things got too bad, she went to talk to her aunt. Her aunt strengthened her by saying things like, "You need to protect your heart," and "Don't let him play you along."

It turned out Anton had been secretly going steady with Marietta for a long time, all during the time he was "boyfriend and girlfriend" with Lucy. The only reason he hung around with Lucy at school was because Marietta went to a different school.

Lucy was glad she had listened to her aunt. The voice of reason had won over her emotions. It was painful to "lose" Anton, but Lucy had the pride of knowing that she had ended a situation that was unfair to her with dignity.

If Lucy and Anton in the above story had entered into a sexual relationship, it would have been much harder for Lucy. Sexual relationships involve explosive emotions. They are not just physical experiences. Sex bonds people deeply together. When a couple breaks up after having had sex, they are much more torn than if they did not have sex. Especially for girls, a sexual relationship implies along with it a high degree of commitment—a commitment that may not be there.

Sex can lead to the emotions of joy and pleasure that imitate feelings of true love. But this is short-lived. Sex between people who are not committed to one another in marriage can lead to fear, guilt, shame, disillusionment, anger, and other negative feelings. Eventually, someone feels hurt and betrayed—and broken-hearted. A bad experience with sex at an early age can do great damage to a person and negatively color any future romantic relations. It can even damage that person's attitudes towards love in general. When pain invades such an intimate relationship, the heart is deeply wounded and may never totally heal.



The wonderful thing is, we don't have to wait until we fall in love with someone of the opposite sex to experience the joys and wonders of love. The joy generated by true love—love for the sake of others—is the greatest gift possessed by human beings. It helps our personalities grow and enriches our lives. Love is joyful whether we experience it by taking care of a young child, helping an elderly person, being kind to our friends and family, working to help animals, or helping with a community clean-up. Our hearts well up with the positive emotion of love when we behave lovingly toward others. Then we become so filled with love that we are more ready than ever to love that special someone with whom we will fall in love and marry.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the three basic human emotions?

2. What are some of the positive feelings we may experience in life?

3. How are negative emotions expressed in family life?

4. What feelings provide for family happiness?

5. Can our minds control our feelings? Give an example.

6. How can sexual relations lead to negative emotions?

7. What is the best way to practice for true love in marriage?

Exercises: “Identifying Human Emotion”

1. Look at a picture that expresses a strong emotional experience and try to describe the emotions felt by those in the picture.

2. Think of the most positive emotional experience of your childhood. What was its cause? How do you feel today when you think about it?

3. Observe the people around you and try to identify the kinds of feelings they are experiencing—positive or negative. Which ones do you see more often?

Reflective Exercise: “Checking Our Emotions”

During the week, record all the situations in which you experienced strong emotions. Find the words that most accurately characterize those feelings. At the end of the week look through your notes and identify those that were most dominant. Are you satisfied with the result, or would you like to change something in yourself?

CHAPTER 2: Being You

In life, everyone goes through times when they are not happy with themselves. Perhaps you have experienced this. What can you do in such situations? How do you build up your self-esteem? Of course, it would be wrong to devote all our time to thinking about ourselves. At the same time if we have some issues to deal with in ourselves, we cannot just ignore them. In this chapter we will look at the story of one teenager who needed to improve his self-image. Perhaps his story may seem familiar to you.



Michael

Michael admires Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has seen every one of his movies. Michael has read a lot about Schwarzenegger. He knows that his idol wasn't just born a successful, muscular hero, but that he had to work very hard to build up his body and his career.

But Michael knows that no matter how hard he works, he will never become like Arnold. Michael is fifteen, very thin and very near-sighted. He hates his thick glasses, hates the pimples on his face, and sometimes hates just about everything about himself.

Today, Michael's family and relatives have gathered to celebrate his grandmother's 70th birthday. It's a beautiful summer day and everybody feels relaxed and joyful — except Michael. Today is one of those days when Michael can't stand himself. The happier the people are around him, the more miserable he feels.

Michael is sitting alone some distance away from the table where his mother and sister have just served cake, and where the others are talking to each other in small groups. Several of his relatives tried to engage Michael in conversation earlier, but his

dull responses caused them to give up after a while, and they left him alone.

Michael has been watching his relatives, especially his Uncle Louis, whom he doesn't see very often because he lives quite far away. Uncle Louis catches his attention because he is laughing a lot with the people who are gathered around him. He seems like a magnet, attracting others. Michael is particularly impressed because Louis has many of the features that Michael doesn't like in himself. He is at least as thin as Michael. He is also very tall, which makes him look even more like a stick than Michael. He wears glasses, too. Yet he doesn't seem to feel bad about himself and the other people like him. There is something about him that they like, which makes them want to be with him. Michael would like to talk to Louis, but he doesn't know how to go about it. Anyway, he doubts that Louis would want to talk to him.

Actually, Louis has been noticing Michael for some time sitting away from the others with an unhappy face. Louis knows that Michael has been going through some difficulties, because his mother had talked to him about Michael earlier. Louis has been looking for an opportunity to speak to his nephew. When he sees Michael stand up and come over to the table to get some cake, Louis decides to approach him. He excuses himself from the group of people he is with and walks over to Michael.

"Hi, Mike, can I join you for a while? Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Yes, Uncle Louis. It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" Michael answers, glad that his uncle is talking to him, but not sure how honestly he should answer his question. They both take a piece of cake from the table and sit together on the grass a little way off.

A heart-to-heart talk

At first, they talk about ordinary things, but before he knows it, Michael is confiding in his uncle and telling him how he feels about himself.

"You know, Uncle Louis, sometimes I think nobody likes me because I'm so thin and look so weak. My classmates often make fun of me, especially in sports."

"I understand, Mike, because when I was your age, I had similar feelings. I wanted to be handsome so that the girls would pay attention to me. And I wanted to be strong and athletic so that I could get back at those who made fun of me because of my glasses. Sometimes I felt so bad about myself that I wished I were someone else."

"Sometimes I wish that, too. But now you don't feel like that anymore? It doesn't matter to you that you're so thin and have to wear glasses?"

"Now it doesn't, no, because I've come to understand that who I am is more important than the way I look. You have to learn to accept yourself—and to like yourself."

"But what if I *don't* like myself?"

"Then the people around you will also find it difficult to like you. The way somebody feels about himself is expressed in the way he acts, the way he talks and walks—even by the look in his eyes. People around him respond to these signs, consciously or unconsciously. It's as if a person who hates himself gives off negative energy that pushes others away. On the other hand, people who like and respect themselves always attract

others who want to be with them.”

"Well, I don't know. It sounds good, but I'm not sure if it's really true. In my school, to be popular it seems more important to wear the right clothes or have lots of money."

"Mike, it's true that there are some people who value a person's possessions or appearance more than his character. But don't worry about them. They don't make good friends. Since they are interested in you because of what you have rather than for who you are, they can easily betray you. The way to attract people is by developing your character, not by focusing on your appearance."

"Well, I don't see why anybody would be attracted to me, whether I like myself or not. There is absolutely nothing special about me!" said Michael.

"Mike, you are a unique individual. There is nobody in the whole world that is just like you. And there will never, ever be another person like you. So you have something to share with people that no one else has. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Okay, I get the point: I'm unique. But I still don't know why this should be attractive to anybody. Maybe my uniqueness is unattractive."

"Well, if that's really true, then it's up to you to change it. You have the power to become the kind of person that you would be glad to know, a person you respect. Become reliable, take initiative, and be helpful and friendly. Then you are sure to develop many friendships."

E-mails

In the following week Michael finds himself thinking a lot about what his uncle said. Finally, he decides to send him an e-mail:

Dear Uncle Louis,

I cannot forget what you said to me. I think you are right, I have to learn to like myself more, because I want to become a person other people like to be with. But, practically speaking, I don't know how to do this. I think you must know, because you are a person that everybody likes (including me). Please tell me what you did to become like that.

Your nephew,

Michael

After a couple of days Michael receives the following response:

My dear Mike,

I was very happy to receive your message and learn that my words have given you so much food for thought. I enjoyed our talk very much — I think you are a sincere and genuine person.

I also deeply respect your decision to learn to like yourself more and to become a person whom others would want to have as a friend. I cannot promise that it will be easy, but as I told you already, I was very much like you when I was your age, and if I have been able to change, you can also. Here are some things I did to change myself step-by-

step:

I knew that I had to stop criticizing myself. There were so many things I didn't like about myself, and I was always quick to think, "I'm so bad; it's hopeless; I'll never change; it's no use even trying." I started observing myself carefully. I checked my words, thoughts, feelings, actions, even my voice and smile. I made a point of reflecting on my day every evening. I would analyze what I had done right and what I had done wrong. Then I would make a goal for the next day. After a while I felt that I was improving, and my self-respect increased.

I had to learn to resist the temptation to compare myself with someone else. Instead, I learned to respect other people for who they were, and their achievements, but also I could begin to respect myself for who I was and for my own progress.

And finally, because I thought that I was a rather unkind person, I started doing things for others, even in small ways. I volunteered to help people in need. Sometimes I didn't feel like doing it, but I pushed myself to do it anyway. I even gave small gifts to people, for no other reason than to surprise them and make them happy. Doing this helped me a lot to feel better about myself.

During this time I became more aware of my own uniqueness. I discovered that I had certain talents different from anybody else. People told me that I was sensitive and tender-hearted. At first I didn't like that, because I wanted to be tough and never show any emotion. But after a while I started to appreciate these qualities in myself instead of denying them.

Well, Mike, I hope some of these ideas may work for you. I look forward to hearing about your progress. I am thinking of you.

*With love,
Louis*

Self-confidence

Mike suffered from a poor self-image, which Uncle Louis helped him correct. Since Uncle Louis had corrected his own poor self-image as a youth, he knew it could be done.

We alone create our self-image. We are the master designer.



A self-image involves our thinking first, then the actions we take to make our thoughts substantial. As was said in the last chapter, our thinking can rule over our feelings, including dispelling negative feelings about ourselves. If we nurture a positive and optimistic attitude about ourselves, we will feel our value. As Uncle Louis advised Mike, we have to watch our self-critical and defeatist thoughts and try to stop them as we become aware of them. Then we have to take positive action, as Louis did, doing acts of kindness toward others and watching our own progress toward our goals. As we do more and more to improve ourselves and our relationships with others, we will feel more and more self-respect.

Life is not always easy or beautiful. Our lives go through many hills and valleys. But there is one thing always to remember— *ultimately we can achieve extraordinary results if our desire and motivation are strong enough*. Believing this can give us incredible power.

Our problem is that we stamp the word IMPOSSIBLE across our plans and dreams and never complete them. Many limitations are ones we set ourselves, in our own thinking.

So believe in yourself! As Uncle Louis told Mike, you are a unique human being. There is no one just like you. You're one of a kind—the one and only! That's a positive and powerful thing.

**"You are a child of the universe,
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here."**

***The Desiderata*
Max Erhmann**

Questions for Reflection

1. What is Michael's character like? Why do you think he is this way?

2. What is Louis's character like? Was he always that way?

3. How did Louis change himself?

4. What do you think of Louis's advice to Michael?

5. What is self-esteem?

6. What makes a person valuable?

7. If your closest friend or relative suddenly became poor or unpopular, would you still feel the same way about that person?

8. How do self-esteem and self-respect influence everything a person does?

9. Does a person with a high sense of self-esteem usually treat others with respect? Why?

10. How can a sense of self-respect help a person develop his/her personality?

Exercise: “How Do You See Yourself?”

How do you see yourself: as lovable, unlovable, or somewhere in between?

lovable a b c d e unlovable

likable (___) unlikable

attractive (___) unattractive

overweight (___) underweight

punctual (___) tardy

careful (___) careless

friendly (___) unfriendly

talented (___) untalented

accepted (___) rejected

diligent (___) lazy

loyal (___) disloyal

kind (___) unkind

sincere (___) insincere

Where do you see you need to change? Number them in their order of importance to you.

Reflection Exercise: “Passing Up An Opportunity”

Write a small story describing a situation in which a person passes up a good opportunity because of lack of self-confidence or because he’s afraid he will fail.

CHAPTER 3: Me and My Shadow

We have all experienced struggling to do the right thing. One part of us knows what we should do and wants to do right, while another part wants to do the opposite. Often it seems easier to be bad (or just lazy) than to be good. How can we resolve this internal conflict?

Conflicting desires

When we do what is right, we experience happiness. The desire to do good comes from our unselfish mind, which directs our thoughts, words, and actions to benefit others. When we act upon the desires of our good minds, although we may experience some discomfort at first, we end up feeling happy and fulfilled.

For example, suppose you borrow a lot of money from a good friend. It may not be easy to pay it back, but if you do, a more trusting and loving friendship is likely to result.

However, from within comes another desire, a desire of the selfish mind, telling you to do what you know is wrong: cheat your friend by not paying back the money, so you can keep it for yourself. This selfish mind says, “Oh, he has plenty of money. He doesn’t need it like I do.” You start thinking that if you avoid your friend long enough, he will never ask for the money back and you won’t have to repay him! So, for a whole year, you avoid him. He never asks for the money back, and one part of you thinks, “Oh, I was so smart.” But the reality is you will probably also feel guilty about what you did. Your unselfish mind knows you did something wrong. Because of your selfishness, you betrayed and lost a good friend. In the end you feel deep regret: “How could I do such a thing?” The temporary satisfaction you gained has been replaced by lasting sorrow.

Although, deep down, we want to be good people and do right by others, we also must deal with our selfish desires. Although we know these desires are wrong, they are still very powerful. How can we defeat them?

It’s all in the mind

The books and magazines we read, the TV shows and films we watch, the music we enjoy and the people with whom we associate — all these have an influence on us through the thoughts they stimulate.

Have you ever read a book or watched a movie that featured a noble hero and thought, “I would like to be like that”? Have the inspiring words or life stories of peacemakers like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas K. Gandhi, or other leaders ever moved you to want to work for a more just and kind world? Are there poems or books of wisdom, religious books, or books of spiritual inspiration that have guided, instructed, and comforted you? Are there songs that stir your emotions and uplift you? Do you have favorite sayings or mottoes that guide you at times? Has the sight of a flower garden, a fertile field, clouds on a sunny day, or a beautiful shell on the sand ever made you feel happy and satisfied? Good images in our minds and good thoughts and words stimulate good and unselfish desires, which lead us to do good actions and make us feel happy. We

find that it is a joy to help and serve others. We are inspired to create beauty in all we do.

By following our good thoughts, we develop good habits, such as being industrious, respectful and honest. Over time, these habits create in us a good character. Finally, our heart becomes good. We find we are no longer dominated by selfish thoughts and desires. We no longer have to struggle to be good. In fact, being unselfish has become natural to us. We cannot help expressing goodness. We sincerely love and care for others. We rejoice in their happiness and prosperity. When people hurt us, we don't feel resentful or seek revenge, but are willing to forgive.

All this is a process, often a lifelong one. However, the more we put the above into practice, the more we will experience this kind of satisfaction.

On the other hand, if we allow bad images to fill our minds, we will have bad thoughts. Such images appeal to and stimulate our selfish desires. We must admit: part of us enjoys listening to and thinking about things that go wrong for other people. For example, we may enjoy, in a rather perverse way, hearing bad things about famous people. That's why we have celebrity magazines, full of gossip and scandal. We may take perverse pleasure in hearing bad news or watching violence done to others—at least on TV.

Pornography also appeals to our selfish desires. Instead of uplifting our spirit with a vision of unselfish love with another person, it fills us with lustful, self-centered thoughts and desires. Although we know it is wrong, we experience an evil joy from indulging in it. We become more interested in our fantasies and the pictures that feed them than we are in caring for real people. This may make us withdraw into isolation and loneliness, and we will not develop the social skills we need to get along with other people. We will become more self-centered. Our relationships with the opposite sex will suffer as people dimly sense that we do not appreciate them for who they are but are looking at them as an object of carnal desires. We will find ourselves less able to truly love and relate to a real person.

Sometimes such images cause us to imagine doing things we know are wrong. Even though we may never intend to carry out these actions, all these selfish thoughts and desires will eventually come out in some way. People who commit sexual crimes are almost always deeply involved in the consumption of pornography. Eventually, they want to live out their fantasies with real people—whether the other people (sometimes children) are willing or not. Violent movies or TV shows with shouting, cursing, and discord may lead us to argue with our friends and family as we subconsciously imitate what we have seen.

Selfish desires lead to bad habits, such as being lazy, rude, lewd, and dishonest. Eventually, our entire character is corrupted. At the end of this downward path, we come to have an extremely selfish heart incapable of loving and being loved and actually capable of doing great harm to others.

Our inner struggle

Within each of us, selfishness and unselfishness are at war with one another. Our good desires are often shadowed over by our bad desires. Even the best things we do are often tarnished by some selfish motivation. On the other hand, even the worst person possesses a conscience which continually urges the person toward unselfish goodness. As

was stated in the section above, we can encourage our selfish nature or our unselfish nature by the types of things we allow ourselves to interact with and the types of thoughts we have.

Two Wolves--a Native American Story about the Power of Thought

An old grandfather's grandson was angry at a schoolmate who had done him an injustice. The grandfather said, "Let me tell you a story, Grandson. I, too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have done something against me, as they feel no sorrow for what they have done. But hate wears you down, and does not hurt your enemy. It is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die of it. I have struggled with these feelings many times."

He continued, "It is as if there are two wolves inside me. One is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way.

But the other wolf is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit."

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which one wins, Grandfather?"

The grandfather solemnly replied, "The one I feed."



The great peacemaker Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of the war within: "Each of us is...tragically divided against ourselves. A persistent civil war rages within all of our lives. Something within us causes us to lament with Ovid, the Latin poet, 'I see and approve the better things, but follow worse,' or to agree with Plato that human personality is like a charioteer having two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in a different direction, or to repeat with the Apostle Paul, 'I do not do the good that I want to do; but I do the evil that I don't want to do.'"



Religions have recognized the presence of a great contradiction inside of people too: the sacred Mahabharata of Hinduism says: "I know what is good but I am not inclined to do it; I know also what is bad, but I do not refrain from doing it." It is written in Buddhist scriptures: "Although they wish, 'Would that we might live in friendship, without hatred, injury...' they still live in enmity, hating, injuring..."

This inner conflict is tearing us apart. We are like a cup with a hole in it, made for a purpose that it cannot fulfill, continually draining out when it is meant to be full. We are meant to be good and happy, but due to this contradiction, we never experience complete fulfillment.

The conflicts of our world are due to the conflict within each of us. Because we are not at peace with ourselves, we easily create conflict with others. Woe to anyone who crosses our path when we are in a bad mood! The conflict between men and women, between ethnic groups, between nations — all are reflections of the conflict within each of us.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* tells vividly of inner conflict, or as Stevenson puts it: "the perennial war" between the good and evil selves.

Gentle Dr. Jekyll, a doctor, scientist, and humanitarian, struggles with sins he does not name, sometimes indulging himself in them. He begins to notice in himself two different natures, both of which are a strong part of him: "I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I labored in the eye of day, at the furtherance

of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering." Both sinner and saint are inside of him; part of him. He concludes that "man is not one, but truly two" and devises in his laboratory a potion that will at last separate the evil nature within him from the good. The evil side comes out in the form of a man he names Mr. Hyde.

When Dr. Jekyll is first taken over by Mr. Hyde's personality, he says, "I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine." Although he inhabits Dr. Jekyll's body, Hyde does not physically resemble the good doctor. Rather, "evil was written broadly and plainly on the face... Evil besides (which I still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay."

"I had now two characters as well as two appearances," wrote Jekyll. "One was wholly evil... inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure... from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone." Hyde is all the evil concentrated in Dr. Jekyll's soul expressed fully for the first time.

Dr. Jekyll labors by day to make scientific discoveries that will help humanity; he treats patients; he even works to undo any evil Hyde has done in the night. His goodness and service to others comforts him, but he begins to notice something. The more he is let out to do whatever he wants, the more powerful Hyde is getting inside of him. He begins "to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown... and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. Where in the beginning, the difficulty had been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to the other side. All things therefore seemed to point to this: that I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse."

Jekyll decides to take the potion no more, and he enjoys a period of peace and joy with his conscience approving of him once again. But after a time "I began to be tortured with throes and longings, as Hyde struggled after freedom. At last, in a moment of weakness, he gives in and drinks the potion again. Hyde is none the weaker for being kept inside so long. "My devil had long been caged, he came out roaring."

This time Hyde commits a brutal murder. Jekyll is firmer in his resolve to never take the potion again. However, he does indulge himself in some sinning, similar to what he had done before he began drinking the potion. Now this alone is enough to transform him into Hyde. At last, knowing that murderous Hyde, his most evil self, has won the battle and is now the stronger of the two, Jekyll commits suicide to end Hyde's crimes.

What can we do?

Lasting happiness is possible only when we eliminate the conflict within ourselves. We do this by strengthening the good side of our character so that it wins over us. As we said above, we should fill our minds with good images and unselfish thoughts. Every time a bad thought enters, we should quickly reject it and think about something good

instead. This can be a struggle, but we can help ourselves by the methods mentioned in the previous section: reading uplifting literature, listening to inspiring music, doing good deeds, and speaking positively with and about others.

We also should be completely honest with ourselves about our thoughts. We can best do this by confessing them to someone we trust. Evil loves to lurk in dark secret places. Exposing our bad thoughts by telling them to a mature person we trust, such as a parent or minister, can help us to defeat them. We should be careful, however, that in doing so we are not seeking for empathy or justification or to drag someone else down with us, but are doing it out of a sincere desire to be better.

If our thoughts have led to a selfish or wrongful action, we should confess and apologize, seeking to put right any harm we have done. It is much easier to do this if we can empathize with the person we have hurt by putting ourselves in his or her shoes.

We must strive to cultivate good habits and do good deeds, serving others in whatever way we can. For example, if we are tempted to keep some treat for ourselves, eating it alone in secret, we can immediately take a step toward goodness by deciding to share it with someone else. If the telephone rings, instead of staying comfortable and letting another family member jump up to answer it, we can be the one who volunteers first. In small ways like this, day-by-day, we can challenge our selfishness and develop our unselfishness until thinking of others first becomes natural.

We may think that we will profit by living selfishly. The world seems to teach us this. However, when we are selfish, we become so wrapped up in our own needs and desires that we are unable to connect deeply with others. We have built a wall between ourselves and other people. We can never find the happiness and fulfillment we want that way.

You probably have noticed that you are most happy when you are involved in caring for others. When we are genuinely concerned with making others happy, the brightest qualities of our character shine through. We become someone we really like and whom others like as well. Then we will have found true joy, happiness, and peace within.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your “shadow” side like?

2. What is your “bright side” like?

3. How does each side affect your relations with others?

4. Why is it important to be careful what we allow into our minds?

5. What does it mean to put yourself “in someone else's shoes”?

6. How can this help us to strengthen our good side?

7. How does selfishness separate us from others?

8. How does this prevent us from experiencing true happiness?

9. Have you ever experienced a deep joy through helping someone? Describe it.

Exercise: “Challenge for the Week”

Write down five character traits that you least like about yourself (for example, disloyalty, laziness, lying, etc.). Choose one of these “shadow” traits to focus on during this week. Make a promise to yourself to watch and deal with this particular aspect of your “shadow”. Write down your ideas and plans for changing this shadow into something bright. Check yourself at the end of the week to see how you did. This is a good way to help you become aware of and change undesirable aspects of your character.

Reflection Exercise: “Controlling Myself”

After completing the previous exercise, reflect on the following:

1. Why, if I dislike a certain kind of attitude or behavior in others, do I find it in myself?

2. How successful was I in controlling my undesirable behavior?

3. Why do I find it so difficult to control my own thinking and behavior?

4. What kind of person do I really want to be?

CHAPTER 4: The Thief and the Mask

There once lived a wise king with a beautiful daughter. The time came for her to be married and the king wanted her to have a variety of choices. So he advertised for prospective suitors to present themselves at the palace for selection. There were just two requirements: the men had to have a good character (the king's preference) and be good looking (the princess's choice).

Among the people who saw the advertisement was a thief. Although he had once been handsome, his life of robbery and lying had marked his face. Lines of deceit and betrayal had disfigured his looks. But his natural cunning was aroused by the idea of competing for the princess's hand.

"I can find a way," he thought, "to beat out the others." Secretly he visited a famous maker of masks and had one made that transformed his face back to the innocence of his youth.

With the help of the mask, the thief progressed rapidly through the early rounds of selection. At first, he would come home and laugh at how easily he had deceived the king's advisers.

"How foolish they are!" he told himself as he looked at his real face in the mirror each night.

After a few weeks, however, he realized that matters were getting out of hand. He had become one of the twenty final candidates, all of whom had their pictures published in the newspapers. Reporters began standing outside his door and asking him questions about his private life, which, of course, he was most reluctant to talk about! He pretended to be humble, saying that he expected to be eliminated and that his personal life was unimportant. He could no longer take off his mask as he lived in terror that his true identity would be revealed.

The day came when he was notified that he had been selected to be one of the three final candidates. Realizing that if his true identity were discovered he surely would be executed, he decided to leave the country the following morning. But as he came out of his house, he was greeted by two soldiers sent by the king to be his bodyguards. It was too late!

On the final day of the contest, the thief walked to the castle for what he was sure would be the last time. He hoped desperately that he would lose to one of the other candidates, but it was not to be. The princess had already made up her mind. She talked to the other candidates just long enough to be polite. Then she took him by the arm and told her father, "This is the one!"

In a last attempt to avoid disclosure, the thief took the king aside.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I am honored, but I need time to prepare for such a huge responsibility. Can the wedding be delayed by one year?"

The king said yes. Of course, the thief's real intent was to run away as soon as he could. However, this proved to be impossible. He was now the second most famous man in the kingdom. Crowds surrounded his house, hoping for a glimpse of the future king. He had to do many charitable works and help the poor in his position as a nobleman. He had to be virtuous and honorable, as a future king would have to be. For a whole year he lived as a noble person on the surface, all the time squirming inside at the knowledge of his own corruption.

Finally, the day came for the royal wedding. Certain that he would be found out and have to face death, the thief went to the palace with a heavy heart. When the princess came to greet him, he asked to be with her for a short time alone.

As they went into a small room, she thought, "Maybe now he will kiss me!" Instead, he threw himself at her feet.

"Your Royal Highness," he cried, "I have a terrible confession to make. Can you forgive me!" And he told her the whole story of his deception: how he was not a handsome prince at all, but an ugly thief. When he had finished, there was a long moment of silence. Finally, the princess spoke.

"I'll forgive you," she said, "but only on one condition. Take off your mask and show me who you really are!"

It was the most he could do to bring his hands to his face. Trembling with shame and fear, he pulled the mask off and turned to face the princess.

"What kind of stupid trick is this?" shouted the princess. "What are you trying to do to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Take this!" she said, and gave him a mirror. He looked—and looked again. Then, he looked at the mask and into the mirror again. The faces were identical!

By living as a good and righteous man for an entire year, he had changed. Since his actions had been good, he had become good without noticing it. There was no doubt: he had changed.

Fortunately, the princess was now beginning to see the funny side of the whole affair.

"Come on!" she said "Let's pretend this never happened." And the new couple went off to see the king. Many years later, after they had become the new king and queen, people considered the former thief the wisest and most kind king they had ever had.



The main point of the story is that a bad person who tries to live a noble life can, step-by-step, without even noticing it, become noble. What do you think? Is this really possible?

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle said,

"We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."

The question is whether a person can truly be changed by good deeds, or if a person is destined to remain evil. There are those who will say that a person cannot fundamentally change character. If someone is bad, he or she will always be bad. Even if he or she were to live as the thief in the story did for a whole year, doing good deeds, the basic evil nature is just waiting for the moment to come out again. Given the chance, he would immediately go back to being evil.

Then there are those who believe that people can change. This viewpoint says that everyone wants to be happy. Evil people are those who think that happiness comes by fulfilling their selfish desires. They cannot imagine how someone could be happy by sacrificing and living for the sake of others. To these people, sacrificing means simply giving up something without getting anything in return. However, if such people were to experience the joy of an unselfish lifestyle, then they would be motivated to change. The attractiveness of being good would far outweigh any benefit they may have experienced by living selfishly.

Can a leopard change his spots? No, but a person can change.



In fact, human beings are known to be very adaptable creatures. We are very much influenced by our environment—for good and bad. In Nazi Germany, for example, people did many horrendous things under Adolf Hitler they never would have done on their own. They changed into people who were willing to do evil and did it. On the other hand, many people in India made noble sacrifices for the cause of independence as part of the nonviolent movement led by Mahatma Gandhi—something most would never have done on their own. They became good people because there was an environment encouraging them to be good.

In daily life we experience adaptation all the time. For example, imagine you are talking about a political candidate with your friends. You support a candidate they don't like. Because they are your friends, you listen to their opinions and try to see their points. You may even come to agree with them over time. This is adaptation. Imagine another situation. You are asked to introduce an unpopular teacher at an assembly and you have to say something nice about him. You would have to adapt your words and thoughts to suit the occasion, finding nice things to say about the person and meaning them or else the whole occasion could be ruined. (You might even find yourself being influenced by your own positive words about him and liking him after all!) Adaptation or conformity to society's expectations is a fact of life that has survival value. Depending on the circumstances and direction, it can be a very good thing. In any case, it shows clearly that people can, and do, change.

In this lesson's story, although the thief entered the competition for the hand of the princess as a joke, it became something he did not intend—an opportunity to change himself for the better. Although he did not see it that way, he was changing. By acting good, he was becoming good. This is confirmed by the fact that, after a year, there was no difference between the mask and his own face. He had indeed changed.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you believe it is possible for a person to change his or her character, or is a person destined to be a certain way?

2. Can you think of some examples of people who were changed by their circumstances?

3. Why do some people seem to be unable to change?

4. What do you think are the positive and negative aspects of adapting one's character to circumstances?

5. How does a person feel when he tries to adapt to an environment that feels unnatural to him?

6. Is it possible, as in the story in this lesson, to go into a situation with an evil motivation and find some sincerity and truth along the way?

Exercise: “The Trial”

Imagine that in the above story, instead of forgiving and accepting the thief right away, the princess decided the thief must stand trial for deceiving her and the king. What do you think are the arguments in favor of his conviction? In favor of finding him innocent? How does your story end?

Reflection Exercise: “Circumstances and Internal Change”

Can you think of an experience in which you changed in some way as a result of the way you responded to or dealt with a situation? Did you change for the better or for the worse? Why did it happen? Specifically, how did your actions lead to an internal change?

CHAPTER 5: Searching for Meaning

Imagine you could connect your brain to a machine that would give you every pleasurable experience you could possibly desire. How would you like that? It would be great, wouldn't it?

Yet after a while, do you think you might get sick of it? Maybe you don't think so, but you might find yourself getting tired of it, the same way some very rich and famous people get weary after indulging themselves in every pleasure. It is human nature to yearn for meaning, not merely to have pleasurable experiences. We all want to lead a meaningful life.

"Madonna and the Meaning of Life"

Madonna is the biggest selling female recording artist ever. Her albums have sold more than 130 million copies. Rich, famous, beautiful, Madonna has been able to have anything she wants. She owns a British country estate of 1,132 acres that she paid nine million British pounds for. That is only one of her houses; she owns several more. She is very famous, has starred in movies, is married to a film director, and has even published books. She has won numerous awards. Men all over the world have desired her.

This woman, who seemed to have everything, has now, after decades of self-indulgence, turned to a strict form of religion.

Her religious teacher said, "in her case more than in others, she has already achieved all the things that others assume would make them happy--fame, money, success. The difference is that she absolutely knows that those things do not fulfill her. She felt that something was missing and she looked for it."

"Madonna and the Meaning of Life" by Shiri Lev-Ari, Haaretz.com., Sept. 29, 2004

In a survey of nearly eight thousand college students, the question was asked what the students considered most important to them. 78 percent said it was to find "a purpose and meaning to my life."

Yet often people feel that life has no meaning. It seems to be just a boring routine — getting up, eating breakfast, going to work, eating lunch, working, coming home, eating dinner, watching television, and going to bed — every day of the week, maybe even on Sunday. It is like the Greek character Sisyphus who was condemned each day to push a rock to the top of a hill, only to see it roll down again each night. What is the point of it all?

There is something tragic about a person who has been busy all his or her life and yet begins to feel that it was all for nothing. Unfortunately, we cannot live our life over again. Sadly, many people feel that if they could live their lives over again, they would do things differently.

People who cannot find meaning in life may try to fill the emptiness by seeking money or power. Or, since it is so painful to admit to oneself that one's life has no

meaning, they may try to keep themselves busy, filling up every moment of the day with work, reading, music, conversation—anything to stop them from thinking about their situation. Other people turn to alcohol, drugs, or sexual relationships to escape from the pain of a life without meaning.

The meaning of life

Each of us must find our own path to meaning. This should help us to live our life to the fullest on a day-to-day basis.

Here are some famous people's views of the meaning of life:

- Life is a road to domination: "*Veni, vidi, vici — I came, I saw, I conquered.*" — Julius Caesar, Roman emperor
- Life is a drama: "*All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.*" — William Shakespeare, English playwright of the 16th and early 17th century
- Life is a journey toward God: "*Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it finds rest in Thee.*" — Augustine, early Christian saint
- Life is doing something good: "*If there is any meaning and purpose in life, then this meaning and purpose are not in our own happiness, but in something much greater. You need to do goodness!*" — Anton Chekhov, 19th century Russian writer
- Life is love: "*We live in this world only if we love.*" — Rabindranath Tagore, Indian poet of late 19th-early 20th century
- Life is always new: "*Human life should always be like this river that is in front of me: all the time one and the same bed, but every moment there is fresh water in it.*" — Henry David Thoreau, 19th century American writer
- Life is work: "*Work is liberating us from three great evils: boredom, vice, and poverty.*" — Voltaire, 18th century French philosopher
- Life is duty: "*The greatest pleasure in life is knowing that you have fulfilled your duty.*" — William Hazlitt, 19th century essayist and literary critic
- Life is suffering: Buddha
- Life is a path to death: "*All men are brothers, and the same end awaits them all — death.*" — Albert Camus, 20th century French existentialist
- Life is creativity: "*There is hardly any bigger joy than the joy of creating.*" — Nikolai Gogol, 19th century Russian writer

With which of these statements do you agree? Are there some you don't like? Try to give your own definition of the meaning of life. What does your definition say about you and how you see yourself? What are your goals, expectations, hopes, and fears?

Why search for meaning?

Why can't we just live for sake of living? Do we really need to think of the meaning of things?

For one thing, we already attach meaning to things, whether we realize it or not. Imagine a man who never seriously thought about the meaning of his life. Nevertheless, he acts because on some level he considers his actions meaningful, whether it is as simple as drinking his morning tea, giving his wife a kiss on the cheek as he leaves for the office, or making some important decisions at work. Perhaps he finds the meaning of his life in loving and supporting his family, financing his children through university, and furthering his company's profits because he believes it is a good company. Somehow, he finds meaning in his activities or he could no longer do them with a will.

Human beings are makers of meaning. They try to make sense out of every significant event that happens to them. Suppose a close friend betrays you, or you become seriously ill. Then you face questions you never thought about before: Why has this happened? What does it mean? Have I been wrong in my thinking about things? Did I attach more meaning to some things than I should have? What attitudes and habits do I need to change?"

Major events also challenge people to make meaning out of them. People struggle to understand the "why" behind violent crime, for instance. After the Columbine high school shootings in the United States, everyone wanted to know why two boys, good students from wealthy homes with seemingly caring parents, wanted to kill their classmates and teachers. The meaninglessness of their behavior was what bothered people most. When it came to be known that the boys had been teased, put down, and socially rejected, people felt a sense of comfort in their sorrow. If it could be understood, if there was some meaningful sense in it, it could be dealt with.

Major political events, like war, require that people understand what they are fighting for and find meaning in it. People will not go to war for no reason. They will go to war to save their nation's way of life, or to benefit the world, or to preserve ideals of liberty and justice—all of which they find meaningful. This is why soldiers are encouraged with patriotic slogans and idealistic songs. They have to find meaning in what they do, or they will not have the will to do it.

Making meaning

Imagine the following: Your goal of entering a university is blocked due to your low score on the entrance exam. How do you react? If you look at the situation simply from the viewpoint of your immediate purpose — attending that university — then your failure is very depressing and of no value. On the other hand, perhaps you can find some meaning in it. Thanks to your failure, you realize you have to work harder at your studies. You develop better work and study habits. You understand more now what it takes to succeed and are more determined than ever to do so. You are able to gain some valuable experience and learn more about yourself and your abilities. Maybe that university wasn't right for you. Maybe it was a "blessing in disguise" that you were not accepted there.

You can overcome failure and setbacks if you consider the possibility that some meaning may be found in it. Important lessons learned, character weaknesses examined and corrected, the opening of new possibilities that were not thought of before—all these things lend meaning to failure and are helpful toward gaining success in the future.

As we go through life, it is good to listen to the advice of those wiser and more experienced. A more experienced person can help us find meaning in our life.

Finding Meaning in Marriage

Patrick, married for one year to Shirley, was pretty discouraged. He wondered if he and Shirley were going to end up as a divorce statistic. All they did was fight. They were so different from one another.

On the advice of their pastor, Patrick and Shirley agreed to go to dinner at the home of an older couple from their church. Patrick thought it was going to be a dull evening of strained conversation, but, to his surprise, he found himself confiding in the older man about the struggles of marriage. The older man laughed and said that he had found the first few years of marriage difficult too—women were so different from men! The men commiserated together for a while about women's ways, and then were joined by the women, who had had their own comparison session about their men in the kitchen.

The older couple explained during dinner that, over time, they had come to appreciate the different strengths the other brought to the marriage and to raising children. They had realized they were different for a purpose—to make a more complete life together than either could ever achieve on their own and to give their children the love of a father and a mother—very different kinds of love.

"Now I really appreciate her femininity," said the older husband. "But for a few years there, it drove me absolutely nuts! Why didn't she think like a man—like me? Now I'm grateful she's feminine. She's got insights into a lot of things that just pass me by. But she needs my point of view too."

Comforted that there was meaning in their differences, Patrick and Shirley went home more at peace with one another than they had been in months.

Is there meaning in suffering?

Most people have experienced some suffering in their lives. Is there meaning in suffering?

We must understand that it is not suffering itself that is so important but our attitude towards it. Facing the same situation, one person may become more responsible and compassionate, while another may be completely defeated by the suffering. Our attitude about life and what we believe will influence how we cope with difficulties.

Life is full of pain and tragedy. Someone we trust betrays us. A family member dies at an early age. We invest our life savings in a business deal that goes bad, and we lose everything. Experiences like these cause people to search for a transcendent meaning in life.

Finding meaning in suffering helps make it more bearable. Suffering for the sake of another person is easier than just suffering for the sake of one's self. The parent who sacrifices his or her food so that the growing children can have more will not mind suffering as much as someone who is going hungry for no reason.

Sometimes our suffering may teach us a great deal, and we can find meaning in it. A middle-aged Chinese woman, now the leader of a major research center, was sent out to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong to be "re-educated." She was just a teenager, but she had to work hard day and night at physical labor. She was separated from her home, family, and friends. She received little food, wore poor clothing, and had little sanitation. It was like being a prisoner. "I learned something important, though," she said. "I learned I had the strength to survive anything."



No easy way

The inner struggle within us, described in a previous chapter, prevents us from living according to the internal law of love and goodness that gives true meaning to our lives. It is more difficult than it should be to live for the sake of others, to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of a noble goal, to give up momentary and fleeting pleasures for more lasting and meaningful rewards. If we surrender to the easiest way of living—living for the moment and for physical comfort—we may never find the meaning in life we seek.

If you find meaning — the meaning of life for you — you should not stop there but seek to fulfill it in your life. For example, if becoming a scientist gives your life meaning, you need to take concrete steps towards that goal — enter university, do scientific research, read scientific journals, and so on. By making the meaning that we have discovered real, we can experience inner fulfillment.

Life raises the question of meaning. We must answer the question of meaning daily — not merely with words but with our actions.

Questions for Reflection

1. With which of the famous people's statements about life in the text do you agree?

2. Are there some you don't like?

3. What is your definition of the meaning of life?

4. What does this definition say about you and how you see yourself?

5. Why is it important to search for meaning in life?

6. Why do you think many people simply pursue pleasure or wealth and seem to avoid the search for meaning?

7. Is there meaning in suffering?

8. Can you find meaning in the events of your own life so far?

9. How would an optimist see the meaning of life as opposed to a pessimist?

10. Which are you?

Exercise: “Mirror Image”

Imagine a three-panel mirror in front of you. The central panel reflects you today; the left-hand panel as you were five years ago; and the right-hand panel as you will be ten years from now. Look at yourself five years ago. What were your beliefs and outlook on life then? Now look at yourself today. How have those beliefs and outlook changed? What caused the change? Now look at yourself ten years from now. How do you imagine you might change in the next ten years? What might cause these changes?

Reflection Exercise: “End of Life”

Imagine you are approaching the end of your life. As you look back, what meaning do you see in the events of your life? What was your life for? Do you feel satisfaction or regret? Why?

CHAPTER 6: Happiness

All of us are constantly seeking happiness. We would like to be happy in every aspect of our lives. We cannot be completely happy if one area of our life is in darkness and suffering. It is not possible to say, "I'm happy, but my mother has cancer." Nor can we be completely happy if the community around us is not happy and at peace: "I'm happy even if gangs are taking over our neighborhood, and everyone is afraid." Nor can we be completely happy if the world is not at happy and at peace: "I'm happy even though my brother is off at war."

In fact, total happiness is nowhere to be seen. You may think other people are totally happy because they appear to be all right, but a psychologist who deals with wealthy and educated people says, "You never know what goes on behind closed doors." Behind closed doors, there is at least some unhappiness and suffering.

We can't be content either with an ideal of total happiness in the distant future or in the distant past, saying to ourselves, "Things used to be better," or "Things will get better" That leaves us unsatisfied. We want total happiness as our reality now. That is human nature.

But what makes people happy? Some people think that money can bring happiness. Money is indeed important. However, those who have great wealth tend to protect and isolate themselves, often cutting themselves off from others out of fear of being used or robbed. Wealth sometimes makes people feel that they are better than other people who are not wealthy—at the same time, they feel deep inside that they are not better. They may suspect that they are worse and feel guilty over their wealth, or they may suspect that people who are not wealthy experience more simple joys and warmer relationships than they do. Money is not a sure way to bring happiness.

The next thing people think of as something that will bring them happiness is knowledge. You may think a university education will help you in your search for happiness. But knowledge alone is also an inadequate tool for achieving lasting happiness. If you take knowledge seriously, it becomes very narrow and specialized, ignoring large parts of human experience and joys. Happiness isn't found in knowledge alone.



How about power? Many people seek for power in life. Can power bring us happiness? If you have power, do you want to share it with others? No, people with power tend to want to hold on to it for themselves. They often become self-centered, lonely, and empty.

Therefore, we can conclude that although money, knowledge, and power may help people in their search for happiness, none of these leads to happiness in itself.

Most people find their greatest happiness comes from positive relationships, especially in the family. Yet we find ourselves very distant from others. Why are there walls between us? Even in small families, there are often walls between people. This is not happiness. How can we bring those walls down? What could possibly penetrate the many walls that exist between people today?

Only one thing can take down the barriers between people. That is love. Only true love belongs everywhere, fits in everywhere, and is welcomed everywhere. True love is what we seek in order to experience happiness.

True love starts within the individual. When an individual's mind and body are in harmony with one another—when that individual lives according to his or her conscience, with deeds matching words and thoughts—a person is able to give true love to others. True love then spreads to the family, society, nation, and finally to the whole cosmos. True love is the way to bring harmony and happiness to the world.

The way of true love

True love means giving, giving help, giving time, giving support or money. In giving we must not be narrow-minded. We must be generous, not only to our family members but also to friends, neighbors, and the society around us.

In human society some people want to possess more than other people and they want to invade others' ownership to possess more land, and so on. That's what makes people fight. Where the principle of true love is put into practice, there cannot be such a thing. Everyone would share and enjoy things together.

If you give out love to other people, rather than being subtracted from, your love will be multiplied. You will be proud of what you have given. Only by giving can we receive. If we choose to live generously, we don't try to attract love or people to ourselves, but people will come to be our friends without our making any special efforts. True love will break down all barriers to happiness.

It takes time to become a person of true love. We cannot just do it in a moment magically. It takes many days, weeks, and years of consistent effort.

If a person hates discipline, he or she will not become a person of love. It's better to have the attitude that you are ready to face whatever comes with great expectation and interest, looking forward to it. If you are faced with a rough current when in a boat, you cannot just look immediately in front of you, but you must set your gaze far and wide, and you must be quick to move the boat. Otherwise, it will be wrecked on the rocks. In your life too, there are waterfalls; sometimes the water will even form walls or cliffs in front of you. So you must dodge quickly past one place or steer directly through the waves in another.



Don't become discouraged by the roughness of your course. If you take interest in what you are going through, and if you are thrilled to find new adventures, then when you are faced with even greater difficulties, you can tackle those with more zeal and capability. If you are unwilling to confront the problems occurring in the environment around you and are afraid of them, then you will not be able to turn the experience into training to face new problems. Only by having gone over the rocks and waterfalls can you bring yourself all the way to the ocean.

Water running down from a mountaintop will encounter many obstacles. If we compare our lives to that stream of water, where are we? Can the drops of water say, "I hate to pound down the cliff"? At the top of the cliff you must get ready and say to yourself, "It's thrilling, and I want to jump down from this cliff and reach the bottom as soon as possible." If you are eager, then you will succeed and attain your goal.

Our life is something like a river. Unless you can flow past all the obstacles in the tributaries, you cannot meet the main river. You are all together with your classmates now, but once you graduate from school you will be like small streams running your own course to reach the mainstream. If you are faced with a power stronger than your own strength and determination, what will you do? Will you surrender, or will you overcome and be victorious?

Sometimes the obstacle may be a conflict of interest between you and another person. If we are small-minded, we may become angry with each other and start arguing. Efforts to reconcile the conflict between you only cause you to become more angry toward each other. You should be of such a broad mind that you can smile, let the conflict go, and return to the greater work waiting for you. Time will solve the problem. If you can pass on from a difficult situation quickly, you will succeed. Tell the others, "You may stay there and fight, but I must hurry on."

Don't try to escape from life, but feel challenged and keep going on your way. On an uneven road, ups and downs are to be expected. Where there are peaks, there are bound to be valleys as well.

When faced with circumstances that look really hopeless, you may feel as though you are going to perish indeed; but there is always a way out if you look for one. Try to focus on today, on this very moment, and if you are alert in winning the very moment you are faced with, you will set the pattern for being a victor your whole life through.

In the end, our happiness will depend on how much love we have given to others.

I shall not pass this way again...

"I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Stephen Grellet, 1773-1855
French-born Quaker Minister

Questions for Reflection

1. Is anyone completely happy?

2. What do you think of the ideas that money, knowledge, and power alone do not bring happiness?

3. How can we break down the walls that exist between people?

4. What does it mean to unite your mind and body? Why is this so important?

5. Is it true that “only by giving can we receive”?

6. What does it mean to live generously? Give some examples.

7. Is the image of our life as water accurate?

Exercise: “Facing obstacles”

Consider the following situation: You are taking a literature class in which you are you have to write a report on your readings every two weeks. You find this difficult and uninteresting. After a while you stop doing it. Then you start skipping the class every once in a while. For this you get cited for detention after school for one week. From this point, what do you do? Choice 1: Not go to detention, which gets you suspended for a week. You are now one step away from expulsion. Choice 2: Go to detention. You decide to change your attitude and start doing the work.

What would be the long-term results of each of these decisions? Draw up a scenario for each one.

Reflection Exercise: “Your Personal Life”

Think of difficult situations that you have faced in your life. How did you deal with them? Did you tend to avoid them, or did you confront them and overcome the difficulties? Did this bring you happiness?

CHAPTER 7: Choose Your Destiny

The life you lead depends a great deal on the choices you make every day. This chapter will demonstrate how different choices bring about different results. Have fun!

Instructions: *Do not read these stories straight through!* You will be asked to make choices as you read, and your selections will determine the outcome. After you make your choice, follow the directions and see what happens next!

The lucky lottery

You and your friend are walking together when you come upon a store selling lottery tickets. They cost \$2 each, and the grand prize is one million dollars!

You have \$3, so you decide to buy one. Your friend also wants to buy a ticket but has only \$1.

What do you do?

If you buy your ticket and keep your other dollar so that you will have some money left, go to (4).

If you tell your friend you will give him your extra dollar so that he can purchase a ticket also, go to (2).

The freedom fighter

You are the graduate of a good university. You have a doctorate in religion. You have a beautiful, supportive, and intelligent wife.

There is a lot of injustice in your society, especially toward people of color, such as you and your wife are. However, with your education and in the right setting, preferably the North, you can probably make a comfortable life for your family on the upper levels of African American society.

You are asked to pastor a church in the South, where there is much more prejudice against black people. You know that you and your wife will experience more racial indignities there, yet you feel called to go there.

What do you do?

If you tell your wife you feel called to go to the Southern church, go to (7).

If you keep quiet about feeling called to go South and worry about what your colleagues will think of you, returning to such a racially backward way of life, go to (1).

If you decide to go to the Southern church and, with your wife's support, challenge the racially prejudiced atmosphere in the South go to (11).

The party

You are a 16-year-old boy. It is summer and your parents and younger sister are going out of town to stay with some friends for a week. You beg your parents to allow

you to stay home and watch the apartment. At first they refuse. But after discovering that the two neighbors are also going away and will be unable to care for the family dog and water the plants, your parents agree to let you stay home alone under two conditions. First, you absolutely cannot have anyone over except for your best friend Mike, whom your parents trust. Second, you must be home by ten each evening (and you know your father will call almost every night to make sure you're all right).

You are happy that your parents trust you, and you want to prove to them that you are mature. Your mother keeps her home as clean as a museum. Your parents do not smoke and hate the smell of cigarettes. They rarely drink, although your father keeps a liquor cabinet for the sake of guests.

A day after your family's departure, Mike tries to talk you into having a "small" party. All your friends know that your parents are away and that you have the whole apartment to yourself. You are a little angry at Mike for telling people after he promised he wouldn't. He just laughs and says you'll have a heart attack by the time you're 25 if you don't stop taking everything so seriously.

For the first few days you ignore their requests for a party, but people keep calling you about it. You realize that if you don't invite at least some friends over, they will cut you out of their social group and call you a goody-goody.

What do you do?

If you decide to have the party under the condition that only five people will come, and that there will be no drinking or smoking, go to (8).

If you decide not to have the party at all, go to (15).

(1) You lead a good, black, middle class life, but your heart sometimes tells you that the people in the South really needed your help. You always wonder what might have been had you taken the sacrificial route to be among your people down there. In fact, race relations in America seem to be getting worse and worse, even here in the North where you live. Eventually, racial war breaks out. **The End.**

(2) Later you find that your ticket is a loser, but your friend's ticket wins the million dollars! When you see him again he says to you, "If you have change for \$10, I'll pay back the dollar you gave me last week."

What do you do?

If you shout insults at him and walk away angrily, go to (16).

If, in expressing your anger at his ingratitude, you hit him, go to (6).

If you congratulate your friend on his good fortune, sincerely tell him, "The dollar was a gift. Keep it," and give him a friendly pat on the back, go to (10).

(3) As you try to engage blacks in peaceful resistance to white prejudice, your family is threatened.

What do you do?

If you give up, go to (5).

If you continue despite the persecution, go to (12).

(4) Your ticket loses. Your friend is upset by your stinginess in not lending him a dollar so that he could buy a ticket as well. In the months ahead the two of you grow steadily apart. Years later you pass each other on the street without even recognizing each other. **The End.**

(5) You and your fellow blacks spend a lot of time decrying your situation to one another. You become more and more unhappy. It is painful to watch your wife and beautiful children affected by racism. However, you accept that this is just the way it is in the United States. No one really believes in the Declaration of Independence or that all people should be free and equal. You watch sadly as America declines and the American dream becomes a nightmare. **The End.**

(6) Your friend falls from the blow and strikes his head on a stone. He dies. You are sent to prison. When you are released from prison, your old friends shun you as a murderer. You wander about from place to place, always feeling marked as a killer. **The End.**

(7) Your wife says she loves and trusts you and that if you want to pastor the Southern church, she will support you. Go to (14).

(8) Nine o'clock comes and the doorbell rings. You open the door and to your surprise and dismay, ten friends, including a girl from school whom you really like, are at the door. They have alcohol with them.

What do you do?

If you let them in, go to (13).

If you tell them that they cannot come in because there are too many of them and you had already said that no drinking would be allowed, go to (15).

(9) Because of the rejection you experience, you become a recluse. Your marriage and finances deteriorate. You end up living all alone, blaming white people for all your personal problems. **The End.**

(10) Your friend is moved by your generous gesture. In tears, he tells you, "Half the prize money is yours. Please forgive me for being so stingy." You say that he does not owe you anything but his friendship. Your friend insists on sharing the winnings with you. The two of you go into business together and become wealthy. Your greatest wealth, however, is your undying friendship. As time passes, you continue to share your lives together and live happily and productively. **The End.**

(11) As you challenge white racism, people laugh at you, arrest you, and put you in jail; the FBI is after you, and people you respect think maybe you have carried things too far. What do you do?

If you continue to speak out against injustice, go to (12).

If you stop trying to share your message with these ungrateful people, go to (9).

(12) Persecution continues, but you steadily gain support. As you lead people in boycotting and protesting injustice, you are asked to speak to wider and wider audiences. Your face appears on the cover of *Time* magazine. White people are joining you now. The nation is listening to you. The President of the United States talks to you on the phone and asks your advice. Laws are passed that support black people's rights to vote, to go to good schools, and to use any facility used by whites. People's attitudes are changing. America's conscience awakens. The National Guard is sent to protect you and your followers when you march. Blacks enter politics, entertainment, movies, housing, and jobs because of your work. Whites repent for their unfair treatment of blacks. Black people have new pride, new hope, and new opportunities thanks to you. You win the Nobel Peace Prize and generations afterward thank you for your contributions to humanity. You are Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ***The End.***

(13) At first you run from room to room, picking up empty beer bottles and cigarette butts, nagging your friends to keep the music down. After about an hour you tire of being a watchdog and decide to join the fun. A few of your friends (including that pretty girl) are playing a drinking game in the kitchen. Mike asks you to join in, and you do. After you have six or seven beers and a few cigarettes, you get up the courage up to ask a girl to dance. It turns out she wants to do a lot more than dance. You know you really don't want to go into the bedroom with this girl. You don't know anything about her but her name. But you're really drunk by now and your friends keep urging you on.

You wake up the next afternoon alone in the apartment. Looking around, you can't believe it's your apartment! There are beer cans, bottles, and cigarette butts all over. Fortunately, you find nothing broken and manage to clean everything up before your parents return home, so they never know. All of your friends are happy and think you're "really cool" to have had such a great party. You think it's all over until, two months later, the girl you were with tells you she is pregnant and you are the father. ***The End.***

(14) The South is unbelievably hard to deal with. There are unfair laws everywhere that restrict black people from eating in restaurants with whites, using the same drinking fountains as whites, sitting in the front of the bus with whites, and using the same pools and facilities as whites. You feel angry about this. Your father was a fighter against white racism, and you have never forgotten the indignities he and you have undergone as black people in a white-dominated society.

What do you do?

If you decide you will fight racism in any way you honorably can, go to (11).

If you decide to commiserate with fellow blacks about the situation but stay tight in your own communities and not challenge the white power structure, go to (5).

(15) Your friend Mike is disgusted with you, and your other friends don't want to talk to you anymore. You feel bad, but you know you did the right thing. You couldn't betray your parents trust. You didn't believe that your friends could have a small get-together without drinking and smoking. You're lonely for a while, but then you start to think about the way your former friends treated you and the way they treat each other. Besides, who knows what could have happened if you had let them have a party in your home? You make better friends. ***The End.***

(16) Your former friend uses his money well and becomes wealthy. You are full of resentment as you hear of his success. Meanwhile, your life is lonely and bitter as you continue to curse your former friend. ***The End.***

Questions for Reflection

1. In the story "The party", besides the choices given, how else could the 16 year-old boy have handled the situation?

2. In one ending of the story (#13), the girl becomes pregnant. Do you think the boy would have acted differently if he had taken this possibility seriously and considered the effect on the girl's life?

3. If Mike had thought about his best friend's situation, rather than what he wanted to do, would it have changed his behavior?

4. In which ending did the boy consider the feelings of others? In which did he not?

5. Why is it that we often allow decisions to happen to us rather than taking a more aggressive role in determining our choice?

6. Why do we often find it so difficult to foresee the results of our decisions?

7. What does it mean to say that hindsight is '20-20' (in other words, 100% perfect)?

8. What does it mean to "rationalize" your actions?

9. What can we do to better foresee the impact our decisions and actions may have on ourselves and others?

10. In each of the stories, what are the moral and ethical issues involved?

Exercise: "Moral Decision-Making Steps"

Applying the following four steps in deciding how you would act in each of the three dilemmas A, B and C:

1. Determine what the dilemma is.
2. Decide what moral and ethical issues are involved (e.g., honesty, respect, responsibility, tolerance).

3. Think about how your actions will affect other people, either directly or indirectly.
4. Make your decision.

A. You are taking the final exam in science class. You notice that your best friend is cheating, but no one else notices. Do you say anything to your teacher?

B. Your mom asks you to stay home and take care of your little brother. She feels very sick, and your dad will not be home until late. You had made plans to go out with a friend, something you have been looking forward to doing. What do you do?

C. You are blamed for stealing money from someone at school. You know and can prove who really stole the money. You also know that the person's family is very poor. Do you tell the principal who really stole the money? Would it matter if this person was your friend?

Reflection Exercise: "Your Dilemma"

Think of a dilemma that you have had to face in your own life. How did you deal with it? Did it turn out successfully or in failure? Knowing the four decision-making steps above, would you handle the situation differently if it presented itself again?

CHAPTER 8: Commitment and Loyalty

When they get married, most people recite wedding vows in which they pledge commitment and loyalty to their new spouse till “death us do part.” We all long for such commitment and loyalty in our marriages. Yet, the tragedy of today’s world is that many couples, despite making such pledges, end up separating. Sadly, it has become a rare occurrence for couples to keep lifelong devotion to each other. Commitment and loyalty seem to be in short supply.

Commitment and loyalty are not confined to marital relationships. Such qualities are also reflected in relationships between lifelong friends, between college graduates and their “alma mater”, between veterans and the armed services, and between citizens and their countries. In the religious realm we see it reflected in the relationship between pious believers and their God.

Whether in relationship to a person, an institution, a country, or God, commitment and loyalty represent the giving of one’s heart to someone or something that has become very important to us. It is an act of unselfishness where we care so deeply, we may be willing even to give our life.



Humans need to form and maintain relationships with others. Our hearts cannot develop properly unless we form attachments with others. Attachments require commitment and loyalty if they are to grow and develop. Therefore, making commitments and being loyal are important parts of being human.

Challenges to Loyalty and Commitment

Being committed and loyal to someone or something does not mean the relationship will be without challenges. Even the most loving couple or the closest friends have moments of difficulty in relating to each other. These difficulties can arise for a variety of reasons: different expectations, misunderstandings, bad habits, differences in tastes, or in the way to raise children (in the case of parents). In such circumstances, our commitment and loyalty to the other person is tested. If we are true, we remain with the person, seeking to work through the difficulties, even if it takes time and patience. In the process our character grows. Our emotional attachment and connection of heart to the other is likely to grow as well. We come to feel that our bond with the other person is stronger than the power of any conflict to break it.

Loyalty and commitment by themselves, however, are not necessarily the supreme virtues. There are such things as blind loyalty and blind commitment. They are not good things and can lead to much harm.

While we would say it is good to be loyal to one's country, if the state is engaging in evil acts, true loyalty to the country requires condemning such actions. To be loyal to such governments would be a betrayal of the true interests of one's country and would be in itself an evil act. If the object of loyalty is unworthy, blind loyalty is not true loyalty at all.

Likewise, there are times when our commitment leads to destructive ends. A good example of this is the "enabling" behavior of relatives of alcoholics. Some children and spouses of alcoholics do all the housework themselves, work extra jobs to make up for lost income due to the alcoholic's inability to work, or call in to the alcoholic's workplace and lie, saying the person is sick and can't come to work, instead of admitting he or she is drunk or hung over. This may seem like a commitment to helping the loved one, yet it is commitment to keeping an unbearable situation the same. Real commitment to the benefit of the other would mean confronting the person and making the person take responsibility for his or her own life.

However, under ordinary circumstances, most people need to practice more loyalty and commitment, not less. The rewards of loyalty and commitment are very great in that they deepen and enrich relationships to the point of making the relationships irreplaceable.

Forged in the Fire of Commitment

"I really meant my marriage vows," says Sally. "But they were hard to live up to. It turned out my husband had a very bad temper that he had hidden when we were engaged. It came out all the time at home, at me and at the children. I was miserable, and so were they, and I thought of walking out on the marriage many times. Still, my commitment held in place. I just couldn't imagine going against my beliefs and getting a divorce.

Over a period of time, I began to understand more clearly why he was so angry. I learned about the pain he had gone through in his life. I began to see my own faults, too, and how hard I was to live with. Yet *he* still stuck with *me*! Over time, I began to change toward him, to soften. And he started to change too. Suddenly we started laughing together sometimes—really having a good time. The children would laugh too. We began to appreciate each other's good qualities more. Our marriage and family life began to get better and better.

My advice? Don't give up. There's a light at the end of the tunnel if you keep trying. I wouldn't give up what we have now for the world—a lifelong partnership, till death do us part. I'm so glad we're together now. But what we have was forged in the fire of commitment."

Note: A scientific survey showed that couples who stay together even through tough times often end up "much happier" with their marriages a few years later.

How do we learn commitment and loyalty?

Some psychologists have theorized that we learn fidelity in marriage on the playground, when we are small children. If we stand up for our friends, wait for them, don't abandon them or throw them over for someone else, we are learning commitment and loyalty. It will strengthen our marriages later on.

Most surveys show that people consider "loyalty" to be the most important quality a friend can have. Since good marriages are deep friendships, loyalty is called for.

How do you practice loyalty in your relationships? What does loyalty look like? Here are some examples of loyalty:

1. A group of your peers are gossiping about your good friend. You are tempted to join in the mean talk in order to belong to this group. Instead you say something very supportive about your friend, and then wait for the tone of the conversation to change from negative to positive or you walk away.
2. Your friend has been sad lately because of his parents' divorce. He's not doing as well as usual on his sports team, and people in the stands are beginning to murmur against him. You don't want to reveal everything he's confided in you, but you do defend him by letting it be known that he is going through a lot of family problems and so isn't playing well. People then become more sympathetic to him.
3. Your parents asked you to be home at ten. A new group of friends urges you to stay with them until ten thirty. They say your parents won't care, but you know your parents have a good reason for you to be home at the time they said. You firmly break away from your friends and show up at home on time.
4. You've been dating Cristina for six months. You've asked her not to date anyone else and promised that you wouldn't either. Good-looking Pamela sends you a note in history class, asking you to go out with her. Cristina and her family are going out of town next weekend—it's a perfect opportunity to go out with Pamela. Still, it could lead to real mess. Cristina would probably find out, and Pamela would have expectations of you after that. You write Pamela, saying, "Sorry. I'm dating Cristina."

How do you practice commitment? The following scenarios might help explain.

1. You told your parents that if they let your friend stay overnight on Saturday, you would study all day Sunday for your test on Monday. They let you have the friend over. But now, Sunday afternoon, the weather is beautiful and some of your other friends have called and asked you to go to the park with them. Regretfully, you tell them you can't, and you get your studying done.
2. Rhonda asked you to come to her party. Even though Rhonda isn't one of your good friends, you agreed because you didn't have anything else to do that night. Then your best friend calls up and excitedly tells you that his dad got tickets for a professional soccer

match through a raffle at work. It's the same night as Rhonda's party. Ouch! Reluctantly, you tell your friend that you have a previous commitment.

3. The teacher gave you a break on your missing term paper because she believed you when you said that you had done it but left it in another classroom. She gives you permission to go get it but tells you to hurry up, as she has to go somewhere else. Passing the gym on the way to your locker, some friends invite you to stop and shoot baskets. You want to, and for a moment you think that you can spare the time if you run all the rest of the way. You shake your head, though, because you owe it to the teacher and yourself to get the paper to her as soon as possible.

4. The coach says if you miss a practice, you can't play in the next game. You are supposed to show your commitment to the team, though, by showing up in uniform and watching the game from the bench. You missed a practice. You don't want to have to show up in uniform and just watch from the bench. You do it, though, to support your team.

Practicing commitment and loyalty—holding them up in your mind as things you believe in and want to live up to and then living up to them—is the way that they grow stronger in you until they become firm character strengths or virtues.

You may have noticed that practicing loyalty and commitment often means giving up something—sometimes something quite desirable. In the scenarios above, someone had to give up a date with a beautiful girl, tickets to a professional soccer match, and a good time with friends in the gym.

Being loyal and committed *does* mean missing out on some things at times. It means saying no to all the attractive temptations that would take you away from your other commitments you want to be loyal to. It means you can't have everything. An expression is: "You can't have your cake and eat it too." In other words, you can have some wonderful things in your life, but you can't have every wonderful thing that comes along. You can have a wonderful, loving spouse, for example, but that means saying no to all the other people in the world who might want a romantic relationship with you.

Commitment and loyalty also mean recognizing potential areas of weakness and compensating for them so as not to fall into temptation.

"I never hire a secretary that I could fall in love with," says one husband of twenty years. "I'm with my secretary all day, every day. Sometimes I have to travel with her. If I hire someone I find attractive, it could wreck my marriage. I always hire much older women to be my secretary. That way business stays business!"

A woman who has a problem with alcohol says, "I've promised myself and my kids I won't ever get drunk again. To me, that means I never set foot in a bar or liquor store again. There's no 'just looking' or no 'just one' for me. To keep my promise never to get drunk again, I have to stay away from alcohol completely."

As we grow we are developing a set of standards and beliefs. Most of us learn our ethics and values from our families of origin. All this is a foundation for our eventual marriage. If we share a common value system with our spouse that includes commitment and loyalty, we stand a good chance of achieving lifelong happiness together.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you agree that loyalty and commitment are important in life?

2. What is an example of "blind loyalty"?

3. What is an example of "blind commitment"?

4. In the scenarios about loyalty, did you find yourself surprised at the choices the characters made? Would you have made the same choices?

5. In the scenarios about commitment, did you find yourself surprised at the choices the characters made? Would you have made the same choices?

6. What is your reaction to the story "Forged in the Fire of Commitment"? Do you think Sally should have divorced her husband?

7. What are some areas of weakness you have that could hurt your ability to be loyal and committed? What actions can you take to shore up these areas of weakness?

8. What does the expression "You can't have your cake and eat it too" mean in relationship to loyalty and commitment?

9. What does a person have to give up to be loyal and committed to a spouse?

10. What are some rewards of loyalty and commitment?

Exercise: “Loyal Partners”

Find a married couple or longtime friends whom you admire for their special relationship. Spend some time with them observing the nature of their relationship. How do they treat each other? Do they have disagreements? How do they handle these disagreements? Now talk with them and find out about their history together. Were they always so happy together? Did they have times of difficulty? How did they make it through those times? What roles did commitment and loyalty play?

Reflection Exercise: “My Commitment”

Reflect on your life so far: Has there ever been someone or something to which you were strongly committed? What did it feel like? Do you still feel the same way, or have things changed? If they have changed, why? When you marry, do you expect to be able to make the same kind of commitment to your spouse? Can you imagine yourself in your old age, still together with your spouse, surrounded by your children and grandchildren?

CHAPTER 9: Groups and Belonging

In our daily lives we are constantly finding ourselves in groups. Some of these groups consist of our peers, like our friends and classmates. Some consist of people of different ages, like our families and extended families. In some we feel close to fellow members of the group; in others we hardly know them. Some groups are pleasant to be a part of; others are not. Some groups we choose to be in, as on teams or in clubs we have joined; others we are required to belong to, like reading groups or work teams we are assigned to in school. Some groups we join because we share a common interest or goal; others we are born into, such as our family, ethnic, and national groups.



Group dynamics

In this chapter we will consider the phenomenon of groups. The subject of group dynamics has always been of great interest, but in the 20th century, especially in the last few decades, groups became the object of scientific study. In this process, social scientists have formulated many questions. Here are some of them:

- What kinds of groups are there and what differences exist among them?
- How are groups formed and what makes people continue to be part of a group?
- How do people in a group communicate with each other?
- How does a group affect the behavior of its members?
- How do groups interact with each other?

The minimum number of people that makes a group is two, such as: partners in a game of chess, two friends, a married couple, etcetera. The maximum number in a small group can vary, depending primarily on the circumstances. Some examples of small groups are: a family, a class at school, a football team, or a dance club.

Large groups, on the other hand, tend to be based on some broad common feature, such as nationality, age, gender, religious beliefs, race or ethnicity. In such groups, the members do not all know each other. They do not have any contact at all with the great majority of the group's members. Their identity is based upon certain broad

characteristics and common interests that apply to most members of the group, whether they know each other or not.

In reality each of us belongs to several groups at once. We may be a young white Christian man living in the United States. In that case, we belong to the groups of the young, people who are white, Christians, and Americans. We may be an elderly black Muslim woman living in Sudan. In this case, we belong to the groups of the elderly, people who are black, Muslims, and Sudanese.

On top of these kinds of major characteristics that assign us to large groups of belonging, we may be a leader of a local club or on the village council. We may be a member of a university faculty or a labor union. The groups we belong to are a part of who we are and how we define ourselves.

Being a member of a group

What does being a member of a group do for us? There are positive as well as negative aspects to group belonging.

One of the positive aspects of belonging to a group is that through our group we exchange information, thoughts, ideas, and skills. Through these exchanges, we enrich ourselves and develop. One study of groups and associations discovered that many people learn job skills through the informal groups they belong to—they may learn public speaking and organizational skills through a committee they belong to in their church, for instance.

Another positive aspect of belonging to a group is its potential to appreciate, support, and encourage us. Most people are delighted to receive a certificate of appreciation or small gift from their groups as a reward for their participation. A group can provide invaluable support. Indeed, there are such groups formed for that very purpose—they are called "support groups." These can range from support groups for people with special diseases to support groups for people whose children have died. Such a group is a place where we can share our hopes as well as our fears and receive the support and encouragement of the group.

A group functions to protect us from outside pressures and threats. In the group there is a sense of closeness and trust, solidarity and mutual support. In our group we can feel more free to express ourselves because we feel comfortable and are able to be ourselves with people who are like us and who like and accept us.

These are just some of the positive aspects of belonging to a group. There are many more. However, there are negative aspects to belonging to a group as well.

More than forty years ago American scientists showed experimentally that people tend to act differently when they are in a group than when they are alone. This is due to what is known as group or peer pressure.

One such experiment was conducted in the following fashion: prior to a group gathering, the researcher would tell all or some members of the group to make false statements deliberately. The persons whose behavior was under study would not know this. When the entire group gathered together, the researcher might say about a blank screen: "There is a black dot on the screen. Where is it?" Two or three members of the group who were brought into the conspiracy beforehand would say, "It is in the upper right corner of the screen. Now it is moving downward towards the center." Although not

true, those members of the group who were not in on the conspiracy tended not to believe their own eyes. Some of them would "see" the dot—or say they did, in order to conform to the group. Through such experiments and others, it was demonstrated that only a few people had the ability to stand their ground, even in the face of clear untruths. Such people, called "non-suggestible," make up 25-30% of the population.

Even without hearing about these kinds of experiments, you probably have noticed how people's behavior changes when in a group. They act in such a way to gain the acceptance of other group members, even though it may mean going against their own values and principles. This is called conformity. For instance, if the group decides to engage in some destructive criminal action, some group members will go along in order not to be rejected by the group and may end up doing something they would never do on their own.

There are other negative aspects of group membership as well. We can easily become dependent on the group of which we are part if we connect our self-esteem and personal value to how other members of the group see us. If something goes wrong, and we are no longer accepted by the group, we may feel crushed.

Group members act upon information circulating within the group, no matter whether it is true or not. This is how a common opinion can sometimes develop into a group mentality. The group operates in subtle ways to coerce its members into all adopting the same opinion on certain issues or people. Failure to go along can result in being excluded from the group or mocked. Thus groups sometimes discourage individual thinking and analysis and they create an "in group" and "out group" mentality.

Finally, groups can lead to a lowered sense of responsibility. Everyone in the group thinks, "Someone else will do it" when it comes time to take on a task. They may let the same responsible people do all the work again and again.

On the issue of responsibility, group members may feel that responsibility is spread throughout the group rather than that they are individually responsible. This is why when one individual wants to do something wrong—for example, vandalize a building—he or she will often "peer pressure" others into doing it too. Another example is if one person wants to take drugs—he or she may pressure others to do so as well in order to take away some of his or her own sense of responsibility and blame: "They did it too!"



Positive or negative impact

A group can have either a positive or negative impact depending on its purpose for existence. Some clubs exist for the sake of some socially significant goal and perform actions which add to the quality of life. Then there are other groups, like street gangs or organized crime groups, which form for the purpose of engaging in socially destructive behavior. Those who participate in such groups contribute to the corruption of society as well as their own corruption.

We will be influenced by a group that is important to us. We will value our membership in and the opinions of such a group. For teenagers, this is usually the peer group—those around the same age and probably at the same grade level. Our peers can influence us a lot and steer our life in either a good or bad direction. That is why parents want their children to make friends with those who will be a good influence on them.

Our choice of friends should be most influenced by our values; in other words, by what is important to us. We may feel very drawn to people who are not good for us, so we can't always rely on our feelings of attraction in choosing our friends.

While our peer group may help us to develop our character and self-esteem, it often can lead us to resist change or move us in a more negative direction, in ways we have described above. Peer influence is very strong. It is a common challenge for teenagers on their road towards maturity. Peers can influence us for the good and make our lives much better through their support, encouragement, and example; or they can influence us for the bad and lead us into trouble.

While we cannot choose all the groups we belong to, let us choose wisely what groups we can. Let us also do our best to do our duty to the groups we belong to not by our own choosing.

Our social life and the groups we are part of play an important role in our development as human beings. Scientists have found that people who belong to different associations and groups are healthier, wealthier, happier, and more emotionally balanced than those who are more isolated. Belonging is important to human beings. It is vital to our mental, emotional, and even physical health. Let us make the most of the group belonging we experience.

Questions for Reflection

1. What groups are you part of?

2. Is it important for a person to have already determined his values before he becomes part of a group? Why or why not?

3. In what ways can a group influence someone in a bad way if he has not already decided for himself what actions are good and what are bad?

4. In what ways may a group influence someone for the better?

5. Can you think of any situations in which a person who is unsure of his own values may be persuaded by a group to do something which is wrong?

6. Why do you think socially destructive groups like street gangs and organized crime exist?

7. Can you name a group whose goals you admire?

Exercise: “Group Influence”

Divide a piece of paper vertically. In the right column list the ways in which a group can have a good influence on society and its own members. In the left column list the ways in which a group can have a harmful influence on society and its own members. Now think of at least five groups that fit each category. Was it easier to come up with five good groups or five harmful ones?

Reflection Exercise: “Creating a Group”

Imagine that you can create any kind of group you want where you will be the founder and leader. What kind of group would you create? Who would be the members? What would be the group's purpose? What kind of activities would you do? How would your group influence those who are not a part of the group?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CHAPTER 10: A Motto for Life

Over thousands of years, human civilizations have had various ideas of justice and different standards of behavior. How have ethical principles developed and evolved in history and what has been their relationship to the level of civilization? What kinds of ethics and mottoes are appropriate for our time? What would be a good motto or ethic for you to live by?

The law of the jungle

The law of the jungle is one possibility. It is very simple: it is revenge based upon doing worse to the other than they have done to you, i.e., "You steal my chicken; I'll steal your cow," "You kill my servant; I'll kill your son." "You give me a black eye; I'll break your nose." Basically the thought process is, "How can I hurt the other person more?" The most ruthless survives.

The law of the jungle

The law of the jungle is vividly articulated in the movie *The Untouchables*. This movie is based upon the true story of officer Elliot Ness's successful pursuit of gangster Al Capone. Elliot Ness is determined to catch Capone and stop his crimes. A hardened street cop explains to Elliot Ness that in order to get Capone, he needs to operate by the law of the jungle: "You want to know how you do it? Here's how: they pull a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way, and that's how you get Capone!"

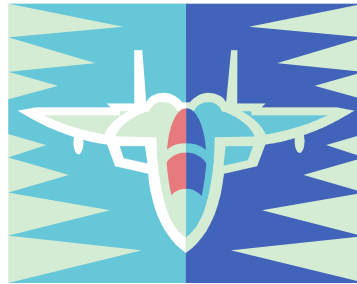
That is how Capone himself operated--on brutality, murder, and doing the other person "one better". The law of the jungle was the only law Capone understood.

Under more ordinary circumstances, this kind of ruthlessness gets out of control and causes a chain reaction which can continue on and on. This is often the origin of blood feuds between families, ethnic groups, and nations that never seem to end. Such actions are taken partly out of revenge and partly to teach the other side "a lesson" for what they have done.

In reality, no lessons are learned. Each side is caught in a vicious cycle of escalating violence. As a character says in the movie *Munich*, which is about the revenge-retaliation-revenge cycle that has taken hold between the Israelis and the Palestinians: "There is no peace at the end of this."

We usually think of the "law of the jungle" in relation to primitive cultures. However, a remarkable number of people in modern times continue to practice this way of life. They lash back harshly at those who hurt or offend them. Enemy nations have often tried to deter or punish each other through a massive escalation of violence. As long as there

are people and nations that live by this code of conduct, the world can never achieve lasting peace.



An eye for eye...

One of the most advanced legal codes of the ancient world was that of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, around 1800 B.C. The code dealt with all sorts of rights, regulations, and crimes and it was carved into a large black slate which was publicly displayed.

This code was state law and was based on the principle of “an eye for eye, a tooth for tooth, a limb for limb.” The Hammurabi code was actually a great step up on the ladder of justice from the law of the jungle. At least it was fairly equal.

In Hammurabi's Code, however, the punishment was different for different classes of offenders and victims, and in that way it was not equal. For instance, it stated that “if a noble destroys the eye of an aristocrat, his eye shall be destroyed. If he destroys the eye of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver in compensation.”

A similar principle guides the code of justice described in the Old Testament of the Bible where, instead of literally taking an eye for an eye, a system of fair compensation was worked out. If you injured someone you had to compensate the person with some amount of money or other goods according to a generally agreed scale. The Judaic Law applied equally to everyone. In these ways, it too represented a step up on the scale of human ethics and justice.

The Golden Rule—positivity and prevention

The ethical systems that have developed in the world are often based on the idea of reciprocity. This means that we must take into consideration the effects of our actions on other people. To do this we have to be able to empathize with others and see things through their eyes, not just through our own. There are two main variations on the principle of reciprocity, which is often referred to as the Golden Rule.

In the fifth century B.C., the Chinese sage Confucius was asked, “Is there any one word that can serve as a principle for the conduct of life?” Confucius answered, “Perhaps the word is reciprocity: do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.” Here we can imagine, “Suppose the other person were me? How would I feel?” We act out of compassion. We do not hurt others because we would feel their pain as our own. When we see someone suffering, we are touched because we can imagine how the other

person feels. So, the logic goes, if you yourself don't like to be hit, don't hit others; if you yourself don't like to be disrespected, don't disrespect others.

For Jesus this ethic was too passive. Instead, he taught that we should "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In this case, we actively help those who need help because we realize that if we were in that situation we ourselves would want to be helped. We listen to others because we want to be listened to. We respect others because we want to be respected. We treat others as if they were a part of ourselves. We love our neighbor as ourselves, as biblical scriptures teach.

This teaching was another great step forward in the conduct of human relationships. For the first time it was assumed there was a connection of heart between human beings. It went beyond prescribing punishment to advocating positive and preventive human action by challenging people to put themselves in the shoes of another. It offered a positive vision of human life in which people treated each other with courtesy, respect, and love.

The highest law--loving your enemy

Jesus challenged people to go beyond even this. He said that we should not just engage in reciprocity. We should love not merely our neighbors and friends, but we should love our enemies too.

Few people in the past two thousand years have been able to practice such a quality and depth of love. To ordinary people it seems unrealistic. Yet there have been such individuals. Modern day examples include Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela.

All three of these men suffered at the hands of their enemies. Gandhi was imprisoned and persecuted by the British government as he worked non-violently to secure India's independence. Martin Luther King, Jr. was mistreated, accused, and imprisoned even as he reached out with non-violence and love, trying to reconcile blacks and whites and establish justice between them. Nelson Mandela spent twenty eight years in a South African prison—the victim of an unjust system of apartheid that treated all nonwhites poorly. When he was released, amazingly, he forgave his oppressors and even worked together with the white president F. W. de Klerk to transform the country into a true democracy of all races.

Although for many of us such a standard of love seems very idealistic and out of reach, we should realize that some people have been able to practice that level of love. In fact, these advocates of loving the enemy have said that it is the only real solution to human problems.

Choosing the future

What is your motto? When something bad happens, how do you respond? Do you apply the law of the jungle and do worse to the other person than they did to you? Do you get back at them with exact "justice"? Do you try to prevent problems in the first place

and respond to problems when they occur by "doing to others as you would have them do to you?" Can you go as far as loving your enemy?

Mr. Robinson lives by the Golden Rule:

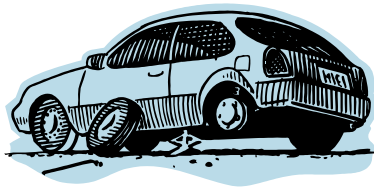
"I live in an apartment complex where each adult is allowed one parking space in the parking lot. My wife and I have two spaces. The problem is, our neighbor has three teenage sons living with her. A couple of them drive and use cars, but they don't have parking places. So what do they do? They park in our places, and we have no place to park.

We pointed out the problem to them and suggested they talk to the landlord about providing them with an extra space or two or arrange for street parking. When they didn't, we talked to the landlord. When he did nothing, we talked to the police.

After the police visited the mother, they stopped parking in our places. But we began to find nails in our tires. Oh, we couldn't prove it was them, but we'd have a flat every couple of weeks or so from a nail in the tire. We reported that to the police too, but since we couldn't prove it was them, we had to pay for the new tires ourselves.

I can't tell you how many times I've walked past their cars after dark, wanting to take revenge by putting nails in their tires. After all, their cars are as vulnerable as ours are. I can sneak out there late at night and do damage, if I choose to, and probably not get caught. Two can play that game, as they say.

But I don't do it. I'm a grown man, and I believe in the Golden Rule. I wouldn't do that to another person, period. I wish they lived by the Golden Rule too, but just because they don't doesn't mean I'm not going to. Sooner or later their bad actions will catch up with them, I believe."



The above story brings up an important point of ethical behavior: Do *you* determine your behavior and attitude or do you allow them to be determined by what others do? For example, if we say, "He makes me mad," we are saying that we are not really responsible

for our own emotions and behavior. Consciously or unconsciously, we often claim that our environment and the actions of others determine our feelings and actions. If we think like this, we have given other people the power to make us happy, sad, or angry and the power to make us do bad things. We think it is the fault of others if we are in a bad mood and shout at everyone. Yet we can never be free that way, because other people will sometimes hurt, frustrate, and upset us. Freedom means not being a slave to the emotions and impulses that others bring up in us. It means not doing wrong ourselves, even if we have been wronged.

We are responsible for the way we are and the way we act. Being in control of our emotions means that we decide how we are going to act in certain situations. We decide how we are going to be affected by our environment.

Survivors of concentration camps have reported that there are two kinds of prisoners in the camps: those who allow the situation to dominate them and who then become craven, and those who decide that they are not going to be dominated by the situation, no matter how bad it is. The latter could keep their integrity and inner freedom. We, too, should never give away our integrity and freedom. No matter the situation, we have the freedom to choose and act based on values and principles.

It is good to reflect on our values and mottos in life. Then we can escape from being the victim of our circumstances and instead become the masters and mistresses of our own lives.

Some common mottos people use to instruct themselves in living:

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Handsome is as handsome does.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Those who live by the sword die by the sword.

Waste not, want not.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

A friend in need is a friend indeed.

What goes around comes around.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the “law of the jungle”?

2. What is Hammurabi's Code?

3. What does an "eye for eye" mean?

4. What is the Golden Rule?

5. Do you think it is really possible to "love your enemy"?

6. When something bad happens, how do you respond?

7. Do you choose your behavior and attitude or do you allow them to be determined by others?

Exercise: “Me, Others, Society and the Future”

Please answer the questions or complete the statements:

Me:

"It's my life and I can do with it whatever I like." True or false?

What do I want others to think about me?

What three (non-material) things could I not live without?

The single most important thing in my life is . . .

I am the type of person who . . .

Others:

What is the value of a human being?

Are there any beliefs that all people have in common?

Are people responsible for their actions? If so, is this always true?

Are human beings basically good or evil?

What I value the most in others is . . .

I feel really good when other people . . .

Society:

What do I gain or lose from being a member of society?

Who decides what a society is like?

Does my behavior make a difference to society?

I want to live in a society that . . .

I believe that the main responsibility to create a good society lies in the hands of . . .

Future:

What do I think the world is going to be like in ten years? Will things be the same, better or worse?

Can I make a difference in the world?

What do I dream of doing with my life in the future?

If I could contribute one thing to the world, what would it be?

My ideal world is like . . .

Reflection Exercise: “My Motto in Life”

1. What is the guiding motto of your life?

2. Into which category does your outlook on life fit? What are your reasons?

- Law of the jungle
- Eye for eye
- Golden rule
- Love your enemy

CHAPTER 11: Altruistic Love

Altruism, according to a dictionary definition, is the “unselfish concern for the welfare of others.” The word “altruism” (in French, *altruisme*, from *autrui*: “other people”, derived from the Latin *alter*: “other”) was coined by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. He believed that individuals had a moral obligation to serve the interests of others or the “greater good” of humanity.

The idea that one has a moral obligation to serve others, of course, came long before Auguste Comte. For example, many of the world's oldest and most widespread religious traditions advocate it. Two of these are the Christian and Buddhist traditions.

The story of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus is an example of altruism. In this famous story, a man from Samaria stops to help a man who has been attacked by thieves. The man was robbed, beaten, and left for dead. Others pass by the injured man, too busy or frightened to stop and help him. The Samaritan stops, tends to the man's injuries, loads him on his own donkey, leads him into the town, gets a room for him at an inn, and pays the innkeeper out of his own pocket. He tells the innkeeper he will come back in a few days to check on the injured man and that if there are any further expenses regarding his care, the Samaritan will also pay for those.

This beautiful and simple story is so famous, that there are over eight million references to it on the internet. Thousands of hospitals, care facilities, churches, and benevolent organizations have named themselves after the Good Samaritan because of his great altruism.

Buddhism also relates a famous tale of altruism in the Story of Kisagotami. Here a woman who is always complaining about her troubles and misfortunes is advised by Buddha to search for a household that has never known sorrow or suffering. If she would bring him a mustard seed from such a household, he would use it to banish all her sorrows. Of course, she never finds such a place. Instead, in the course of her searching, she discovers people much worse off than herself. Her heart moved, she gives up her search and dedicates herself to helping those less fortunate people.

The conclusion of such stories is that the true way of life—and the way to true happiness—is to live for the sake of others. This means to practice altruistic love.



Motivation

When an individual feels empathy for someone in need, he or she will be motivated to help that person even at a sacrifice of his or her own interests.

If one performs an act beneficial to others with a view to gaining some personal benefit, this cannot be considered true altruism. There are several different perspectives on how "benefit" (or "interest") may be defined. A material gain (e.g. money, a physical reward, etc.) is clearly a form of benefit. However, some people identify and include non-material gains (affection, respect, happiness, satisfaction, etc.) as a form of benefit equal in value to material ones—and just as motivating. According to such a view there is no such thing as a purely altruistic act, because lingering in the background is always a desire for self-benefit, even if it is just a feeling of happiness or inner reward.

For most people, altruism usually means helping another person without expecting a material reward. However, people who practice altruism for the sake of an inner sense of reward may find themselves frustrated. Until their motivation becomes purely for the sake of others, they will probably not experience the inner reward. The inner reward comes almost as a byproduct of altruism; it cannot be the end itself.

Practicing altruism near to home

Altruistic acts are often done for people one doesn't know and may never or rarely meet. For example, people donate to international charities, "adopt" children from an underprivileged country, or raise money for worthy causes like fighting AIDS, cancer research, or stopping child abuse. They rarely meet the people who benefit from their altruism.

It is wonderful to help people whom you never meet out of a general sense of care for humanity. At the same time, it is also important to remember the words of a Charlie Brown comic strip character: "I love humanity. It's people I hate!" Sometimes those nearest to us are the hardest to love. It may be easier to be kind to people we don't know rather than practicing altruistic love toward a selfish sibling, a maddening classmate, or an irritated parent. Yet it is important to altruistically love those we know as well as those we don't know—and it may be more of a moral challenge to do so.

Altruism in politics

What is the implication of altruism in the so-called "real world"—where self-interest often seems to be "the name of the game"? Does altruism have any role to play here?

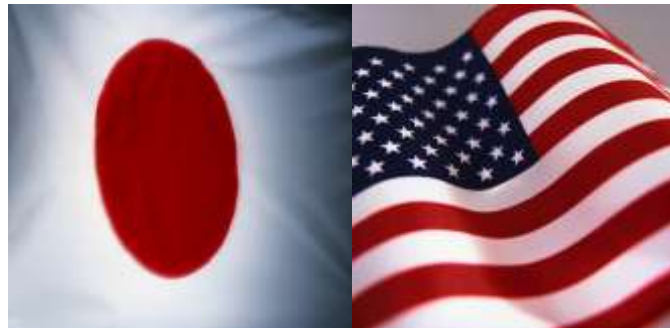
If we believe that people have an ethical obligation to help or further the welfare of others—if we believe in altruistic love—then we will support the kind of political system that is most effective in furthering the welfare of others, regardless of the effect this may have on us. Since there is no general consensus on what kind of political systems result in the greatest benefit for others, different "altruists" may have a wide variety of political views. It would be generally conceded, however, that political systems where people are free, not oppressed, and have rights and respect the rights of others would be systems wherein altruistic love would flourish.

Nations usually act in their own self-interest. When they do practice altruism, the world often deeply appreciates them. Political rewards often follow, but these should not be the aim of the altruism. Altruism is for its own sake and for the sake of the people it serves; otherwise, it does not necessarily bring about good results.

Political altruism

At the end of World War II, Japan was utterly defeated. Many Japanese had no food, no homes, and no heat. It might be expected that the United States would not want to help its defeated enemy. After all, Japan had attacked the United States first—they had bombed Pearl Harbor in a sneak attack and killed many people. The war in the Pacific with Japan was particularly bloody and cruel.

However, General MacArthur, who took over the American leadership of Japan after the war, had spent time in Japan with his father as a younger man. He understood the people. He ordered his soldiers not to eat the local food so there would be more for the Japanese people. He ordered land reform so that tenant farmers could at last become owners of land. He broke the stranglehold a few powerful and rich families had on the economy and guided Japan into prosperity. He had homes built for the people. MacArthur helped the Japanese write a fair and just constitution, granting women rights that even American women did not have.



MacArthur did not harm the Emperor of Japan or bring him to trial as a war criminal. Instead, he had the Emperor go around comforting his people by opening hospitals, being present at public events, and helping others. The Emperor was enormously popular, and his presence was comforting to a proud but defeated people. Like them, he was defeated. Yet, like them, he was keeping his dignity and building a new future.

The United States poured millions of dollars into the rebuilding of Japan. Japan and America have been friends ever since. Many Japanese people of the older generation thought MacArthur was more like a god than a man because of his altruism.

Many people believe that altruism should guide the actions of politicians and other people in positions of power. They believe that people in power should set their own interests aside and serve the populace. This is the concept of public service. If they do not serve altruistically, they may be criticized for failing what is believed to be their ethical obligation to place the public interests above their own.

Yet it is not only powerful leaders who are called upon to exercise altruistic love. All of us are called to do so. Altruism is the only way to ultimately deal with the problems in the world. In the end, altruism will serve all of our interests best. It has the potential to bring about the peaceful, safe, prosperous, and mutually respectful world we all dream of living in.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is altruism?

2. How does altruism relate to loving your enemy?

3. Do you think it is really possible to live in a totally altruistic manner, without regard for your own interests at all?

4. Is it easier to act altruistically toward someone you know or don't know? Why?

5. Does “power corrupt”, as the saying goes, or can those in power truly act for the benefit of others? Give some examples.

Exercise: “Stories of Altruistic Love”

The text contains stories which demonstrate altruism. Can you think of a story you have heard about altruism?

Reflection Exercise: “Personal Experience”

Can you think of some instances when you acted altruistically? What were the circumstances? Who did you help? What was the outcome? Did you receive any unexpected benefit?

CHAPTER 12: Marriage and Divorce

As we stated in a previous chapter, when people marry, their usual hope and expectation is that their marriage will last until they die. No one marries thinking that someday they will divorce. In the excitement and expectation of getting married, people do not think that their relationship may one day break down.

Nevertheless, throughout the world divorce rates are at an all time high. Millions of people get divorced each year. In many countries the rate is over 50%. If we want to avoid adding to this statistic, it would be worth taking a look at the causes of divorce and family breakdown. Then we shall be more prepared for the challenges that may come to our own future marriages and hopefully be able to overcome them.



Causes of divorce

There are many pressures on modern marital relationships. Rapid social, economic, and technological changes present challenges that were unknown to earlier generations. Several general factors have contributed to the increase in divorce:

- In the past, marriage was more of a social custom and institution. People generally did not marry out of love. Rather, it was seen as a practical social and economic arrangement. The family itself tended to be a working unit, and marriage was part of this unit.
Today, marriage is more of an emotional encounter lacking the external support structures it had in the past. This has placed greater stress on the relationship itself.
- The widening professional opportunities available to women have brought other challenges. A woman today often has a full-time job. Sometimes her pay is higher than her husband's, which may weaken his self-esteem and pride. An independent income also makes it easier for women to live without husbands, asserting their independence and leaving their marriages.
- Today people enter marriage with greater expectations than ever before. However, these expectations often fail to be linked to the investment necessary to make a

marriage work. The result is that many people are easily disappointed when their expectations are not met.

- When a couple does things together, the relationship grows deeper and more solid. The partners learn to support and encourage each other. In many societies over the past century, however, the state has taken over many of the functions traditionally performed by parents, such as the education, health, and even the financial welfare of the children. Having fewer common tasks to unite them, a husband and wife more easily drift apart.
- People who marry very young often experience great stress arising from housing as well as work-related and financial issues. Before taking such a serious step, we need to ask ourselves whether we are mature enough to handle the challenges marriage brings.
- Sometimes two people meet and marry very quickly, before getting to really know each other. Studies have shown that the success of a marriage is related to the length and quality of courtship. Through courtship a couple can learn about each other intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. It gives them time to discover each other's views on important matters, such as running a household, their roles in the home, and child rearing. Many conflicts will arise if their opinions and values in these matters are different. If a couple waits several years before marrying, they can find out if they are really suited for each other.
- Alcoholism has destroyed countless marriages. A drinker, if angry or frustrated, is more likely to abuse his or her spouse and children, verbally and physically. Excessive drinking also leads to economic problems if the family is left short of money. People often drink to escape reality. Rather than dealing with painful experiences and other difficulties of a marital relationship, alcoholics seek to escape from them, which only makes the problem worse.
- Divorce rates for non-religious couples are higher than for religious ones. This is because religious people tend to view marriage as a sacrament, or sacred covenant, not to be easily broken. Non-religious people tend to look at marriage as a kind of contract between two people that can be broken at will. One of the consequences of the loss of religion in society has been to make divorce easier.
- Some people get married because they are pressured into doing it, whether by parents, friends, or circumstances. Perhaps neither is really ready to make a lifetime commitment. It is better to call off an engagement, even at the last moment, if one or both is marrying for the wrong reasons than to regret it later on.
- One common instance of people being pressured into marrying is when the girl gets pregnant. In such a situation the couple is likely to be unclear as to whether they really love each other and whether they are ready for the responsibility of raising a child. They may feel trapped and see their marriage, and even the child, as some kind of punishment. This is hardly a good beginning for a marriage. Not surprisingly, statistics show that the majority of such marriages end in divorce. There is no better reason for staying sexually abstinent until marriage than the thought of an unwanted pregnancy and all of its problems.
- One challenge for many married couples is their relationship with in-laws, particularly if the newlyweds move into one of the parents' homes. It is not easy for a spouse to join an in-law's household. The inability to establish good

emotional and practical relationships can eventually hurt the married couple's own relationship.

- As we grow older, we change. If you marry at age twenty-one, you will probably find that both you and your spouse have changed somewhat by the time you are thirty. The challenge for a couple is to change and grow together as partners, facing life together, and supporting each other when difficult times come. Shared experiences enrich a marriage, making it deeper and more fulfilling. People who don't do this may feel themselves growing apart.
- When two people marry, their lives become one and they must learn to adjust to this new situation. This takes time and effort. It often requires giving up or cutting back on some of the things we personally like to do for the sake of the marriage and family. We may not be able to spend as many nights out with "the guys" or immerse ourselves for too long in a thick novel. Successful marriages require learning to balance our own desires with those of our spouse and family. Not learning this leads to tension and potential disaster.
- Another factor to be aware of is family finances. If one spouse is frugal but the other wastes money, there is bound to be conflict.
- Too much time at work can put a strain on a marriage. If one or both spouses work long hours, the couple will not have time to relax and enjoy each other's company. The couple may begin to grow apart.
- Another problem can be unemployment. If a spouse loses his or her job, that person can begin to feel worthless and a failure. Anger, depression, and irritability easily come into the marital relationship. In addition, the loss of income is likely to put a further strain on the relationship.
- Finally, one major cause of divorce is adultery. When a couple first marries, they are excited and just want to be in each other's presence. However, over time the sparkle in the relationship may fade. If they are not investing in and deepening their relationship, they can easily grow bored with each other. The relationship becomes stale and predictable. Their love grows cold. Eventually, one or both may begin to search for new love elsewhere. A simple friendship at the office may turn into an exciting "affair". Even if the spouse never finds out, the secret creates a wall in the marriage. If the betrayed spouse finds out about the affair, it can lead to divorce or, if the couple stays together, to a great loss of trust.

The importance of preparation

All of the above reasons for divorce can be avoided and overcome. The key is preparation. Marriage can be a source of great joy and happiness, but it is also a challenge. Before undertaking such a challenge, we should be prepared.

The most important preparation is to develop our heart and character so that we become people who are capable of loving and caring for another individual. We must also learn to manage practical things, such as time and money. We must be able to control our physical desires and know the proper time and place to fulfill them. Good character means having a strong conscience and not giving in to temptation.

Learning how to love does not mean learning how to have sex. The key to having fulfilling sex is having a healthy relationship—emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Sex

is important to a marriage, but most couples find that their sexual relationship is very much affected by the quality of their overall relationship– in other words, the loving relationship that the couple maintains in their daily life.



Obviously, marriage is not something to be undertaken lightly. Whom you choose to marry will be the most important decision of your life. Marriage is meant to be the place where we experience life's most intimate relationship. If it works, it can bring the greatest joy; if not, the greatest misery. Because of this, there are few things more important in life than preparing for marriage and its challenges. You should think that your entire life before marriage is preparation for becoming a spouse and parent. If you think like this, you are far less likely to end up in a divorce court. Instead you will find that through your marriage you grow and find deep happiness and peace.

Questions for Reflection

1. Name five reasons for divorce.

2. What are the reasons why people get married?

3. Why do you think there are more divorces today than in the past?

4. What is courtship? Is it important?

5. What are your expectations and hopes for your future marriage?

6. How can you prepare yourself so as to avoid problems that lead to divorce?

7. What are your views about the role of husband and wife in the family, raising children, the role of grandparents, and spending money?

8. What activity that you like to do might you have to give up or cut short once you are married?

9. What is marriage to you: sacred or simply a legal arrangement?

10. What would you do if you discovered that your spouse was unfaithful?

Exercise: “Marriage Counselor”

Pretend you are a marriage counselor. You are asked to write an article for your local newspaper explaining the common mistakes people make in choosing marriage partners. Present some of the ways people can prepare themselves for their future marriage in order to avoid these problems.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reflection Exercise: “Marriage Agreement”

Imagine that you are about to get married. You and your future spouse decide to make a formal agreement with each other. What would you include in this agreement? What assurances and promises would you make to your beloved?

[illegible]

CHAPTER 13: The Individual, Family, and Society

What is the relationship between the individual, family, and society? In what way is a person responsible to society for his or her actions? How does what goes on in families affect society as a whole?

These are important questions, for we live in a world that places great emphasis on the value of individual freedom. At the same time it seems to downplay taking responsibility for the results of one's actions and the impact an individual's actions may have on others.

For instance, since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, we have been told that sexual love is a private matter that is no one else's business. But is it? Does what individuals do in private have an impact on the society in which they live?

Indeed it does. Society pays the price for the deeds of individuals. After all, society is only a large group of individuals. Just as one cancer cell in the body can affect the whole body, an individual's actions for good or bad have some impact on the body of society.

We may think, "Why shouldn't I do what I want sexually? I'm not harming anyone but myself. What I do in the privacy of my own home with another consenting person is nobody's business." Yet if individual choices lead to unwanted pregnancies, sexual diseases, divorce, and family breakdown, as they so often do, those choices do become society's problem and society's business.

The Princess and the Barbarian

The story "The Princess and the Barbarian", written by author George Gilder as a prologue for his book *Men and Marriage*, addresses these issues.

Upon reading the story, look at the difference in behavior between the two generations. The virtues of the new generation differ from those of the previous one. The courtship and sexual morality of the first couple contrast sharply with the behavior of the second couple. The story reveals the social consequences of these different value systems.

In the first generation, there is a barbarian who is young and aggressive. He is undisciplined and seeks instant gratification in whatever he does. He takes what he wants without regard for the consequences. When he encounters a young princess, he is filled with lust and desire for her.

She, however, is modest and guards her virginity and integrity with her life. Through her love and strength, she helps the barbarian become self-disciplined and transforms his lust into love. He finds the motivation to change, grow, and give up his barbarous ways for the sake of her love. He changes from a wild man to a husband, a father, and eventually he becomes the new king. As head of the kingdom, he lives for its benefit and future, bringing in an era of peace and prosperity.

This story tells us that sexual purity in a woman can "tame" a barbarian man into acting well—into becoming a committed husband, a good father, and a "ruler" of his household if not a kingdom. If the woman had given in sexually, the barbarian would

never have been tamed by her. He would not have become a husband. He would not have become a good father. He would not have become a responsible ruler.

In the second generation, there is another barbarian. This barbarian is like the first was at the beginning—aggressive, undisciplined, and seeking self-gratification. However, this princess, the daughter of the first, has different values from her mother. She has been influenced by modern ideas. She doesn't care for her parents' morality, and when she meets the barbarian she welcomes the excitement of the encounter, but she is not committed to their relationship. It would take too much effort for her to tame him. She prefers just to enjoy pleasure with him without thinking of the responsibility that goes with it.

When a suave, worldly-wise king from a neighboring kingdom appears at the court, she is attracted to him immediately. Why stay with a barbarian when she can have a king? And the barbarian? His heart betrayed, he begins seeking revenge, wreaking havoc on the kingdom and driving it into ruin.

This is a parable of how sexual immorality leaves men in a barbarous state. The barbarian is not transformed into a husband, father, and ruler. Rather, he is simply used and then abandoned for someone better. He then goes on a rampage.



The moral of the story

This story tells us that the virtues practiced or not practiced by individuals have a definite impact on a society's future. A society is made up of the relationships among the people of that society. If these relationships become selfish, then the whole society will be affected. This is especially true if such behavior is demonstrated by those in a position of influence, such as a member of the royal family or a nation's elected leaders.

Nobody's business but their own?

The cover of a major news magazine in the United States showed a large portrait of then President Clinton and his wife Hillary. The words read, "Nobody's business but our own." The news magazine cover was referring to the sex scandal surrounding the president and Monica Lewinsky, a White House worker, which was storming the country at the time.

Was it really nobody's business but their own? Consider. President Clinton had lied to a grand jury about his involvement with Monica Lewinsky. Ordinary citizens who lie to juries are put in jail. President Clinton had also ordered military strikes on other countries on the eve of important days in the scandal: the night before Monica Lewinsky's grand jury testimony and the night before he was to be impeached. Many Americans questioned the timing of these strikes—were they meant to serve as distractions from the president's political troubles? Many people from other countries saw the military strikes as a way to distract attention from the scandal.

The president's actions also affected the trust that some of the members of his own armed forces felt in him. A colonel in the United States Air Force said, "If I had done what he did, I would have been fired. Yet I had to obey him as my Commander-in-Chief." Some Air Force cadets said, "If one of my leaders here couldn't be loyal to his own wife, how could I trust that he would be loyal to me in a combat situation where my life might depend on him?"

Did the president's personal immoral decisions really only affect him and his wife? Was it really "Nobody's business but their own"?

If people betray the trust of those closest to them, they are likely to betray the trust of other people as well. If we are prepared to cheat on those we are close to, why not cheat on our casual acquaintances or those with whom we do business? Betrayal, lack of trust, grounded in human selfishness, are at the root of many of our social problems.

The story of the princess and the barbarian is not only about the effects that royalty or people in positions of power have on society. It is also a story of how sexual self-control strengthens a society and how lack of sexual self-control hurts it.

Anthropologist J. D. Unwin studied the sexual behaviors of eighty-six cultures through five thousand years of history. He observed that when cultures believed that sex outside of marriage—either premarital sex or extramarital sex—was wrong and did not practice it, those cultures prospered and were strong. The societies that were more sexually loose declined and eventually faded away.¹ Unwin theorized that it was a matter of energy. Energy dispersed carelessly through promiscuity resulted in a dying society.²

¹ Unwin documented these findings in several publications, including *Sexual Regulations and Human Behavior*, published in London by Williams and Norgate in 1933, and *Hoplusia*, published in London in 1940.

² He postulated this in remarks made during his address to the British Psychological Society on March 27, 1935: "Sexual Regulations and Cultural Behavior." Proceedings from the gathering were published by Oxford University Press in London.

Sociologist Pitirim Sorokin at Harvard found a similar pattern in his studies of societies. Thus there is a strong scientific link between personal moral decisions and the strength of a society.

Family Life and Society

How we handle our sexuality in a society determines a great deal about the stability of marriage and family life in that society. Many social scientists have found that unstable marriages and family breakdown lead to crime in society. Neighborhoods where there are many single parents are usually less safe than neighborhoods where there are strong marriages. Most criminal offenders are unmarried young men (from age eighteen to age thirty-five).

When men marry and stay married, they, like the first barbarian, become stakeholders in society. They care about their families. They get into fewer fights, they drink less alcohol, fewer of them are involved in homicide, they keep steady jobs for the sake of their wives and children, they care about the schools, hospitals, roads, and facilities in their communities and pay taxes and serve on committees to make them better. They often own property and care about their property. Their sexual energy is channeled into building a marriage, a family, a home, and a community in which to live and prosper.



This is the significance of the story of the princess and the barbarian. Through channeling the couple's sexual energy into marriage, family, and kingdom-building, all is well. All are happier for the couple's sexual restraint.

When sexual mores are loose in the society, they contribute to social breakdown. Loose sexual mores contribute to divorce. Then children grow up in broken families, often with only one parent. This will have a negative effect on the larger society, because children from broken families are statistically far more at risk than children from stable families. Children from broken families statistically use drugs more, have more mental and emotional problems, are more involved in crime, suffer from health problems, fall behind academically, and are more likely to be victims of abuse. Children of single parent families tend to be less able to cope with emotional and social difficulties. Although this is not true in every case, they are more likely to grow up feeling insecure, neglected, and unloved as the single parent struggles to maintain the home while working full time to support the family as well. Such children are exposed to the dangers and problems of the world before their hearts have been grounded in the warmth and security of a loving

home. Because they often spend time alone in an empty house, they are more likely to join a gang, which becomes like a family to them.

These things do not always happen to children from broken homes, but they do face greater challenges and have more difficulties to overcome than those growing up in stable homes with two loving parents.

The quality of family life is enormously important to society. Children who do not experience respect and love in the family will not know how to show respect and love to people in society. In an atmosphere of love, children can learn to love and trust, to apologize for mistakes, to forgive others for their mistakes, to resolve conflicts, to be conscientious and courageous, to respect the rights of others, to postpone gratification, and to be both free and responsible. They can gain the inner confidence to develop healthy relationships with many kinds of people.

We often think that our problems are caused by the social environment. Of course, it is true that social influences can affect us in both good and bad ways. Yet the family is the basis of society. When we find problems in society, they can usually be traced back to problems in the family. It is in the family that our personality and character are formed. We do not inherit just our parents' genes; we also inherit their attitudes towards life, their way of dealing with problems, and their patterns of human relationships. These are passed on from generation to generation.

The relationships we experience in the family are the models for our social relationships. Our societies are a reflection of our families, and our families are a reflection of the moral choices made by the individuals within them. In these ways the fates of the individual, the family, and society intertwine.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do values sometimes change from one generation to the next?

2. What should a traditionally moral society do when immoral ideas start influencing the youth?

3. How is it possible to choose between a moral and an immoral idea? What are the criteria for making such a judgment?

4. How does the breakdown of order in sexual love influence society? Is it a strict cause-and-effect relationship?

5. Why do you think most criminals come from broken homes or single-parent families?

6. How does an individual's choices affect his or her family?

7. How does a family affect society?

8. How did the first princess act to change the barbarian into a responsible adult? How did her actions and the result differ from her daughter's?

9. The couples in the story happened to be the kingdom's rulers. Do leaders have a special responsibility to set the moral tone of their society?

10. Why do you think the second princess rejected the values of her parents and adopted more "modern" ones?

Exercise: “The Two Princesses”

Make a chart of the two princesses comparing:

- 1) their values;
- 2) how their actions affected the kingdom

Now think which path you would realistically take if you were to find yourself in their situation (if you are male, let the barbarian be a female). To do this, you have to reflect on your own character and values.

Reflection Exercise: “The Princess and the Barbarian Today”

Try to write a short story transferring the circumstances to the 21st century: where is the “kingdom”, who is the “princess”, who is the “barbarian”, and what happens? Use your imagination in creating a modern day setting for the story.

CHAPTER 14: Under Fire

Character development often occurs “on the job”. That is, sometimes only after being in a leadership position do people learn what it really means to be a leader. Only when they bear the responsibility of decision-making, sometimes in the face of criticism and opposition, do they become real leaders. Such circumstances demand and draw out of them qualities and abilities that no one, including the leaders themselves, knew they had. In these cases leaders emerge from the position and the experience greater than when they originally took on the responsibility.

In this chapter we will look at two examples of people who faced tremendous challenges as leaders—and grew to greatness as a result.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln is one of the best known examples in American history of someone who grew in stature and leadership abilities as time went on. Hugely underestimated in his time and greatly reviled by many, Lincoln ultimately came to be known as one of America’s greatest presidents. Out of all the presidents, he perhaps presided over the most difficult period in U.S. history. His entire presidency was taken up with a civil war that very nearly tore the country apart.

Lincoln did not come from the privileged class of society but was born in a one room cabin on the edge of what was then the frontier in Kentucky. He had no more than eighteen months of formal education but was mainly self-educated. He established a law practice in Illinois, which became the basis for his career in politics. Until he reached the presidency, that career was a spotted one, losing more elections than he won. Before becoming president, his highest political office was a two-year term in Congress.

Although admired by many for his simple, humble ways and straightforwardness (hence the nickname “Honest Abe”), he was also ridiculed for his lack of formal education and often portrayed by the press as a “country bumpkin”. His humility and folksy ways caused many people to underestimate him. In reality Lincoln had a sharp wit and clever mind.

No president was faced with a more severe national crisis than Lincoln. By the time of his inauguration in March 1861, seven Southern slave states had already seceded from the Union. These were to be joined by several others in the following months, leading before long to an all out civil war between the North and South. From the beginning Lincoln was determined to save the Union. One of his first acts was to select a strong cabinet that included all of his major rivals for the Republican nomination.

As Commander-in-Chief Lincoln was soon noted for vigorous measures. These were sometimes at odds with the Constitution and often at odds with the ideas of his military commanders. Democrats, who liked to refer to him as “Abraham the First”, accused him of being a tyrant because he restricted many civil liberties. For example, he suspended the right to a fair trial and his administration made thousands of arrests. On the other hand, Lincoln was often called a clown by the newspapers, due to his lack of formal education and political experience. During the course of his presidency Lincoln would be criticized for violating the Constitution, overstepping the bounds of executive power, declaring martial law, ordering the arrest of a number of newspaper publishers, and sending

hundreds of thousands of young men to their deaths in the war. Radical Republicans criticized him for going too slow on the question of abolishing slavery, and later for not being ruthless enough toward the conquered South.

He tolerated with great patience such criticism. His attitude towards all that was said about him is summed up in the following statement:

If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what's said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

Lincoln went forward and acted based on his conviction of what was right for the nation. He was unwavering in his goal to preserve the Union and eventually to free the slaves. He proved adept at balancing competing considerations and at getting rival groups to work together toward a common goal. In his many speeches and writings, he was able to mobilize and inspire the North to stay the course, even though at times everything seemed hopeless.

In the course of the war Lincoln emerged as a strong leader, a moral force, and an upholder of the founding principles of the United States. In his Gettysburg Address, he defined the war as a rededication to the egalitarian ideals of the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created equal. In this and other speeches, Lincoln articulated better than any one else the rationale behind the Union effort.

As to how Lincoln grew into his leadership role during his Administration, historian Lord Charnwood said, "Not many conquerors, and certainly few successful statesman, have escaped the tendency of power to harden or at least to narrow their human sympathies, but in this man a natural wealth of tender compassion became richer and more tender, while in the stress of deadly conflict he developed an astounding strength."



The Prophet Muhammad

The life of the Prophet Muhammad, founder of the religion of Islam, which numbers today more than one million members, is another example of a person who suffered tremendous opposition and persecution throughout much of his life, yet who emerged as a wise and benevolent leader. Muhammad was born in the year 570 in Mecca, Arabia, which was particularly barbaric at that time.

Arabia stood isolated, cut off from the rest of the world by vast deserts. There was a shortage of material goods, and the fighting character of the various tribes of the region made robbery and banditry the normal way of life. There was a great deal of lawlessness, and morals, culture, and civilization were undeveloped. Blood feuds, some lasting for decades, were common. Drunken orgies ending in bloody fights were common. The gambling tables were open all night, and dancing girls excited the passions of the young men from the desert. The dominant religion was animism—the worship of stones, trees, idols, stars and spirits.

Muhammad's early life was filled with tragedy. His father died a few days before he was born, and his mother died when he was only six years old. He was brought up by his grandfather and then by his merchant uncle. Following in his footsteps as a merchant, Muhammad was well liked and earned the nickname "The Honest One" for his piety, honesty, fair dealing, and practical common sense.

When he was twenty-five, Muhammad married and soon became a rich, respected, and influential citizen of Mecca. However, he was not satisfied. The barbaric lawlessness of his society bothered him and increasingly he sought the solitude of the desert. Finally, at the age of forty he began to have encounters with the angel Gabriel who said that God had chosen him to lead the people out of ignorance and barbarism and build a new civilization.

Muhammad began a daily practice of prayer, which drew comment from those around him. After a while, he began to preach on the street corners of Mecca. He challenged people to submit their lives to God and to practice love toward the poor, prisoners, slaves, and foreigners.

It must have been difficult for Muhammad to go out to those who knew him so well and preach openly. He was respected as a noble and kind man, but now he was claiming to have been sent by God to change their lives. He demanded an end to immorality and corruption. His message that all men were equal in the sight of God challenged the unjust class system. Although crowds gathered to listen, most people didn't want to change their lives.

The people began to threaten, ridicule, and insult Muhammad, but nothing would make him give in. They became determined to stop him and his few followers at any cost. His enemies abused and slandered him. They covered Muhammad and his followers with dirt and sewage as they offered their daily prayers. Men pelted them with stones, beat them with sticks, threw them into prison, and tried to starve them by excluding them from all trade, charity, and business. In the meantime Muhammad continued to have deep experiences with God, which gave him great comfort and strength. The intense

opposition he encountered only confirmed for him the truth of his message. Slowly he started to gain more and more followers.

After ten years of reaching out to the people of Mecca, Muhammad's fortunes changed dramatically. He was invited to Medina, a town some 320 kilometers to the north of Mecca, by seventy-five of its leading citizens. They were looking for a strong but just leader to bring peace to their city, where there were constant conflicts between competing tribes.

In Medina, Muhammad's leadership skills were tested. He had to unite the various tribes into a single strong community. He also had to deal with Mecca, which was bound to attack Medina if Muhammad succeeded in making it strong. Beyond this, he had to think about how to fulfill what he saw as his mission to civilize the whole of Arabia.

He began by challenging the whole political arrangement of Arabia, which until then had been based on the tribe. Muhammad replaced tribal laws with a basic principle of justice for all, regardless of class, race, or creed, and wrote these rules down. He declared that all citizens should be free to practice their own beliefs in peaceful co-existence, without fear of persecution. He expected that all citizens should join together and cooperate in the face of a common enemy from the outside.

Although he was now the ruler of a city-state, Muhammad never lost his humility. He always greeted people kindly and showed respect to elders. He balanced his clear moral teachings with a gentle good humor. Despite his position as leader, he never made people feel small, unwanted, or embarrassed.

Muhammad's ultimate goal was to bring peaceful civilization to all of Arabia. He sent out ambassadors to other regions with proposals of alliances. By coming under the protection of Medina, these cities and tribes could escape from their own destructive blood feuds. Step by step, Muhammad gained the support of more and more of Arabia. One of the last places to submit to his rule was his hometown of Mecca. Near the end of his life Muhammad fought a final battle against Mecca and gained victory. He proved magnanimous in victory, granting a general amnesty to everyone in the city despite their continual persecution of him over twenty years.

In the end Muhammad left behind a monotheistic religion with a strict moral code; he created a well-disciplined state to replace tribal warfare; he left a new system of law, which dispensed impartial justice. He encouraged religious tolerance such that non-Muslim inhabitants of Muslim countries equally enjoyed freedom. Above all, the Prophet Muhammad set a noble example and fully practiced all that he taught to others.



Leadership under fire

Although separated by over a thousand years, living in vastly different cultures and having different belief systems, Lincoln and Muhammad exhibited several common qualities. They both were guided by an overarching vision for their societies that had the power to transcend the immense challenges they faced. Staying centered upon their vision, they could resist the temptation to misuse their power and retaliate against their enemies. Instead they remained true to their vision. Opposition and persecution only served to strengthen their conviction in their sense of purpose. Because they stayed true to their purpose, attacks upon them could be deflected and gave them greater moral authority. Both were humble and gentle believers in equality. In victory, both were generous to their enemies.

The key point in both of these examples is that true leadership emerges if the leader can remain true to himself even when under intense attack. This can happen only if the person has a good heart to begin with and his motivation for becoming a leader is not to advance himself and his own power but to advance the well-being of the people he wishes to lead. Most of all, he must be able to keep that kind of heart towards his enemies. Such a leader ultimately can bring harmony, peace, and prosperity to his society.

You too will be a leader under fire sometimes once you step into the world outside of school, even if it is only as the leader of your own life and family. It is well to learn about and cultivate the good character traits of these famous leaders and apply them in our own daily lives.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is true leadership?

2. How can opposition and criticism actually strengthen a person's leadership capabilities?

3. What made Abraham Lincoln a good leader?

4. What made Muhammad a good leader?

5. Compare and contrast the circumstances of Lincoln and Muhammad.

6. How were Lincoln and Muhammad different?

7. How were they the same?

8. Do you see any potential leadership qualities in yourself?

Exercise: “Exemplary Leadership”

In this chapter we presented the stories of two leaders who grew to greatness under intense opposition. Can you think of any other historical figures who demonstrated exemplary leadership under fire? What were their circumstances? What kind of opposition did they face? How did they overcome this and prevail? What was their greatest accomplishment?

Reflection Exercise: “Me as a Leader”

We are all destined to be leaders someday, whether in our chosen career, in our community or simply as a parent in our future family. Imagine yourself as a leader in one of these areas, i.e., career, community, or family. Using a real life crisis as a reference, one that either you have seen first hand or heard about, how would you handle such a situation? What kind of character qualities would you need to do so? What possible outcomes are there? What would be the best outcome and how would you achieve it?

CHAPTER 15: I Can Make a Difference

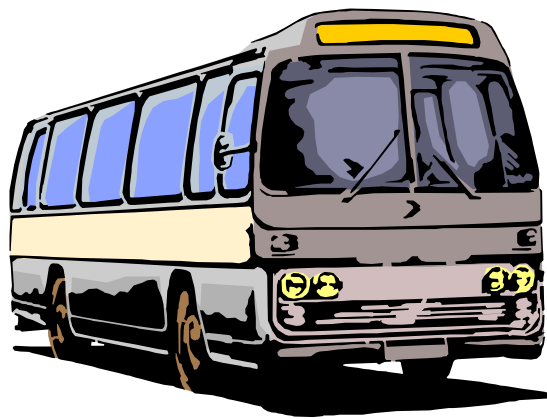
Waiting at a bus stop in a large city, a young woman stood with a handbag over her left shoulder. The night air was warm, and the city was full of sights and sounds and the murmur of voices.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she observed three young men approaching her. Although the sidewalk was full of people, she noticed these three immediately. She could see them whispering to each other and glancing around suspiciously. Holding her bag more tightly, she looked away from the men. As they began to pass, one man stopped to ask her a question. Nervously, she looked into his eyes, preparing to respond. Then, to her shock and terror, one of the other men lunged at her while the third man grabbed her arms and began to yank the bag from her shoulder.

In a panic, she screamed, “Help! Help me, somebody! Please!” She was sure that people would come to her assistance once they saw the situation. A small crowd gathered around the men and the woman, but no one stepped forward to help.

“Get away from me!” she shouted, fighting with all her strength to hang on to her bag. “Get away from me!” she pleaded again.

The men tore off her necklace and earrings. A bus pulled up to the bus stop. A few people pushed their way out of the crowd onto the bus, as did the three men, carrying the young woman’s bag and jewelry. Filled with helpless rage, the woman watched the thieves ride away on the bus. They laughed and waved goodbye to her through the window as the bus pulled out of sight. Bursting into tears, the young woman stood alone at the bus stop. The people that had witnessed the scene disappeared as quickly as they had gathered.



The above incident actually happened. What is it about this story that angers us? How could people watch such a malicious assault occur without coming to the aid of the defenseless young woman? Her attackers had no weapons and could have been overpowered easily, if at least some in the crowd had intervened. Can you imagine witnessing this scene? What would you have done?

Now read the following scenarios and answer the accompanying questions:

You are on the escalator in a crowded subway station. You see a man in front of you taking the wallet out of a woman's handbag. The woman does not notice the theft; neither does anyone else—except you!

1. How would you feel if you were the one being robbed?
2. Would you want someone to intervene if you were the victim?

You are riding a bus when you hear a young man making fun of two young, dark-skinned girls sitting next to you. He is with a friend, and the two are making mean jokes and ethnic slurs about the girls. The man tells them how he hates "their people". The girls sit quietly, looking down.

1. Imagine you were one of the girls. What feelings do you think you would have if someone were treating you badly because you were different?
2. Do you think you would be grateful if someone stood up for you and told the young men that what they were doing was wrong?
3. If someone said something in your defense, what kind of impact would that have on you? Would it encourage or empower you to do the same for someone else if the occasion arose?

You are with a large group of classmates after school. Two boys in the group have a difficult time getting along. They are always arguing and saying nasty things to each other. Today they are acting especially hostile to each other. Suddenly, the two boys begin punching each other. Then one of them pulls out a knife and viciously stabs the other boy in the stomach and runs away. You and the rest of the group are left standing there in shock. The boy is lying on the ground bleeding, but no one is running for help.

1. Imagine you were the boy who had been stabbed. What would you have wanted your friends to do?
2. How would you feel if you saw all your friends just standing around watching you bleed?



Getting involved

It is not easy to get involved in a difficult situation and put yourself on the line for another person. Why should we risk our life for the sake of another, especially for someone we do not know personally? To do so requires tremendous courage and compassion. Yet in reality, countless “ordinary” men and women in history have given their lives for the sake of others, putting into practice deeply-held beliefs of right and wrong.

Billions of people have passed through history. Some lived and died without leaving much of a mark while others are remembered and revered by millions, even centuries after their deaths. What makes the difference between a memorable life and an insignificant one? How can the efforts of one person make a significant impact in history?

We started our discussion with some situations in which people (and you could well find yourself in their place) were faced with situations involving moral choices. The role they played in those situations was a direct result of decisions they made. Some made good choices; others not. The resulting influence on the situation was either positive or negative, depending on the decision.

According to the situation, our choices may affect only ourselves, or they may affect our family, our friends, our neighborhood, or have an impact on the destiny of our country, or even all of humanity. Shall we then get involved?

Moral duty

Most people would like to be able to influence the lives of others in a good way. We would like to be remembered favorably, for people to say after we’ve gone, “He (she) was a good man (woman). He (she) lived his (her) life for others and left the world a better place.” We want to leave good memories in the hearts of people.

Those who are able to make a positive impact on the world around them have one feature in common: they care. They are not afraid to insert themselves into difficult situations to help others. In many cases they go out of their way to do so. Why would people choose to involve themselves in situations when they do not have to? The answer is: they have a sense of duty and responsibility.

What is duty? Different people understand it in different ways. For some, duty concerns only their own interests: “I am responsible only to myself and for my own welfare.” This is a rather self-centered outlook on life, not recognizing the connectedness one has with others.

Others feel moral obligations toward their family and friends. For instance, if someone were threatening your sister or mother, it is likely you would step in and do something. Even if the threatening person were much stronger than you, you could not simply ignore the situation. No amount of fear would stop you from trying to help those you love.

Some people, out of a deep sense of moral duty, are ready to help not only those

whom they know and love but anyone in need, even if helping involves trouble and danger. Here we face an important question: How wide is the circle of people whom we are ready to help? My classmates? People in my city? Fellow citizens of my country? Only those whom I know and like? What would I do if a dirty beggar on the street came to me for help?

Patriotism refers to a person's love for and sense of duty toward one's country. In times of crisis patriotism has led to countless examples of courage and heroism in countries throughout the world. During the Second World War, for example, tens of thousands of people volunteered to join their nation's army, motivated only by the desire to serve their homeland. They did not do this in response to an external order, but out of the inner command of their hearts and consciences.

Even in times of peace there are always people who, out of love of country or humanity in general, are ready to stand up for what is right and fight against injustice. Others serve and devote themselves out of an even greater love—a love of humanity.

What can I do?

But what can one person do? Can one person really make a difference?

A person's ability to influence others depends finally on one thing —character. If we are concerned primarily with our own well-being, we may be remembered, but not fondly. We may instead bring much suffering to others. Self-centered persons are especially terrifying when they possess power and authority. The history of the world is full of examples of rulers who caused great suffering in the pursuit of personal power. Power and influence of this kind may be impressive, but it benefits no one.

Many people think that to have real influence on the lives of others you must have power, money, and position. Certainly people with such attributes are in a position to influence others. But power comes in many guises; the power of conviction is awesome, the power of good character is immense, and there is no greater power than the power of love.

One Person Makes a Difference

On December 1, 1955, a black seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger after a long, weary work day. Yet she was not only tired because of work. She was tired of the way black people were being treated.

The rule on the buses was that a black person could sit up front in a seat only if no white people wanted a seat at that time. If a white person came along, though, the black person was expected to give up the seat and move to the back of the bus.

This brave woman, Rosa Parks, chose not to obey the unfair bus rule. With quiet strength and dignity, she allowed herself to be arrested and fined for violating a city ordinance.

Black leaders in Montgomery were excited about rallying around Rosa Parks. She was an intelligent, quiet, church-going, hard-working woman who had never been in trouble with

the law before. Everyone knew she was a good woman. No one could accuse her of being disorderly or a lawbreaker. Her dignity pointed to how unjust the bus rules were.

The black leaders decided that the black people of the city should stop riding the buses until they were treated fairly, and the black citizens agreed. The famous Montgomery bus boycott that followed brought race relations to the forefront of America's conscience, aided by the eloquent spokesperson Dr. Martin Luther King.

It all started because of Rosa Parks's quiet refusal to go along with injustice. Her brave, solemn act led to the end of legal segregation in America and made her an inspiration to freedom-loving people everywhere.

This is what one person can do if she or he has courage, determination, and the conviction that what he or she is doing is right and just.

In the end our ability to make a difference relates to the depth of our hearts. Our sphere of influence grows as we learn to accept and love many kinds of people and situations. At the same time, in choosing such a life path, we must be prepared to face obstacles. The greater the person, the greater his influence on the lives of others, and oftentimes the greater the opposition due to misunderstanding and prejudice. No matter how he or she is viewed by people living at the same time, however, and even if all seems hopeless, if such a person's heart and conscience are in the right place, history will judge him or her kindly and with honor.

The impact of such people cannot be measured simply in words or external achievement, but by the love in the hearts of those they have affected. How would you like to become this kind of person?

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think you would have done (be honest!) if you were witness to the scene described at the beginning of this chapter?

2. What is duty? How may this differ from moral duty?

3. Why would a person with high self-esteem be more likely to get involved in a situation to help someone than a person with low self-esteem?

4.. Do you think we are controlled by our circumstances or are we in control of them?

5. What is the relationship between our values and actions?

6. What are the consequences of lacking any strongly held beliefs about anything?

7. Can you remember doing something which made a lasting impact on someone?

8. How wide a circle of people would you be willing to help, if necessary?

9. Are you the kind of person who can influence others? Why or why not?

Exercise: “A Historic Person of Influence”

Research the life of a real historic person who fought for a righteous cause, trying to improve the lives of others.

1. What was the character of this person like?

2. What did this person do?

3. What kind of obstacles did this person have to overcome?

4. What was this person's lasting contribution?

5. If you found yourself in the same circumstances as this person, how would you have acted?

Reflection Exercise: "Becoming a Person of Influence"

Pretend that you are a person of great personal character and that you have dedicated your life to the betterment of others. What have you done and why? Share some of your experiences, and explain your outlook on life. Be as specific as possible. For example, what field do you work in, where do you live, how old are you at the moment you are speaking, how did you get to where you are?

CHAPTER 16: Making a Difference Through Service

Throughout this book we have been talking about the importance of living for the sake of others. Yet we live in a world that very often is telling us just the opposite: live selfishly, focus on your own needs and desires, and make money. We get the message that to get ahead in life you have to do it on the backs of others. In other words, live for yourself first, *then*, if you have some extra time, resources, and energy, do something for someone else. "Look out for Number 1," is the way the saying goes.

This way of thinking has brought us to the world we have today—a world of conflict, crime, poverty, inequality, disease, pollution, family breakdown, drug abuse, promiscuity, and a host of other social, political, and economic problems. It has also led to many problems in human relationships—distrust, envy, hatred, resentment, betrayal, disrespect, irresponsibility, and all sorts of pain.

To be a person who actually lives for the sake of others, then, we must be prepared to go against the tide of much of the world. If we have the courage to do so, we can be a force for goodness and change. We can become people who will make a difference. Indeed, we have already presented many examples of people who did so in the course of their lives.

Such people need not be famous, although some are. More often, they are just ordinary people, the so-called "unsung heroes" who day-in and day-out in countless little ways make a positive impact on the lives of people around them. They are the doctors and nurses, the police officers and firefighters, the priests and counselors. They are the city councilmen, the garbage collectors, the custodians, and the bellhops. They are the person behind the counter at the drug store, your local mechanic, the mailman, and your child's teacher. Some of them may receive formal recognition for their contributions to others; many do not.

For most such people their greatest reward is simply the general goodwill they generate with their actions and the smiles that come their way as a result of their positive attitudes and giving hearts. They are different in many ways—in personality, physical ability, interests, talent, nationality, and religious beliefs—but such people have one thing in common. In one way or another, they serve others. For some it may be through their external activities. For others it is more their attitude and ready smile, their giving of themselves from the inside that matters.

The trap of living for oneself

One of the most important things we can learn to do is to serve others. This does not necessarily come naturally. Unless we somehow are able to gain positive experiences through serving others, we may not be motivated to live this way. This is because as human beings we are all seeking happiness. Without positive experiences in serving others, we can easily think that we find happiness only by living for ourselves.

We start believing that we need certain things to be happy; for example, money, certain kinds of clothes, a car, an attractive mate, etc. Unconsciously, we are telling ourselves that happiness comes by having or consuming "things". With this mentality,

people get reduced to objects to be used for our happiness. Without our realizing it, we are caught in a trap from which it is very difficult to escape. People who live this way usually end up realizing, when it is already too late, that it didn't bring them the happiness they were looking for. Instead, it led them into a dead end.

As we have been saying, lasting happiness comes from thinking of others first. However, we need to experience the truth of this statement if we are to believe it deeply.

Learning to serve

In recent years programs have been developed which enable students and young people in general to gain experiences in serving others and to learn through those experiences. These programs have been grouped under a general heading known as "service learning".

These programs are very useful in learning how to become a serving person. Perhaps you have participated in one. Service learning is excellent preparation for living a worthwhile life in society.

In service learning students not only provide an important service to the community; they also learn about the causes of problems in the community and how to communicate effectively to others as they serve. They learn important skills and life lessons that they can use when they go out into the world beyond school.

The combination of service and learning is transforming to both community and students. It is transforming to the community because the causes of problems are brought out into the open and dealt with. It is transforming to students because they can experience themselves as agents of positive change. Such an empowering experience leads naturally to feelings of inspiration and joy.

According to the National Student Learning Clearinghouse, service learning also provides the following benefits:

- It involves cooperative rather than competitive experiences and thus promotes teamwork, community involvement, and citizenship.
- It addresses complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation.
- It offers opportunities to engage in problem-solving and gaining knowledge firsthand rather than only drawing upon knowledge such as might come from a textbook.
- Service learning is more likely to be personally meaningful to participants and to generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas, and hence to support social, emotional, and cognitive learning and development.

In other words, service learning is training for life—engaging with the community and world intelligently and benevolently. Service learning has been growing rapidly in recent years precisely because it is having a powerful impact on young people and their development. In conclusion, we may say that once a person has such a positive experience with service, he or she will be motivated to serve again and again. The person

is able to see that what he or she does can indeed make a difference in the world. Soon, living for the sake of others becomes a way of life.



Questions for Reflection

1. What is an “unsung hero”?

2. What are the personal benefits of serving others?

3. How can living for yourself become a trap?

4. What is “service learning”?

5. How is it different from traditional types of community service?

6. Why is self-reflection important to successful service learning?

7. Do you think “lasting happiness comes by living for the sake of others”? Why or why not?

Exercise: “Contributing to Society”

Think of the ways that people in the following occupations can touch the lives of others and contribute to the welfare of society:

- A nurse
- A professional athlete
- A mail deliverer
- An office clerk
- A priest
- A waiter in a restaurant

Personal Reflection: “Creating a Service Learning Experience”

Take a moment to look around you. Look at your family, your school, your neighborhood, the town or city you live in, your nation and world. Do you see a problem that you feel you could make a difference in solving if you could organize a group of people to tackle it? Who would you be helping? What would you learn from that experience? What would you need to do in preparation for such an activity? Who could you get to work with you on it? Is it something your school could do? Create a plan for such a project and present it to your parent.

CHAPTER 17 A Life Worth Living

One warm summer's evening, an elderly couple sat together outside their home watching the sunset.

After a long silence, the man turned to his wife and, looking at the years of experience carved into her face, asked: "Is there anything that you regret after all these years?"

Looking at her husband, the old lady's mind was far away, thinking over her many memories, both joyful and painful.

"Yes," she said, "I wish I had given more of myself to other people." Then the two looked straight ahead silently as they sat in the glow of the fading sun, pondering the thought.

There are few people who do not stop now and then and think about what the future has in store for their lives. Have you thought about what will become of you in a few years? Maybe you will be a college professor, or will go into business, or perhaps someday you may even go into space as an astronaut!

Imagine you have gathered with your classmates to celebrate the 20th anniversary of your high school graduation. Most of them have spouses and children, as do you. One of your classmates may have become a doctor, another a teacher, and another a farmer. What things will be most important in your life by that time? What would be the first thing you would tell the friends whom you haven't seen for such a long time? Would you tell them about your work, your family, your car, your travels, or something else?

Now imagine now the 40th reunion of your high school class. Probably by now grandchildren have entered the picture and will be a big part of your conversation. Maybe you've bought a nice new home. Perhaps retirement is on the horizon. What would you like to be like at this age? How do you think you can get there from here and now?

Time passes

In our childhood and youth, adult life may seem very far away. But time passes, and what once seemed like the distant future suddenly has become our reality.

As times goes on, what shape and direction is our life taking? What are we proud of about ourselves? What do we regret? If we think about such things now, perhaps in the future we will not be looking back in sadness, wishing we had done things differently and realizing that it has become too late to change anything.

Have you ever peered into an old person's face? Have you ever spoken to any elderly people other than your own grandmother and grandfather? Next time you get a chance, try to pay attention to these people. You may see them sitting in a park, walking with their dog or grandchild, or perhaps in line at the local supermarket. Without being rude, study their faces and bodies. Look at the wrinkles around the eyes, the long lines along their cheeks, their stooped shoulders and shuffled steps. For some of them, they may be feeling that their whole life has already passed them by. Their only thoughts are about their next pension check and keeping food on the table. Others remain active in their family and community life. They spend time with their grandchildren, are part of a bridge

club, help out at the local community center, and perhaps even play tennis or go bowling each week with friends.

Tragically, many people come to the later years of their lives drained of all energy and desire to do anything. They spend their time wondering what it was all for. Looking back, they strain to find meaning in what they did with their lives, in the relationships they made with others, and in the various events that took place. They look back and wonder about the choices they made. They ask themselves, “What if I had done this instead of that?” Then, they feel, their whole life could have gone in a completely different direction.

There are countless times when we are presented with choices: whether to go to college or into the armed services, whether to marry someone or not, whether to move to another part of a country or to a different country, or whether to change careers. Some of these choices result in difficulties and pain, perhaps even disillusionment. As a result, in their old age, people may find themselves always irritable and unhappy because of the choices they made in their lives. They think, “If only I could live my life over again, I would make different choices.” The tragic reality is, however, that it is impossible. To find oneself in such a situation can feel very depressing and hopeless. And the constant question in the back of the person’s mind is: “What was it all for? What was the meaning of my life?”



No regrets

On the other hand, you are sure to come across other elderly people whose wrinkled and lined faces are full of inner beauty and energy despite their age. You cannot find any anger, irritability, or resentment in them. They seem to have reached the autumn of their lives without any bitter feelings, even though they may have had a difficult life in many ways. They have no regrets about their past life. They face their increasingly helpless and unattractive old age with courage and spiritual strength. Despite their hardships, or maybe even because of them, they have come to understand something about the true meaning of life. They know that in the end it has nothing to do with external success but rather with internal qualities of the heart and spirit.

By the end of a person's life the face has become wrinkled, the hair is gray and thin, and the body is no longer strong and attractive. Position, money, career — all these things are in the past. What is the secret of those elderly people who seem to still have the spark of life? Where does their inner beauty and radiance come from? Did they simply have a more easy and successful life? Did they not experience the sorrow and grief that other people did? Or did they find a dignified way to overcome their difficulties?



It is worth thinking about what our own old age will be like before we start making the choices that will determine our life. If we are wise and careful, we can go through life without regrets and disappointments as we grow older. Instead, we can arrive at our “golden years” with a feeling of serene wisdom and harmony within ourselves and with our surroundings.

Life is simple. What we give out, we get back.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is most important to you now in your life?

2. What do you think will be most important to you twenty years from now? Thirty years? Forty years?

3. What do you wish to accomplish in your life?

4. What kind of personal relationships with others do you want to develop in your life?

5. Are the most important things in life material?

6. Why do you think some people experience regret at the end of their lives?

7. Do you have any regrets?

8. How do you deal with difficulties in your life?

9. What qualities do you most admire and respect in people?

10. How would you like to be remembered after you are gone?

Exercise: “Personal Interview”

For this exercise, find an elderly person to interview. It could be one of your own grandparents, a neighbor, or just someone you meet in the park. You may add some questions of your own if you wish.

1. What has been most important to you in your life?

2. What quality in your character has helped you get through the difficult periods of your life?

3. What qualities do you most admire and respect in people?

4. What has made your personal relationships closer? What has made them difficult?

5. What is your biggest accomplishment?

6. What was your most memorable experience? Why?

7. What do you feel you have contributed to your family, friends, community, nation and/or the world?

8. What was your biggest struggle in life?

9. How do you want to be remembered?

10. What do you regret?

Additional Questions:

Afterwards think about what you learned personally from the interview. Is there anything the person said that struck you in particular? Anything that made you reflect on your own life? What is your personal opinion of the person you interviewed?

Reflection Exercise: “Living Life Over”

Make a list of all the things you have done that, if given the chance, you would do differently. Next to each item explain why you feel that way; then state exactly what you would do differently if you could. Which of the items is it already too late to do anything about (for example, deciding to drop out of the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts three years ago)? Which ones could you still possibly correct (for example, the quarrel you had last week with your best friend)? Regarding the second group, make a concrete plan to make things better.

GLOSSARY

Definitions are taken or adapted from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1999)

Abolish—get rid of; outlaw

Abstinent—staying away from; refusing to take, use, or indulge in

Adaptable—able to change or adjust

Adept—good at; expert at

Adultery—sex between a married person and someone other than his or her spouse

Advocate—to defend something or believe something should be done or used

Aesthetic—pleasing in appearance; appealing to the sense of beauty

Affirmations— positive statements of support

Agents—an active cause or person who actively causes things

Aggressive—ready to fight, argue, attack, go after strongly

Altruistic— unselfishly caring about and acting for the sake of another or others

Amnesty—forgiveness or pardon for a large group

Apartheid—dividing or separating races and being unfair to people of color

Aristocrat—a group of people believed to be better, more noble, or of higher class than others

Articulated—put into clear words

Aspect—side, view; appearance

Assault—violent attack

Assert— to say or state firmly; to put forward one's rights in a forceful way

Assumed—to take as being true

Assurances—promises; things that take away doubt or fear

Barbarian—someone without manners; rude; untrained; wild

Barriers—blocks; obstacles; things that stop progress; walls

Benefit (noun)—useful aid; help; good thing

Benefit (verb)—gives some aid; helps; gives good things to

Benevolent—doing good; kind

Betray— to fail someone; to be false to someone; to win someone's trust and then hurt him or her

Braggart—someone who says he or she is great

Brutal—rough; causing pain; cruel

Byproduct—unexpected result or product

Carnal—of the body; low desires of the flesh

Channel—to direct a force

Charioteer—driver of a horse-pulled cart
Charity—kindness or gifts to the poor or to those in need
Circulating—flowing a course that returns to the beginning
Code—rules; laws
Coerce—force or pull
Cognitive—knowing; of the mind
Commiserate—to feel sad with and for someone
Commitment—an agreement or promise to be kept
Compassionate—feeling pity; caring; feeling sorry for
Compensate—to pay money to or to pay back what is owed; to make up for
Compete—to try to win against another
Conceded—went along with; agreed with; gave in on
Concrete—solid; down to earth; real
Condemn—to state that someone is wrong, evil, to be pushed away
Confession—to tell your mistakes or sins
Confide—to tell secrets in trust to someone
Confirm—to approve; to make strong or firm by agreement
Conformity—acting the same as everyone else
Confront—to face, especially in challenge
Conscience—sense or knowing the goodness or badness of your actions
Consciously—knowingly; knowing in your mind
Consensus—general agreement; group belief
Consistent—regular; steady; dependable; reliable
Contradiction—opposite ways; two things going against each other
Conviction—strong belief; being convinced of
Corruption—being changed from good to bad; to become rotten or wrong or ruined
Cosmos—universe; orderly system
Criticize—to judge; to find fault with
Cultivate—to prepare or get ready for crops, fruit or results
Cunning—clever; tricky; smart
Current—happening now; river or flow of water
Decade—ten years
Deceit—using lies or tricks to fool someone
Deceive—to use lies or tricks to fool someone
Decrying—crying out against; having a low opinion of
Defeatist—accepting defeat or failure before it has happened

Defer—to put off to another day; to allow someone else's opinion or authority to take over

Deflected—to turn aside or cause to bounce off

Deformity—something wrongly formed

De-sensitization—to make someone less sensitive to something

Desirable—to be wanted

Destined—a person's fortune; fate; where a person will end up

Detention—kept after school; kept in prison or held by officials

Devises—forms or plans in the mind

Dilemma—hard choice between two difficult problems

Disaster—sudden, destructive, huge event

Discipline—training; rules

Discontent—unhappy; unsettled; unsure

Discord—conflict; lack of agreement or harmony

Disfigured—scarred; permanently injured or changed

Disillusionment—disappointment; feeling one's dreams or hopes or beliefs did not come true

Dispel—drive away by scattering

Dispense—give out; pay out

Distinguish—to mentally separate into kinds of types

Distractions—things that take the mind or thoughts away from problems

Dominant—the strongest one

Dominate—to rule; control; take over

Egalitarian—belief in human equality

Eloquent—able to speak well; flowing with words to move people's hearts

Emerged—to come out; to show; to rise up

Empathy—feeling someone else's feelings or experiences as if they were your own

Empower—to give power to

Encounter—to meet; to come upon

Enmity—active hatred; ill will

Enrich—to make rich; to make better

Environment—the surroundings; the natural world

Epidemic—rapid spread or growth of illness or disease

Escalating—increasing; expanding; raising the level of

Essential—something basic; necessary; something that cannot be done without

Ethic—a set of moral beliefs or one moral belief

Ethical—to do with right and wrong

Ethnicity—national, racial, tribal, religious or language group a person belongs to

Excessive—too much; more than is normal

Exclude—to leave others out

Executed—to carry out a plan; to put into action; to kill

Exemplary—so good as to be used as an example; excellent

Exhilaration—to be cheerful; happy; full of energy; joyful

Expectations—expecting things; looking forward to things

Expulsion—to be thrown out; to not be allowed to come back

External— the outward or outer part of something

Facility—something that makes an action easy—an equipped building, for instance

Fantasies—waking dreams in the mind that the person imagines or creates

Fates—destinies; final ending points

Femininity—femaleness; womanliness; girlishness

Flourish—to grow a lot; to do well; to increase

Focus—center of activity or attention; to center attention on

Foresee—to see ahead; to see something before it happens

Forged—to form by heating; to form by effort

Formulate—to prepare or form in an orderly way

Founder—the person who starts an organization or group

Frontier—the line between what is known and what is not known

Frugal—careful with money or resources

Frustrate— to block or defeat; to be frustrated means to feel your plans are blocked or defeated

Fulfillment— a dream come true; the feeling of satisfaction that what you have wanted has come to pass; satisfied fully and completely

Gratification—pleasure; satisfaction; feeling pleased and satisfied

Havoc—general destruction

Homicide—killing a human being

Honorable—good; noble; known for being moral

Horizon—the meeting of earth and sky; the distance

Hormone secretion—natural chemicals of the body flowing through the body

Hostile—angry; full of enemy feelings

Humanitarian—a person who cares about and tries to help others

Humble—low; simple; not proud; serving

Hypothalamus—part of the brain

Identical—exactly the same

Immerse—to drop or dip fully into water or liquid

Impeached—to accuse of a crime or to say that the person should be removed from his or her duties

Imprint—a mark or print made in something

Inadequate—not enough; not having enough to do something

Indignities—insults; something that hurts a person's dignity

Indulge—to let or allow yourself to have all you want of something

Industrious—hard-working

Influence—to affect the ideas and actions of other people

Ingratitude—lack of gratitude; lack of thankfulness

Inherently—belonging to something by nature; built in to something

Inherit—having something like land or property or qualities passed on or down to a person—e.g., to inherit your father's house after his death; to inherit your mother's talent in music

Initiative—starting something; being the first to do something; doing something first

Injustice—unfairness; injury; wrongful treatment

Insecure—not sure; unsafe; not stable

Insights—seeing into a situation deeply; understanding deeper than the outside

Inspiration—when the mind and heart are moved and full of energy to take action

Institution—important organizations in a society

Integrity—completeness; wholeness; not being divided; to live up to one's beliefs and words; to live up to a code of honor or high standards

Intense—strong feeling; extreme energy

Intently—concentrating with the mind, attention, or will

Interact—to act one on another or between one another

Internal—inside the person or organization; inner

Intervene—to come between; to enter into to change things

Intimate—very close; very warm; very personal

Intoxicated—to be happy (or drunk) beyond control

Invade—to enter to steal or conquer or hurt

Invaluable—so valuable no price can be put on it

Investment—money, energy, time, care or resources put into a project or person

Irreplaceable—cannot be replaced; no substitute for; nothing like it

Irrevocably—cannot be called back or changed

Irritability—in a state of being easily upset; easily made to lose your temper; touchy

Isolate—to be alone; to make someone be alone

Justification—explaining why something is right or just

Lament—mourn; to be sorry about; to cry over

Lash—whip; hit
Latter—the second of two groups, persons, or things named
Lethal—leading to death
Lewd—sexually evil; seeing everything as sexual; dirty-minded
Limitation— limits; the quality or state of being limited
Lottery—drawing lots or gambling chances to win or get something
Lunge—to thrust forward
Lurk—sneak; hide; wait in the darkness
Lustful— having intense sexual desire, usually for more than one person
Magnanimous—kind; generous; giving
Mainstream—main flow of activity
Malicious—mean; nasty; wanting to hurt
Malignity—an event where someone is mean; nasty; wanting to hurt
Massive—huge; large; heavy
Maximum—the most; the greatest number or amount there can be
Metabolism—chemical changes in living cells by which energy is provided to the body
Minimum—the least; the lowest number or amount there can be
Mock—ridicule; make fun of; laugh at
Monotheistic—believing in only one God
Monumental—very great; very important
Morality—virtue; behaving in the right way
Mores—habits, ways; standards
Morgue—place where dead bodies are kept
Motivation— a force that causes a person to act or move; influence; drive
Motto—a saying or phrase or sentence or word that guides you in life
Murmur—low voice; sometimes complaining in a low voice
Narrow-minded—only able to see one viewpoint
Near-sighted—unable to see things far away
Noble— having a high position or very good qualities of character
Non-suggestible—not easily convinced or persuaded
Norm—the usual way of what is considered good behavior
Obligation—duty; something you must or have to do
Obstacles—things in the way; blocks; things that stop you
Opposition—a group that is against another group
Oppressors—those who push or hold someone or a group down and take their rights

Optimist—a person who looks at things very positively, thinking everything will be well

Ordinance—law, rule, or regulation

Orgies—out of control drunken or sexual parties

Outcome—something that follows as a consequence

Outlook—a place offering a view; the way a person looks at things

Overall—all over; from beginning to end; including all

Overarching—over all other things

Overcome—to get the better of; to gain superiority over

Overstepping—going over boundaries; going beyond where you should

Overthrow—to cause to fall down; to win

Overwhelming—overpowering; too much; too difficult

Ownership—being an owner

Parable—a short story that tells a moral point

Pelt—cover with by throwing; throwing a lot of something

Penetrate—to pass into or through

Perennial—coming back and back again for several years

Perish—die; be destroyed

Persecuted—to bother, attack, accuse because of someone's beliefs or stands on issues of right and wrong

Perspective—point of view; the ability to view things in their true relations of importance

Perverse—always against what's accepted as right or proper

Pessimist—someone who thinks negatively and believes that things will turn out badly

Phenomenon—everything that occurs that can be seen or heard rather than just thought about

Physiological—having to do with the physical life and activities of an organism

Pious—being good, being faithful to your religious beliefs

Pituitary—small organ that produces internal secretions related to most of the body's works

Plead—to ask desperately; to beg

Pondering—to think carefully; to think over

Populace—people; common people; masses of people

Pornography—pictures of sexual acts or people in sexual situations or poses

Portray—to make a picture of in words or a drawing

Postpone—to put off until another time

Potion—mixture of liquids

Predictable—could have or can easily be told ahead of time

Prejudice—a hurtful attitude about someone based on race, color, religion, etcetera.

Preserve—to keep or save

Prevail—to win over with strength

Preventive—to keep something from happening through care or readiness

Previous—that which came before

Primitive—rough; simple; uncivilized; backward in technology

Proclamation—something said or written out in public; announcement

Productively—bringing fruits or results

Profit—a valuable return

Prologue—the beginning or introduction to something

Prolong—to lengthen the time of something

Promiscuity—having many sexual partners

Prosperity—being successful; enjoying wealth

Provoke—to call forth (as a feeling or action)

Pursue—to chase; to go after; to follow

Radiance—giving off brightness; shining with light; glowing

Rampage—a lot of violent, uncaring actions

Rational—having to do with reason, with the mind

Recipient—one that receives or is given something

Reciprocity— to give back when something is given; to treat others as you would like to be treated

Reconcile— to go back to friendship; to return to harmony; to return to a good relationship

Reference—to relate to; mention of

Reform—to change; to shape again; to make better

Refrain—to keep yourself from doing something

Regret—to be very sorry for, as a mistake; to be sad over the loss of something

Reject—to refuse to accept, consider, use or have a relationship with

Relentless—not stopping, refusing to be less hard, cruel, or severe

Repetition—repeating and repeating

Resentful—to be full of angry feelings; to be full of dislike

Resolve—(noun) firm decision; committed to a course of action

Resolve— (verb) to deal with successfully; to solve a problem; to find an answer to; to decide something firmly

Restraint—holding back

Retaliation—to repay or return an injury

Revered—to hold up high; to worship; to look up to

Reviled—to yell at; to put down; to abuse with hard words
Ridiculed—to make fun of; to make someone an object of laughter
Rivals—competitors; people who are trying to get or have the same thing
Ruthless—having no mercy; very cruel
Sacrifice—to give something up for a belief or for love of something
Sage—wise; a wise one; someone very wise
Sanitation—making things clean; germ-free; getting rid of wastes properly
Scandal—bad words, gossip, bad behavior that everyone is talking about
Scenario—a little play or scene; imagined events; plot
Secede—to pull out of a group, nation, or organization
Seething—boiling, as in "seething with anger"
Segregation—isolation of a race, class, or group
Self-esteem—confidence or satisfaction in yourself
Self-image—the way you think about yourself
Self-reflection—looking at yourself and your actions carefully
Serene—calm; quiet
Severe—strict; harsh; hard
Shun—to avoid completely; to have nothing to do with
Slander—to say bad things about someone that are false
Slurred—slipping; sliding; words that slide into one another
Slurs—bad things said about someone
Solemn—serious
Solidarity—united as a group
Solitude—being alone; going to a lonely place to be alone
Specialized—designed or fitted for one particular purpose
Specific—restricted or narrowed down to one or more details that make something stand out
Stability—firm; having the strength to stand or last a long time
Stakeholders—people who have something invested that they care about and want to protect
Statistically—according to numbers
Stature—height; position; how highly someone is thought of
Stimulate—to excite to activity, growth, or feelings
Stinginess—not wanting to share with or give to others
Stranglehold—a choking hold on something or someone so that is no movement or breathing
Structured—arranged in a definite pattern; having some form

Suave—smooth and pleasant, although not completely sincere
Subconscious—existing so deep in the mind a person is barely aware of it
Subtle—hard to understand or see; deeply hidden
Supportive—being of support; someone who holds something up or gives strength or support
Surrender—to give up; to give over; to admit defeat
Suspect—to imagine that someone is guilty of something without having proof
Suspension—to be kept away from something; to stop something for a short time
Tame—changed from a state of wildness to gentleness and being able to live with people
Tarnish—to get smeared, dirtied, blackened
Temperate—to keep within limits; mild; controlled
Temptation—something that urges a person to do wrong; making wrong look attractive
Tenant—a person who rents or uses land or property not his or her own for a price
Therapeutic—healing; something that helps an illness
Throes—a hard and painful struggle
Token—a small part that is to represent the whole thing or group
Tragic—sad; hurtful; destructive; awful
Transcend—to rise above or go beyond limits
Transform—to change completely
Tributaries—a stream feeding a larger stream, river or lake
Tyrant—a ruler who uses power cruelly and unfairly
Ultimately—at the farthest point; at the final end
Unbearable—cannot be endured; too hard to live with
Unconsciously—not aware; not knowing
Underestimated—to think someone or something is less than he or she or it really is
Undesirable—not wanted; not a good thing or person
Undying—forever; will never die or go out
Unique—the only one of its kind
Unleashed—to let loose or let free
Unwavering—does not go back and forth; not moving
Venture—to try; to risk; something tried or risked
Vigorous—strong; forceful; full of energy
Villainous—evil; vicious; bad
Violate—break; do harm or injury to
Virtuous—morally excellent; full of character strength

Vivid—sharp; fresh; full of life; clear; strong

Volunteer—someone who willingly does something without being paid

Vulnerable—open; open to being hurt or attacked; without defenses

Welfare—in a good state or condition; benefit or well-being

Withdraw—to take back on take away

Wreaking—to cause or let loose
