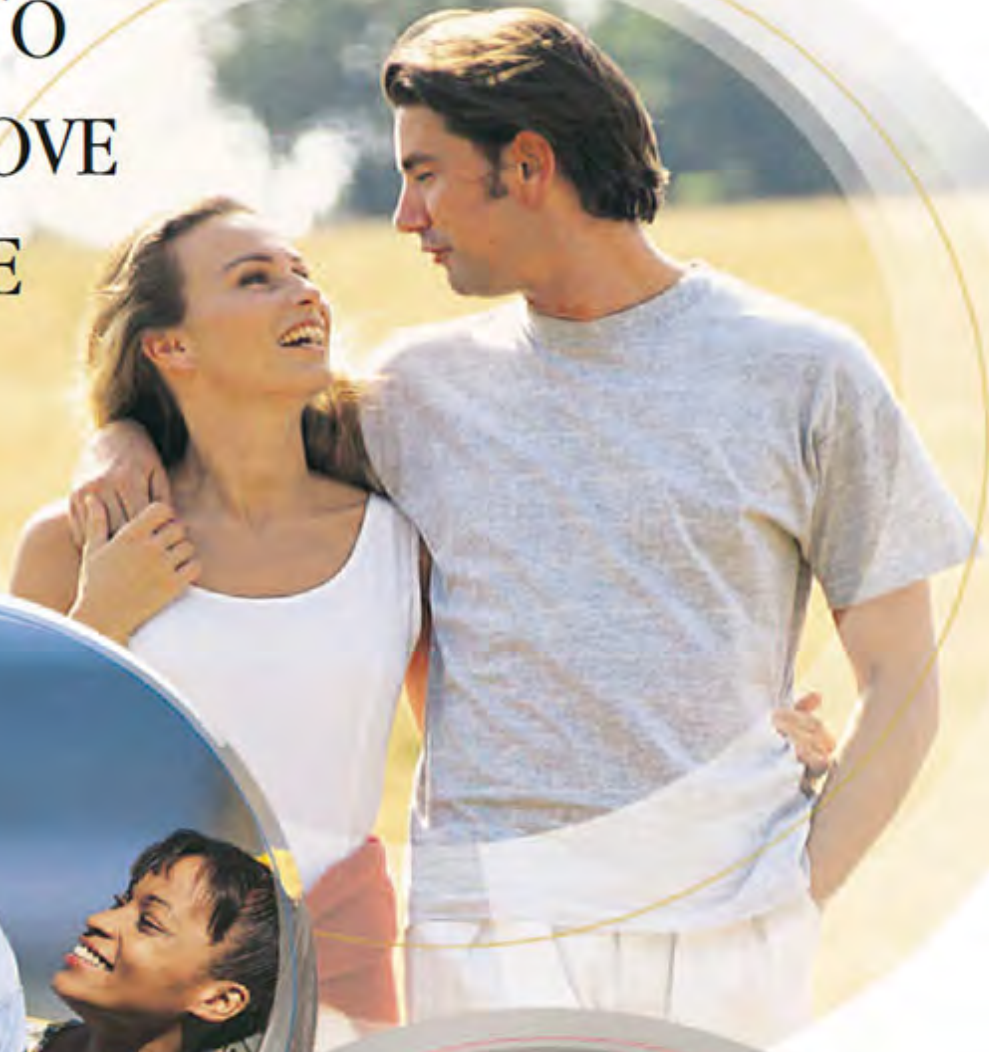


# SMART LOVE

A GUIDE TO  
LASTING LOVE  
FOR SINGLE  
ADULTS



Nancy L. Van Pelt

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# *Before You Begin*

Some of you have fallen for all the wrong people. Others have failed at love more times than you care to count. Many singles feel much like Leo the cat.

Leo is a stately, all-white, furry cat who belongs to my friend Jean. Poor Leo never saw it coming. One day he lived in a peaceful household with Jean and her family. The next day he was bruised, staggering, hot, bothered, and definitely cross-eyed.

The problem began when Leo's owner checked on a load of clothes in the dryer. She opened the door of the dryer and found that half the load was still damp. So she sorted through the load and removed the dry items, carrying them to the next room to be folded. Then she returned to the laundry room to restart the dryer.

This is where the trouble began. No sooner had the dryer begun turning than she heard a loud and rhythmic thump. . . thump . . . thump . . . similar to the sound of tennis shoes being dried in a clothes dryer. She didn't recall tennis shoes being in the load of clothes. Then terror-stricken, she thought of Leo. She gasped, reached for the dryer door, and pulled it open. There was Leo—alive but stunned.

Poor Leo. He never knew what hit him. He lived through the trauma but was a bit dazed and seemed to stagger afterward. Jean never could get his fur to lie flat again. I asked Jean how Leo was doing. "Well," she replied, "Leo doesn't purr much anymore. He just sits and stares.

It's easy to understand why,

Just as Leo was bruised, ruffled, and cross-eyed, so are many singles who have been through an unhappy relationship. They are still going around in circles—even though they are out of the dryer.

Maybe you are one who has had your share of dead-end relationships and disappointments. While trying not to give up on finding love, you are lonely and unfulfilled. You may live a busy life—own your own business and have a successful career, plenty of friends, and a full social schedule . Yet you know you're missing out by not having someone special with whom to share your life. Vague feelings of discontent haunt you as you attempt to concentrate on career church, and other interests rather than on the empty

hole in your hearts While successful in other areas of life, you've been unsuccessful in establishing a long-term relationship.

Others of you may be late bloomers. You've pursued an extensive education and taken time to establish a career. You possess self-worth and promise and have an unblemished future before you. But though reasonably good-looking and intelligent, you've never found that special someone.

Still others of you have fallen into sin more times than you care to count. One-night stands and promiscuity have become the name of the game. This hook is for you too. If you give God the past and let Him bury it, this book can be your guide to the clean, healthy, happy future you've always wanted.

Whatever the circumstances, most of you have been drifting in and out of unsuccessful relationships, not realizing it is possible to have more control over future relationships than you have had in the past. It is possible to learn behaviors that will help move a relationship forward to commitment.

You may be floundering because you never learned how to manage romance. And that is what this hook is all about. I have extensively researched this subject and measured it all against biblical standards. As I've taught courses on "romance management" over the years, I've realized the truth that romance can be managed much like a career or business. But just as some people have no educational, career, or business goals, many have little education and no goals concerning relationships. They aimlessly drift along, at the mercy of circumstances and other people.

If you are one of those who is at the mercy of circumstances, I hope you are ready for a change and that you will read this book with an open mind, incorporating what is needed into your present lifestyle. Remember, if what you have been doing in the past hasn't resulted in what you desired, then it is time to try a different approach. This book will show you how. What could be more satisfying? You can take control of your love life! You don't have to just wait around hoping something great will happen!

This book will help you do the following:

*Stop drifting and take charge of your relationship*

*Educate yourself about what you want and need from the opposite sex*

*Avoid relationships with emotionally unhealthy persons*

*End dead-end relationships forever*

I've observed that many people spend less time seriously considering what they want from a relationship than they spend on what clothes they will wear to work the next day. If you want to find someone to love you, with whom you can have a satisfying, nourishing relationship, you must have plan of action.

Dating for an adult single is vastly different than for a teenager in high school. Addressed here will be the more sophisticated and complicated issues of love, dating, and sex for the mature single—the one who no longer has parents to answer to or the one who is trying to date and parent too. This book is for the person who is attempting to live a pure life in the midst of a sexual jungle, the one who is trying to find forgiveness for innumerable daring mistakes, the one who is reentering the dating arena after divorce or death of a spouse and the one who wishes to follow God's principles,

Most of us have had very little instruction in how to choose a mate and yet we are expected to make a brilliant choice. Statistics indicate how often we are wrong. We desperately need to reevaluate mate-selection procedures! And this book is my attempt to make a difference, beginning with you. As a Certified Family Life Educator, I will explain how to establish healthy relationships before problems develop. Unlike a counselor who assists people with solutions after a problem occurs or the relationship breaks down. I will help you develop skills so that you can make better choices and be more successful in love than you have been in the past. My goal for this book is to help you make a wise choice in the person you marry.

The probability of your having a great marriage can be significantly increased if you adhere to carefully formulated principles. Those who count on luck and chance, passion and romance alone are those who are going to end up with disappointing marriages or in divorce court.

Most of us are acutely aware that divorce is responsible for much of the chaos and agony people are experiencing. But with guidance, your choice of a marriage partner can be made skillfully and wisely. The principles in this book comprise recent scientific research and durable biblical teaching. When you combine these two sources of wisdom, you will have a significantly better chance of making wise decisions about the person you marry.

Your choice of a marriage partner is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. If you choose wisely, your life will be satisfying and

fulfilling. If you make a serious mistake and your marriage fails, it will cause you and your children, and all the generations to follow, immeasurable pain.

The theme of this book is prevention—preventing unhealthy relationships and the heartache that follows, I advocate taking time for relationships to develop. The best way to prevent getting involved in an unhealthy relationship and the tragedy that follows is to slow down. Slowing down romantic relationships allows time to carefully analyze your emotional health and the emotional readiness of your dating partner and provides the opportunity for hidden difficulties to appear.

I have a real problem with people jumping into relationships. I have seen too much pain. It has become a basic tenet of my seminars, writing, and counsel, and it is a well-researched fact that healthy relationships develop over time. The following letter illustrates a scenario I see far too frequently:

Dear Nancy,

I'm forty-four years old and in love with a wonderful man I met two months ago. He is so kind and treats me better than I've ever been treated in my life. We truly love each other and plan to be married in five months.

We've been sleeping together and I feel really guilty about this. I told Jim how I felt and he doesn't want to hurt me in any way. So sometimes we sleep together in the same bed but refrain from having sex. How do you see this?

Please forgive me for being so blunt with you, but I sometimes relieve his sexual drives through oral sex. Is this okay for a couple who is going to get married in five months?

I really love this man and know he loves me. He isn't the same religion I am but he is a Christian and we both want to obey God, My divorce will be final in five months and I know I can finally be free of any past. My last husband sexually abused our daughter and physically abused me. I am so happy I found Jim and want to marry him just as soon as possible. I don't want to miss one month of happiness I know he will bring into my life. I deserve it, since I've had such a miserable past. Jim will make my life wonderful!

Signed: Guilty in Wisconsin

"Guilty in Wisconsin" is breaking every rule of good sense for wise mate

selection. To name a few:

- The decision to marry has been made too quickly.
- She seeks marriage as an answer to a miserable past.
- She has unrealistic expectations for future happiness.
- There has been insufficient time to observe any personality or behavioral problems in Jim.
- There is sexual involvement, which clouds the emotional development of the relationship.
- They are dating; prior to the closure of her previous marriage.
- She has emotional trauma due to physical abuse.

Like "Guilty in Wisconsin," most unmarried people look to marriage to solve past problems and make them happy. They assume a quick trip to the altar will ensure happiness. Often the greater their problems, the faster they rush. But weddings do not automatically change anyone nor do they ensure happiness. Feelings of romantic excitement greatly cloud the realities involved in a long-term marriage and the sacrifices a couple must make for the relationship to work. And it certainly is not possible to survive if the relationship is rushed or the two people have not dealt with their own brokenness.

My prayer is that God will use the principles here to help you learn, easier and sooner than others, how to build and maintain successful dating relationships that may eventually lead to a harmonious and mutually satisfying marriage.

We serve a magnificent God. Regardless of your past, God can salvage your life. I can't promise that as a result of reading this book you will find the perfect partner and live happily ever after. But I know that we serve a God who is masterful in turning ashes into gold. My prayer is that His Spirit will speak to you on every page regarding His will for your life.



# Part 1

## Chapter 1

### Self-Worth

#### *Prerequisite for Love*

Nat, a thirty-six-year-old telephone executive from New Orleans, desperately wants to meet a woman he can fall in love with. But every time he thinks about dating someone new, his mind plays reruns of failed romances. When he met Connie, a friendly physician's assistant, it was all he could do to ask her out. He knew the date would be disastrous and sure enough it was. In spite of the fact that he was attracted to her and she appeared to like him, he was so self-conscious, he was miserable. When he did talk, he said the wrong things. He was so uptight that he had no sense of humor. Nat's lack of self-worth had already cost him several relationships and now it cost him one more.

Jeannie has had a couple of dates with a man she is beginning to like. Since he said he would call this evening, she waits by the phone. When he finally calls, he tells her that he's not been totally honest with her. He likes her but he's in a relationship with another woman that he cannot get out of at present. Jeannie is devastated. After hanging up, she cries uncontrollably, in spite of attempts to convince herself she'll get over it. She feels miserable and spends the next month berating herself. "Every relationship I've ever had ends up like this," she whimpers over and over. "I knew it wouldn't last. He really didn't care for me at all. None of my dates ever gets to the serious stage. Something is really wrong with me."

To all the Nats and Jeannies of the world, if you don't change how you think and feel about yourself, you'll end up dating and marrying the wrong kind of person. The poor image of self you harbor will attract someone who will try to control, parent, or fix you. Because you don't like yourself, you may allow someone to abuse you physically or emotionally.

To establish an emotionally healthy relationship, a person needs a positive self-image. Unless you like yourself, you are neither capable of

making intelligent decisions about love nor ready to form a romantic relationship with another person.

The concept we have of self is the basis from which we act and react. It determines how we choose our values, select our goals, and formulate our belief system. Our response to life events is shaped to a large extent by who and what we think about self. Remember: Self-image is not what you actually are. *Ninety percent of self-image revolves around what you think others think of you.* In effect, we allow others to determine our self-image!

Sometimes our perception of what others think is false. It is possible to be loved by parents, children, and friends and not love oneself. One can be admired by work associates and still feel worthless because of other experiences that have had a negative impact on self-image. Honors and awards can be won by those who feel useless because self-esteem comes from within. Success in the eyes of the world does not spell success inside.

The self-concept, then, is formed from a combination of all past experiences and relationships, our successes and failures, and what we think others think about us.

Many definitions of self-esteem have been given, but Nathaniel Branden, Ph.D., a pioneer in the field of understanding self-esteem, gives the most complete one. "Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness." "Self-respect," according to Dr. Branden, "is confidence in our right to be happy; confidence that achievement, success, friendship, respect, love, and fulfillment are appropriate to us."

When you feel like this about yourself, you will be able to establish healthy love relationships, earn a living, take independent care of yourself, bounce back from pain and adversity, and pursue and achieve successful life goals.

Self-worth is the center of emotional and mental health. If you genuinely know and respect yourself, you have laid a solid foundation that equips you to handle the daily challenges of life. When you possess a poor self-image and shaky self-confidence, you cannot maintain control of your life. No relationship can be healthier than the two persons involved. A critical question for two people to answer before considering a lifelong partnership is: How solid is our individual self-worth? If either one has a fragile or poor sense of self, the couple will be susceptible to endless emotional trauma. It takes energy and maturity to manage the inner life. It is emotional

and mental stability that produces marital strength and happiness. When one or both aren't healthy there is the probability that their relationship will be damaged and eventually fall apart.

## **All the Negative Garbage**

Feelings of worth are learned, not inherited. Initially feelings of worth are formed during childhood. When parents love and value a child and such feelings are conveyed in a positive manner over a period of time, the child concludes he is special. The opposite can also be true. When a child is repeatedly ridiculed, he begins to accept this evaluation as valid. A lack of affirmation from parents who are too busy, too drunk or ignorant to provide it can be just as devastating. The effects last a lifetime. Those with a poor self-image resulting from childhood trauma must first heal those early wounds before they can progress to healthy adult relationships.

Those from dysfunctional homes—alcoholic parents, physically and/or emotionally abusive parents, or parents who neglected them—begin to believe the message that they are no good. Often such children begin to believe that if they had been good enough, their parents wouldn't have gotten drunk and wouldn't have beaten or neglected them. If they had been good enough, their parents would have loved, nurtured, and affirmed them.

Society also plays a part in promoting feelings of inferiority. Prizes are offered to winners, honors given to the intelligent, and awards presented to the beautiful and popular. Commercials tell us that to be accepted we must use certain products, wear certain clothes, and look a certain way. A person may feel inferior because he was forced to wear hand-me-downs, has a large nose, is a member of a minority race or religion, or has a physical handicap.

A survey by *Psychology Today* on body image showed that more than 60 percent of both sexes feel their looks are a liability to them. Those who were teased about their appearance as children are much more likely to carry the residual effects into adulthood than those who did not like their appearance but were not teased about it.

*Psychology Today's* survey, as well as numerous other studies, confirms that self-worth is deeply affected by appearance. While there are exceptions, generally speaking, the higher you rate your looks, the higher your self-worth. The less satisfied you are with your personal appearance,

the lower your feelings of worth.

## **The Far-Reaching Consequences of a Poor Self-Concept**

The consequences of a poor self-concept are far-reaching. Not only does a poor self-concept warp the person's feelings about himself but it also reaches out and affects everyone with whom the individual interacts—including all romantic interests.

*A poor self-concept limits your capacity to love and accept others.* It's a simple fact. You cannot love someone else unless you first have a healthy self-like. You can genuinely love and receive love from others in direct proportion to how you feel about yourself. If you cannot like yourself, then you cannot like others. If you do not feel secure and worthwhile at the very core of your beings you cannot like or respect others.

*A poor self-concept influences your choice of dating partners.* The person who lacks self-respect often picks a partner who will devalue, criticize, or put him down. Why? Because this treatment re-creates feelings to which he has become accustomed. He feels comfortable with it.

*A poor self-concept influences the future of your children.* Parents pass poor self-concept on to their children. You may think you hide it so well that no one will ever find out. But your children are able to see in your attitudes toward yourself and life that you do not respect yourself, and they will not respect you either. Unconsciously they pick up the same tendencies toward poor self-concept. It is difficult for a person with a poor self-concept to pass on to his children a healthy self-image unless someone or something else is able to compensate.

*A poor self-concept affects your sex life.* Sex is commonly used to boost a weak self-image. An insecure male might try to prove to himself and others how great he is by having sex. An insecure female might try to hold on to a man through sex, thereby making herself feel desirable and secure in the relationship. Both are using sex to prove they have value and worth.

Such strategies backfire. Within marriage sex includes love, trust, security, and freedom. Within a permanent commitment there is no need to prove anything or use the other as an ego booster or a security blanket. God provided a perfect arrangement, but people are still trying to sidestep His plan.

*A poor self-concept may cause you to tolerate abuse.* Fran, a thirty-

three-year-old receptionist, said she began self-destructive behavior early. By age thirteen she was having sex regularly with a boyfriend so she wouldn't lose him. By fourteen she was pregnant and had her first abortion. By seventeen she was on a binge of sleeping with anyone. By her own admission she hated herself. "I was attracted to men who would emotionally abuse me, physically use me, and eventually reject and abandon me. I would put up with anything. My experience with men taught me that I'm not worth much. I subconsciously set myself up, time after time, by becoming involved with men who would treat me this way."

Those with poor self-concept put up with abuse and other destructive behaviors because they think they don't deserve better. They actually believe they are worthless and look for and feel comfortable in love relationships where this idea is confirmed. Because of their low opinion of themselves and the tendency to repeat self-destructive behaviors, they will date anyone who shows an interest.

*A poor self-concept diverts attention to false goals.* If you truly feel you are worthless, you may try to gain acceptance by pursuing goals that will bring you the approval of others. For instance, some people strive for unattainable perfection, buy expensive clothing, drive foreign cars, and live in elegantly furnished homes in an effort to cover up feelings of inadequacy. Accumulating material possessions has diverted their attention from more important goals. As a result, their search for self-acceptance goes on and on, because things cannot boost up an unstable self-concept.

*A poor self-concept hinders spiritual growth.* We all have trouble from time to time with trusting God, but the person with low self-worth will feel even more troubled about his inability to trust God. And this person will have difficulty having faith in God. This inability to trust God can often be traced to a deep rejection of self. One woman reasoned this way: "God created everything, didn't He? He is supposed to be wise and everlastingly loving. If what I see in the mirror is an example of His creation and His love, then I'm not interested in that kind of God."

Such feelings are usually not conscious. More often than not they are unconscious murmurings but they have a strong negative impact on one's relationship with God.

## **Cover-ups We Wear to Mask Our Pain**

Art Buchwald once said, “Humor is a mask. It is a way of hiding emotion.” Yes, humor is a mask comedians often use to cope with the pain and hurt from their past. And just as they hide behind humor, so do others hide behind masks and reactions to cover pain. Let's look at several of these.

*Withdrawal.* Mary has surmised from past experience she is inferior and cannot attract a man. Completely surrendered to this evaluation she concludes she is worthless and will never marry. In order to protect herself from further rejection, she withdraws from social situations into a shell of silence and loneliness. As Mary journeys through life, she carefully protects herself from meeting men and from any situations that involve emotional risk. Never will she initiate a conversation, speak up in a group, or defend her ideas. In so doing Mary has become less capable of developing and maintaining a love relationship. Without realizing it, her deductions about herself have closed the door on love.

*Comparison.* People who feel inferior are always comparing themselves to others and coming up short. John was attracted to Becky, who invited him to go to a party with her. John went but had a miserable time as he felt the other men there had better jobs, were better looking, or were better built than he. Even though John desperately wanted to see Becky again, he never called because he felt so inferior. Becky became engaged to one of John's best friends. At dinner one evening when discussing old times, Becky told John how much she had wanted to see him again after that party! John lost to another guy because he compared himself to the competition and accepted defeat! Every time you compare yourself to someone else, you will come out second best. When you feel second best, you will act second best.

*Jealousy.* Jealousy is a reaction that is prompted by fear—the fear of losing someone who means a lot to us. Yet the tighter we cling, the more ground we lose. Fear and possessiveness breed contempt and actually drive others from us. Feelings of insecurity and lack of personal identity invite rejection and cause others to feel stifled. Emotionally healthy persons may feel slightly jealous from time to time but are not consumed by unreasoning and continual bouts of jealousy.

*Criticism.* Barb is always bragging about her home, pool, car, clothes, and job while criticizing what others have. Attempting to make herself look better, she tries to make others appear worse. Criticism and put-downs drive people away entirely or make any friendships very unsatisfactory.

*Fear of Intimacy* It has already been established that you cannot love others until you first have a healthy self-like. If you don't like yourself you will become fearful when someone attempts to get to know you. More than anything you want friends but you fear they will reject you once they know the real you. So you keep people at a distance, never allowing them close enough to get to know you.

## **The Effect of Self-image on Relationships**

When your self-image is positive, you tend to seek relationships that will reinforce positive feelings. The opposite is also true. When you are consumed by negative feeling about self, you will seek relationships that confirm worthlessness. When you feel like a nobody inside, when fearful and easily depressed, you will be easily swayed by the attentions of anyone who woos or flatters you, regardless of who it is. When you lack the ability to validate your own worth, you tend to follow others around like a puppy, dependent on them for attaining a sense of significance.

Some people are so lacking in self-worth and are so afraid of being abandoned, they will cling in desperation to any relationship, even one that brings pain. It doesn't have to be this way. To avoid getting into a destructive relationship, you must be ruthlessly honest about your own brokenness. If you are carrying hurt and pain from the past, have unfinished business with parents or previous relationships, or have a self-image so poor you will permit abuse, you need healing before you begin dating. Dating is beyond your capabilities for now. Back off from emotional involvements. If you have brokenness in your life, admit it now and seek help. A1 Anon and other twelve-step programs and private professional counseling can give you the help you need before you endanger your future as well as someone else's.

Building self-esteem, learning to feel entitled to happiness, and expecting good things to come your way are important elements in being ready for romance. Some people appear naturally to have a healthy self-image. Others struggle find it. Still others must spend long hours in therapy before they can achieve it.

You can often tell by the way a person looks and acts that he does not like himself. Picture Charlie Brown from the Peanuts series. The slump of his shoulders, hands in his pockets and down-turned mouth all tell a story

without the caption: “Nobody cares if I live or die.”

A weak self-image will bind and keep you from achieving what you really want. It will force you to stick with the safety of the known and familiar rather than challenging you to achieve new and worthwhile goals. If your aspirations are low, you won't achieve much. But the higher your self-esteem the higher your aspirations will be for achieving success—emotionally, financially, intellectually, spiritually, and romantically.

The poorer your self-image the greater the urge to prove something and to impress others. The better your self-image the easier it is to be yourself without having to put on airs. Low self-concept will cause defensive and inappropriate communication patterns to dominate due to unclear goals and a concern to protect a weak sense of being. The stronger the self-esteem the more open, honest, and clear your communication patterns will be because you have thought through your values, goals, and beliefs and have confidence in them.

If you hope to achieve a healthy, happy relationship with a member of the opposite sex, this factor of self-esteem is the most important. *The greatest barriers to successful romance are feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, and failure.* The first relationship in which you must achieve success is a love relationship with yourself. You must first feel that you are worthy and lovable. Then you are more likely to be able to negotiate loving relationships with others. Only when you can first love yourself will you be able to accept love from others.

Part of loving self is being happy with how you look. This has a lot to do with how you present yourself to the opposite sex. And how you present yourself has a sharp impact on how successful you are in attracting dates. If you feel you are not physically attractive, you may fear to approach an attractive person who catches your attention. How you feel about yourself and how you present yourself also determine what kind of person you are likely to attract, it is hardly surprising then that those with a sloppy appearance rate themselves as dissatisfied with their opposite-sex relationships.

When evaluating your self-esteem you must look at what relationships you presently have that are validating your worth and which are detrimental to your feelings of worth if a relationship is destructive and negative, you must choose to end the relationship or to change it so that the impact of it is positive. It takes effort to change old patterns of interaction and create new



ones to improve relationships, but if you sincerely want to feel better about yourself, you need to invest in relationships that will contribute positively to your self-esteem.

## **Divorce—A Blow to Self-Esteem**

Maybe you have been through a divorce. There is probably no time in a person's life when he feels so worthless as when a marriage ends. Marriage is a very personal part of a person's existence and when it fails, the people involved feel like failures. Even if you are the one who initiated the divorce, or were not at fault, or did not desire the divorce, or were the “innocent party,” or tried your best to keep the marriage intact you will not escape the emotional crisis that accompanies divorce.

When you enter a love relationship, you receive much validation from the other person. When a marriage ends, there has already been massive destructive impact on each partner's self-concept. For some people, their self-concept has suffered so much they can't even take the necessary steps to end the marriage. This is often the case with battered women.

To the same degree that falling in love is exciting, falling out of love is painful. The devastating hurt comes from the deep sense of rejection. The period of a divorce is likely to be when the self-concept reaches an all-time low.

One positive side effect of this experience is that it can also cause you to take a closer look at yourself than you ever did before. It could be a powerful force in motivating you to make some much needed changes in your life and your perception of self.

Self-esteem is fragile. It can be intact one minute and gone the next. We may endure two or three setbacks, but when another one comes along, it brings on a crisis of confidence. The worth we ascribe to ourselves, especially in romantic relationships, is so vulnerable that even tough people barely make it at times. The one who lacks self-respect is going to find it very difficult to have good relationships with the opposite sex.

## **Positive Self-Image**

Self-worth should be an honest appraisal of self. “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Rom.12:3). We should not rate ourselves too highly; neither

should we under estimate our value. Some people try to make low self-image a virtue by identifying it with humility as opposed to arrogance and pride—their definition of high self-esteem. But high self-esteem is not arrogance. When we have high self-esteem, we feel equal to, not better than others—adequate to cope with the responsibilities of life.

We make no false claims. Rather, we accept our weak areas as well as our strengths and feel we deserve the respect of others. We have learned to build on strengths and compensate for weaknesses. We have learned to live with the limitations we have been unable to change. From time to time we fail but we are able to pick up the pieces and move ahead. We try to be sincere and open and we consider that we are worthwhile.

Healthy self-respect frees us to pay attention to others. We can then be as tolerant of the weaknesses of others as we are of our own. We can appreciate the differences of others instead of resenting, fearing, or ridiculing them. We realize that this differentness makes each human being unique. Healthy self-respect also frees us spiritually, for we can more fully appreciate God's acceptance of us as we are and the potential for good within us.

Dr. Nathaniel Branden believes there are six key virtues on which self-esteem depends: living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and personal integrity.

- *To live consciously* is to understand who and what you are. The choices you make day by day determine your values, goals, and beliefs.
- *To be self-accepting* means that you recognize your imperfections and mistakes as well as your strength. You are able to put failures behind you and build on strengths to compensate for the weaknesses. What cannot be changed is accepted.
- *To be self-responsible* is to recognize that your future happiness, success or failure is determined by the choices you make through your words, actions, and emotions and that no one else is responsible for making you happy.
- *To be self-assertive* is being willing to stand and speak for your convictions, values, and feelings as well as learning appropriate ways to express your wants and needs.

- *To live purposefully* is to think through meaningful life goals, to choose actions that lead toward those goals, and to check periodically to see if you are moving toward your chosen goals.
- *To live with integrity* is to choose principles and values that govern your life and living, through word and deed, according to those principles.

Think what it would mean to live by these virtues! Think what it would mean to establish a lifelong relationship with a person who lived by them! Men and women with high self-esteem are drawn to each other. Likewise, people with low self-esteem are also drawn to each other and form destructive relationships. Possessing an adequate measure of each of these six virtues, then, is the most important element in establishing a healthy romantic relationship.

### **When You Are Emotionally Healthy but Your Partner Isn't**

If after careful evaluation you recognize that your self-worth is solid but your dating partner's is low, what should you do? *Slow down.* 'The person who is unhappy with himself before marriage will not be happy after marriage. Marriage is relatively easy when both partners feel good about self. The person with positive feelings of worth will be able to freely give love, compassion, and forgiveness and will be cooperative and will accept responsibility. This person has confidence in his own abilities and is free to appreciate the worth of others and accept others as they are. Problems may arise, disappointments mount, fatigue press hard, but somehow the high self-esteem person manages.

The person with a poor self-image, however, has difficulty solving problems constructively because this person is buried in myriad self-defeating patterns. Desperation overwhelms him as problems surface. Since this person possesses neither the coping mechanism to resolve his problems nor the ability to put new skills to work, he will sink deeper into self-defeating patterns. Obviously this affects all relationships. The person with a poor self-image is often unhappy and will likely sink into terrible states of depression and indifference or lash out at his partner with blame for the hurt and pain.

Rather than risking your future happiness by marrying a person with a

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