

## *Being Happy*

By Andrew Matthews

Reviewed by William Gross – updated Mar 2011

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### **Patterns -**

This book is a sleeper. It looks light and almost childish in its format. It has cartoons on the cover and throughout its pages. Don't let that fool you. This book is one of the most powerful texts I've ever read on the nature of human behavior and how to change it. I'm going to try to keep my summaries of what Andy says short just so the poignancy of what he says isn't lost.

In his opening salvo Andy sets the theme of the book. *We are creatures of habit.* We have habits of thought and habits of behavior that establish **patterns** in our lives. If we are to change our weak and destructive patterns into strong and constructive patterns, then we must first understand that there is a reason why the world looks to us the way it does, and why it treats us the way it does, and why we behave the way we do. *We are not victims of our circumstances. We are not victims of other people's behavior or choices. We are individually responsible for how we think, how we behave, and how we respond to our world.*

If there is going to be change in us, then we are going to need make those changes ourselves. We cannot change anyone else. We can only change ourselves. The way we make those changes is by changing our input, and changing the way we think about things. When we do that, our patterns of behavior begin to change. Andy lists a whole slew of things to recognize in our own experience that aren't just unfortunate when we discover them. They are **patterns** - learned behavior - and it is downright *criminal* to allow them to continue determining our lives for us. We sow the seeds of these patterns into our children and into everyone we meet. When he lists them, Andy is speaking about ongoing predominant patterns, not isolated incidents. The list may frighten or discourage you because you may find he is uncovering patterns in your own life. That's *good!* If you recognize these patterns you *should* be frightened and alarmed - hopefully you will be shaken enough to decide to *change* them!

Andy lists repeated accidents, constant sickness, unavoidable messiness, ongoing financial needs, the sense that you are indispensable and the world around you will crumble in your absence, an inability to keep a job long-term, always being a victim in search of the next disaster, never having a surplus of anything (i.e. an inability to prosper - having only enough to survive at all times), never being in the right place at the right time, persistently being the victim of other people's bad intentions toward you, etc.

Let me add these: bigotry, hatred, cynicism, discouragement, and fear. These too are learned behaviors, patterns that can and must be broken.

These patterns are only in our mind. To change them, we need to change our mind. We need to look at the world differently. When we do, then the world around us will magically change. **“Life changes when we change.”** Once we make that choice to change, we will inevitably encounter massive opposition from our family, our friends, our co-workers, and even the world around us. That’s just to see if we’re serious. That’s what happens every time we get serious about changing. Stuff happens. Get over it. Get past it. And Get on with it. That’s what we’re going to learn how to do in this book. It’s simply wonderful! The method? Yep: we’re going to change our input (what we read, watch, and listen to) and our associations (who we hang around).

I hope you commit yourself to being dissatisfied with who you are now, and then commit yourself to becoming who God has created you to be. That’s what life is all about: a journey, a process, a never ending road into the future. It’s an adventure. Let’s enjoy it together!

## **Self-Image –**

The image of ourselves that we carry around in our head determines the image we have of the world around us. If we are content with ourselves, we’re usually content with the world. If we hate ourselves, we usually hate the world. If we are confident, there is no holding us back from reaching our goals. If we lack confidence, then the world can’t be trusted - it is a dangerous and unfriendly place.

Andy calls our self-image a blue-print that determines who our friends are, where we live, and what career we choose. If we are fearful, doubtful, insecure, and withdrawn, then the only way to change that is to change the way we think and talk about ourselves. We act within the bounds of how we perceive ourselves. If we want to stretch our bounds, then we have to see a different self-image. Once we see ourselves differently, then everyone around us will see us differently. *We decide what our self-image will be. We decide what we are worth. We decide how much happiness we should expect.*

So why don’t we all choose to have a better self-image, raise our self-worth, and gather more happiness? One reason is that we’ve been taught to think that a healthy self-image equates to conceit. We’ve been taught, and we are conditioned daily, to put down anyone who thinks highly of themselves, including the one in the mirror. If a woman is beautiful, we tell her she’s got a pimple, or her hair is a mess - and those clothes! If a man is intelligent, we tell him every time he makes a mistake until he’s convinced that he’s an idiot. Why? Affirmation.

We all want to affirm the image we have of ourselves. And we all want everyone else to agree with that image, whether it’s good or bad. A beautiful woman is a reminder to every plain woman that she doesn’t measure up to some imaginary standard. An intelligent man is a reminder to every man who struggled in school that daddy wasn’t pleased with that “D” on the report card. If I don’t measure up to the image others want me to fit, then I’m sure not gonna let you fit that mold either. I’d rather you looked just

like me. Then I know I'm OK. Well, newsflash: that's a lie! You're OK even if I don't look just like you.

Your worth, like my worth, is independent of what other people think it is. I have intrinsic value as a human being. I have certain inalienable rights bestowed on me by my Creator. No one has the ability to take them from me unless I give them that right. I am who I think I am. You are who you think you are. We deserve to be treated right. We deserve to be treated equally. We deserve to keep our dignity and self-respect. We deserve success. And we deserve happiness. We control whether we receive those things.

The Bible says, “Never think more highly of yourself than you ought to, but think of yourself with sober judgment” (Rom. 12:3). “In humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). *That's called balance.* A healthy self-image isn't one that constantly talks about itself and needs to be the center of attention. Neither is it one that always seeks its own benefit at the expense of others. Nor is it a doormat to be walked on.

Instead, a person with a healthy self-image recognizes his own value, and therefore the value of others. He will not allow that value to be diminished or over-estimated. He just says ‘thank you’ to compliments, and often diverts attention to others who contribute to his success. He can afford to do that because their success doesn't diminish his own. That's called grace. Be gracious. Give people their due. But don't forget to do that for yourself as well.

## **Image and the Id -**

The id is our subconscious mind.<sup>1</sup> It is a literal place where whatever we believe is accepted as true. It cannot determine whether what you are telling it is true or false. So it always acts on what it is told, regardless of the veracity of the input. That's good and that's bad. If you tell it you are worthwhile and lovable and successful, it will ensure you receive the fruits of those characteristics. If you tell it you are worthless, unlovable, and a failure, it will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that those statements are proved right. That's negative affirmation.

The following are symptoms of a poor self-image:

- jealousy
- negative talk about ourselves
- experiencing guilt
- failure to give compliments
- inability to accept compliments
- not taking our own needs into account
- not asking for what we want
- rejecting luxury unnecessarily
- failure to give affection
- failure to accept and enjoy affection
- criticizing others
- comparing ourselves with others
- constant poor health, which is the drive for attention at any cost

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<sup>1</sup> I do not believe psychology is a tool of the devil (the “philosophy and vain deceit” spoken of in Col 2:8), as many Christians seem to believe. Science, even a science of the mind, is a means to explore the face of God, and to be awestruck by the complexity and intricacy of His works. Ps. 8.

The solution? Give compliments. Accept compliments. Always speak well of yourself and others. Praise yourself. Separate your current behavior from who you are as a person. Treat your body well. Let others know how you want to be treated, and remember to treat them that way as well. Get around good people. Pamper yourself. And paint a picture of yourself in your mind as you want to be. You will gravitate toward that mental image.

Once you are on the road to becoming on the outside who you always were on the inside, you can begin to love others effectively. As you give out compliments, and feed the hungers of other people, you will begin to receive their acceptance, approval, and appreciation – the very things you desire for yourself.

## **Health -**

Ever heard of psycho-somatic disorders? That's the kind of physical illness or disability that is all in our head - there is no physical basis for it. Doctors can't find anything wrong to account for what ails us - no bacteria, no virus, no injury. Is it real? Oh yes. How does hypnosis work? How can we do things under hypnosis that we cannot do on our own? It's the mind over the body. The body will do and will respond to what the mind tells it. We know that.

Does what the eye sees, and the ear hears, affect how we feel and how we think? Of course! Madison Avenue advertising executives and psychology majors have known that for generations. Did last Tuesday's terrorist attacks affect you (*Twin Towers 9/11/2001*)? Did they affect how you felt and continue to feel? You *know* they did! Now let me ask this: were you there? Did you personally experience *any* of it? No! You didn't have the concussion knock you down, or the smell turn your stomach, or the dust cover you and fill your lungs - so why did it affect you? Why did you break down in tears, become enraged and depressed, find yourself unable to work effectively, and feel compassion for people you never met? Wasn't it all in your head? ***Yes! It was!***

So let's get real honest about this: what we see, what we hear, what we read, who we talk to, the topic of conversation, radio, TV, and music - all of these have a direct impact on us, on our health, and on our very ability to function as a human being. Our energy and our health, our optimism and our strength are directly impacted by what we allow to *influence* us even if those things are passively received on a TV set or in a casual conversation.

We not only receive input, we transmit things to other people that *they* receive as input. Why would we want to receive trash and negative?! Why would we dare to transmit trash and negative to someone else!?! We have the ability to control our mental well-being, our physical well-being, and even the mental and physical well-being of those around us, by simply controlling what we allow ourselves to be exposed to and what we choose to say! *That's the greatest single fact we may ever learn in our life!*

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - *put it into practice*. And the God of peace will be with you. Phil 4:8-9 NIV

God says, "Protect your input! Control your output!" GIGO is a scriptural principle that predates computers by several thousand years (garbage in, garbage out).

We don't want to insulate ourselves from all negative as if we lived in a fantasy world. What we want to do is determine how we interpret those words, images, events, and circumstances - how we *process* them. Stuff happens. We need to learn how to deal with it when it does. That's where the real *power* is. That's the point at which we can impact our world through what we do, and how we live.

When I see a movie or read a book, I don't want something that merely captures the reality of what is described. I get that every day just by living. I want something that transcends reality, something that gives it meaning and value. Then I grow and overcome it. I am better for having experienced it. War is either brutish in its destruction of human life, or it is noble in its opposition to evil. We *choose* the interpretation. And we long for the type of person who can turn tragedy into victory by how they look at a situation. We want to become that type of person. We want to bring health and vitality to everyone we meet by changing the way they perceive their world.

## **Pain –**

In 2 pages, Andy identifies one of the biggest catalysts to change that we have in our life: pain. It could have been pleasure, but for most of us there is no change until the pain of continuing our current course of behavior overcomes the fear of changing it. We are normally complacent, almost contented people, as long as things look familiar to us.

Beating the wife, kicking the dog, berating the kids, even though destructive, are familiar and the familiarity is comforting. It's structured. It fits a known pattern.

Laziness, failure to plan ahead, procrastination, even though destructive, are familiar and comforting.

Blaming others, avoiding responsibility, cheating, even though destructive, are patterns that reassure us. We have coped in the past with these behaviors and we can cope in the future with them - if only we don't have to change.

So when will we realize that the pain of changing will be easier than the pain of *not* changing? Ahhhhh. That's the question. For each of us it is different. It may be the look in our child's face when mom leaves them at day-care again. It may be yet another argument over money between a husband and wife. It may be settling one more time for the cheaper appliance or car. It may be continuing rejection by someone we love. It may be recognizing how destructive our behavior has been to those around us. That's what it was for me. That kind of pain is good pain. It lets us know that something is seriously

wrong and needs fixing. We need a mirror to see how far from normal we really are. The familiar must become frightening and painful.

Learn this phrase: “you’ll find yourself in the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> That means, we have patterns of behavior we can’t recognize by ourselves. We can’t see how far from normal we are without someone telling us what normal is. Our parents didn’t teach us. Our friends won’t tell us. Our spouse can’t share with us. Only by coming to our Creator in His Bible, can we finally learn the truth about who we are, and who we need to become. Only God can hold up the mirror of His Word to us so we can clearly see what others have seen all along. *The truth hurts*. When we are startled enough, ashamed enough, hurt and angry enough, God will begin the process of change in us. Pain becomes our hope for better days to come. Embrace it. Be thankful for it. And respond to it. It’s a warning bell.

## **Association -**

In today’s chapter, Andy tells us that we will become in character and attitude what our environment makes us. Who we hang around determines who we become. Peer pressure is a powerful molding tool and nearly impossible to resist. That’s because one of our hungers is for acceptance. That drives us to conform to the world around us.

When my daughter was younger I used to teach her to be careful who her friends were. She used to get frustrated with me and say, “Dad, don’t you trust me? Don’t you think I can change them?” And I told her, “I trust you. I don’t trust them. And the Bible says that they will drag you down. It never says you will lift them up.” Now for the reality test. Who won the battle with her peers? They did. Who was right, my daughter or the Bible? The Bible. Sometimes we just have to take things on faith. Lot thought he could hang out in Sodom and Gomorrah and not be affected by it. He was wrong.

It would be nice if we could control our reaction to the world around us and not be swayed by it. But our hunger for acceptance, approval, and appreciation are so overpowering that we succumb to them. Therefore we must control our environment if we are to preserve a proper mental attitude, good health, and prospering ways. How do we do that? Jerry Falwell is convinced that we should make laws that conform the world to us. Monks believe that we should escape the world and create our own. Neither approach is good or even reasonable for most of us. So *what* do we do? And *how*?

I’m not going to go into that right now. That’s what the whole book is about. Andy’s conclusion is where I’ll leave it: *if we’re serious about changing our life, we need to get serious about changing what surrounds us*.

## **Prosperity –**

This is going to be a long one today - I’m going to share from my personal experience. I hope it helps you spot similar excuses you may be making to avoid prosperity. This

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<sup>2</sup> Many Bible-based books will provide excellent insights. But if they’re not Bible-based, they will only deceive.

single topic will determine whether we begin the process of change, poke at it with a stick, or walk away from it altogether. It is absolutely crucial to take this *seriously*. It's almost like learning you have a life-threatening disease and you need to make some hard choices. This section of the book always beats me up. The truth of it is simple and direct: *if we don't have enough money, it's because we believe that we don't deserve it, or that we can't be trusted with it.* Those two beliefs result in our making choices that ensure we won't get it, or we won't keep it. Why?

For myself, I could say that I make those kinds of choices to affirm how I feel about myself, but I think it goes even deeper. Remember that pattern of behavior we examined the other day? We are creatures of habit, but we are also creatures of our social grooming. We acquire an identity that tends to match the people we grew up with: our parents, our siblings, friends and neighbors, teachers, local people in our town that we associated with or learned things from. We knew them and listened to them in our formative years. We allowed them to mold our thoughts and behaviors, our belief system about ourselves. We gained beliefs about the purpose of life, the value of money, the role that we play in the world, our own importance, what humility and success look like, and what the limits of our ambition should be.

When I went to law school and began to clerk for an attorney in Philadelphia, I said to him, "I'll be the first one in my family to break out of poverty and become successful." Wrong. Why did I fail? I failed because I couldn't accept the fact that I deserved success, and therefore I made choices that ensured I wouldn't succeed in my chosen field. It had nothing to do with my intellect, my circumstances, my skills, or even my ambition. It had everything to do with who I thought I was, and how I felt about myself. That's all.

I became over-involved with condominium activities - I took on the role of finance chairman. I cut down on study time. I failed to make contacts with other students to share the study load. I avoided meeting with them at school to go over the material. I never asked for help from my professors. I was pegged most likely to succeed, and the one to beat by the other students - but I didn't peg myself that way. I didn't feel I was trustworthy or competent. One of the other students from an Ivy League school said to me, "I always knew somebody from a state school could make it." What he meant was just the opposite. He had the same low expectations I had of myself.

And so I began to *justify* why I wasn't meant to be an attorney. This is somebody else's dream for me, not mine.<sup>3</sup> There is too much pressure. I don't want other people depending on me. These judges and attorneys are corrupt. The Law is tarnished and I don't want to be associated with it. The market for attorneys is saturated. I'll never pass the bar because they only let those whose parents own law firms get through. I'm too far

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<sup>3</sup> Yet I was in law school because others thought I *ought* to be there, not because I *wanted* to be. That's not good either. Don't live your life according to other people's expectations of you. Do what you do, choose what you choose, because such things are in harmony with who you are, and with your values – not because it pleases others. If you want to please someone to affirm your self-worth, choose to please God. *Choose* to do that. Don't do it out of fear; don't do it because it is expected of you; don't do it to gain His favor. Do it because it's who you are, and it's what *you want* to do. *Live free* according to godly values. Do that *willingly* and without *guilt, shame, or bondage*. "[There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.](#)" Rom. 8:1. "[If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.](#)" Joh 8:36

in debt to continue. I have a wife and a child on the way with immediate needs. My success at this is years away and I need to do something right now to provide for my family. Other people with better contacts from better schools, like the attorney I work for, aren't succeeding - so what makes me think I can? I really don't like doing this.

**Those aren't reasons! Those are excuses!** And so I walked away from law school just three months, one semester, from graduation. I couldn't take a chance on actually succeeding when my mind told me I wasn't worthy or able enough.

Have you noticed that successful and wealthy parents tend to have successful and wealthy children? Struggling and poor parents tend to have struggling and poor children. Is it because prosperous kids get help from their parents that give them an advantage over the other kids? In a way, but probably not in the way we normally think about it. The help they receive is contained in the way they think, and the confidence they have in themselves, not just the money or education they receive. They believe they deserve success. They have been taught how to handle money effectively. They don't allow fear of loss to affect how they treat their money. They know they can always get more, so they're willing to risk losing some. People who don't have much live in fear of losing what little they have. They don't risk much, and so they don't gain much.

That's one of the principles taught in the parable of the talents in the Bible. Do you remember that email I sent on sloth? Failure to invest is a reflection of a slothful mind, and it is sinful. It indicates an underlying distrust of God and a rejection of the hope he expects to find in us. Will the Son of Man find faith in the world when he returns? (Lk.18:8) Or will he find fear of loss and low expectations? Oh ye of little faith! Why do we refuse to get out of the boat and walk on water? Have we forgotten who our ruler is and the might of his hand?

Do we *justify* our limited resources by saying that having money would tempt us to sin because we couldn't handle it? A pastor gave me that excuse for not pursuing financial success. Money is *not* the root of all evil and money is *not* a temptation! Temptation is an inner desire, not an external object. The *love* of money is the root of all evil. That love indicates we have substituted a material thing for the lordship of God. We have let money – or the lack of it – rule us. We have let it make our decisions for us. We have let it control where we live, what we buy, what we drive, the level and quality of our education, the care and protection of our children, the insurance we carry, the clothes we wear, the vacations we take, the time we have for community work, the presents we buy, and the charities we support. We have let sin master us. That *must* change!

Having money and prosperity, being able to thrive and flourish, is a *choice*. I hate that truth, but I can't escape it. Andy says that it is a poverty mentality, not our circumstances or background, that determines our financial condition.

*Prosperous people save first and spend what is left. Poor people spend first and save what is left.* A poverty mentality means if we get a little extra cash, we'll spend it. It means we envy rich people, we're embarrassed when we have a lot of cash, we resent other people's success, we refuse to borrow even a small amount from a friend because

we think we don't deserve it, we hate to lose money or overpay for something when we miss a sale, we're aggravated when somebody else gets a better deal, we don't want to do much better than our parents or friends, or we think that poverty is a virtue.

That has been the story of my life. I grew up in a household with a poverty mentality. I grew up in a neighborhood of people with a poverty mentality. We all worked hard but that wasn't going to change anything. Poverty isn't always a matter of laziness. It is often a matter of the mind. There will never be enough money if the choices we make ensure that we won't have it. And the choices we make begin in our head based on our self-image.

Now, let's break the pattern, and shatter the mold that limits our thinking, our success, and our prosperity.<sup>4</sup> Andy has listed a number of steps we can take to do just that. The list speaks for itself. All I want to do today is identify poverty as a disease of the mind and encourage us all to find the cure. *Being successful in any endeavor is not the cure - it is the result of the cure.* Hold onto this: there is a cure, and we can all have it.

## **Live Now –**

It seems like I've spent a lifetime preparing to live. Have you ever felt that way? It doesn't matter how old you are, or how far you are from retirement. You can waste time at any age. I've found myself always putting off until tomorrow what I really wanted to do: that vacation I wanted to take, the tour of Rome and Paris, the Caribbean cruise, or any number of other things.

Putting off vacations because of the hassles of scheduling it, the finances involved, and the drudgery of the journey itself, meant my kids only had one real vacation in their life. It was when we toured the Southwest, California, Las Vegas, and Lake Powell. Lynn and I were so excited. We'd waited so many years. We wanted to see everything, hear everything, taste everything, and share it with our children. We hoped they'd be as fascinated and excited as we were. The kids spent most of the time asking when we were going to get to the next place, or they buried their face in a book, slept in the car, or watched TV in the hotel. Just like I had done for years, and just as I had taught them by example, they were beating time until the next event; and then during that event, they were getting ready to beat time again.

The way I have lived, there is more than enough time to feel guilt over the past, or to worry over the future, but there is never enough time to enjoy the present. That's so very wrong and wasteful. Entire lifetimes are squandered that way. Mine has been. But that is changing - *now*. As I enter into a new season of life, I realize all too well the value of time - present time - and the terrible waste of trying to spend any other kind of time. Life happens now. It happens here. It is an ongoing shared event with family and friends.

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<sup>4</sup> Don't limit "prosperity" to financial prosperity. Prospering means thriving – it means growing and progressing toward a desirable outcome. Gen 39:23; Jos 1:7; 1Chr 22:13; Prov 28:25; 3Joh 1:2.

Investing in the future is a good and necessary thing to do. Laying away savings for the vacation or the new fishing gear is a good thing too. We do the savings in the now. And when the time comes that we have been preparing for, we need to savor it in the now. Our children will never be their age again, nor will we. Cherish the moment. Leave the past out of it. Let the future take care of itself. We can only experience now. We can only act now. We can only give and receive now. Don't miss the now of your life. It won't come again. Lynn and I are enjoying more of each other and of our life than we have in most of the preceding years we've shared. We're not focused on other things and other times anymore. We're learning to focus on each other, right now. I pray the same for you all.

### **Cat's in the Cradle -**

Have you ever conditioned your happiness on something? If I get the raise I'll be happy. When we go to Hawaii I'll be happy. Once I'm healthy I'll be happy. Andy tells us this is like putting our lives on hold. We decide to *wait* for some event or circumstance before we'll let ourselves be happy. That event or circumstance may never come.

A play called "Waiting for Godot" was all about waiting for a man to come who would make everything better. He never came. The issue was what to do while waiting. Some refused to do anything. Others chose to do what was necessary - if he came, great. If not, that's OK too. We've all heard that the most important thing on our tombstone will be the dash between the two dates. What did we do during that dash? Wait? Or act?

"When ya comin' home, dad?" "I don't know when. But we'll be together then, son - yeah we'll be together then..."

Life is. Seize it. Take advantage of every opportunity. If we don't ride life, it will ride us. We need to stop waiting for that magic set of circumstances, that sign from God, that we can begin on the path we've chosen. Where we are is where we need to be. Living in the present means we don't just beat time by marching in place. It means life is what happens while we're waiting for something else. Don't miss it!

Andy says, "If we let go of the situation, it speeds the results." So if we're waiting for a bus, we need to use the time to meet people, read a book, or just smell the roses. The time passes quicker, and we have something to show for it. We don't want to waste a minute of our life. It's so very precious. Happiness isn't some *place* else, or some *time* else. Happiness is where we look for it: right here and right now. Enjoy the journey, not just the destination.

### **Forgiveness –**

I wondered out loud to my wife tonight how somebody as young as Andy could have as much wisdom as he does. This chapter on forgiveness is outstanding. He says that when we *fail to forgive* we're doing several nasty things at the same time:

1. We're continuing to live in the past, because forgiveness is the only thing that frees us from the chains of the past. There is no difference between failing to forgive others and failing to forgive ourselves. The result is the same: we're stuck in the past.

2. We're holding onto blame as if that was going to solve something. When we insist on blaming others (or ourselves) for our present condition, we're actually refusing to take responsibility for our future. No one is responsible for our happiness except us, and therefore no one is responsible for our unhappiness except us. We made the best choices we could with the information and experience we had at the time. Now we need to make preparations for what is yet to come.

3. We suffer from guilt, and that guilt leads to sickness, heartache, depression, and anger. The guilt arises out of a sense that we let something happen that shouldn't have happened. We let ourselves or those we love become victims because we failed to act, or failed to protect ourselves or them. I suspect that's what leads us to blame others. We just can't deal with the guilt. It doesn't matter what happened, or why. It only matters what we're going to do about it.

So what should we do? Forgive others who have hurt us or let us down. Let go of the pain. It enslaves us to the past. It makes us physically and emotionally sick. Receive the forgiveness of others we may have hurt - *after* we've done what we can to restore them. If they still won't forgive us, then we should forgive ourselves anyway. We did what we could in the present to make reparations for the past. That's all we can do - we can't change the past. What happened, happened. We need to get over it. Continuing to hold onto our guilt only prolongs the agony and increases the damage. That's silly and destructive.

Have you noticed that blame and guilt seem to be the tactics we choose when we don't want to do anything meaningful about the problem or circumstance we find ourselves in? We use them as excuses for our inaction. They prevent us from living in the now. We need to take ownership of our lives. We need to forgive and forget and get on with living. We need to act in the best interests of our future. *Yesterday is gone, and Tomorrow never comes. There is only Today in which to act. Make it count.*

## **Happiness –**

Happiness is a very simple thing. *It is choosing to be happy by focusing on things that bring us pleasure, or looking for things that make us feel better about ourselves and our world.* Like what? Well I guess that depends on you. What tickles one person's fancy may not tickle someone else's fancy. For me, it's in my relationships with my family, the color of a sunset, the promise of a sunrise, the sense of personal satisfaction when I do my job well. So happiness is a personal *attitude*, custom-made for who you are and what you like. It can't be compared to other people's happiness, even though you may both share similar likes and pleasures. Your happiness is unique to you, and therefore invaluable to you and to those around you.

But what threatens happiness for all of us are circumstances and criticisms. The word happiness comes from transient events, what we call “happenstances.” If our happiness is based on circumstances or other people’s opinions, it comes and goes like a yo-yo. Good circumstances make us happy; bad circumstances may us unhappy. Nice words lift us up; harsh words drive us down. Well, if we shouldn’t base happiness on our circumstances or other people’s opinions of us, then what should we base it on? Good question! That’s what I want to talk about. How we deal with criticism is an indicator of how we deal with circumstances. It’s easier to spot. It isn’t our environment, or what people say to us that determines our happiness. It is how we *respond* to them. To repeat, happy people aren’t *born* happy. They *choose* to be happy. It is an act of will.

Happy people remember the good times for years, and the bad times for seconds. Unhappy people relive the bad times for years, and remember the good times for seconds. When happy people hear a criticism, they examine themselves to see if it is true. If so, they apologize and change their ways. But unhappy people won’t change, no matter what is said or what they read, and no matter how destructive their habits are. They need to maintain their behaviors and attitudes so the criticisms will be true. That affirms their negative view of themselves and their world. They *choose* to be unhappy. I like to say to my kids, “They savor their pain like a fine chocolate.”

I’m going to equate happiness with wisdom, and unhappiness with foolishness. The Bible says in the Book of Proverbs 9:8-9 that a wise man accepts criticism and loves you for it. When he is instructed, he gains knowledge and learns from it, becoming wiser still. He listens to advice (12:15). The very same counsel can be given to someone else, the foolish person, but instead of being grateful, that person will feel insulted, discouraged, defeated, rejected, and unhappy. Why the difference?

I think it’s because the wise man chooses to pursue the truth, no matter where it leads him, even to a mirror. He is always willing to change and grow. If he makes a mistake, as we all do, he wants to know why, and he corrects it. And that pursuit of excellence, tempered with humility, brings him friends, joy, contentment, and personal satisfaction: what we might consider happiness.

An unhappy person, hearing the very same advice, resorts to blaming others, and justifying what he has or hasn’t done. This kind of perverted self-protection has a lot to do with staying unhappy. “Hey! That’s just the way I am. I like the way I am. If you don’t, keep it to yourself.” And so their unhappiness continues. Their ability to deal with other people never improves. Their relationships are shallow and meaningless. They insist on finding the negative in every situation - which drives people away. That was my chosen way to live for most of my adult life. In fact, at my 10th high school reunion we were asked to include a “message.” Mine was, “Every cloud has a silver lining, and every silver lining has a moth.” Uplifting, don’t you think?

Happy people always manage to find the one thing of *value* in every disaster, the one *lesson* to be learned in every failure, the one *positive* twist that the unhappy person is blind to, and refuses to even look for. Andy says happiness is ours for the asking.

Unfortunately, he says we'll only ask for it when we've had enough misery, heartache, loneliness, and disappointment in our life. I reached that point several years ago. That's the point at which we finally *choose* happiness over unhappiness. We refuse to be thrown about by every whim of circumstance and every negative comment.

And that's the point at which we become attractive and winsome. People want to be around us. They listen to what we have to say. And they want to hear more. *That's a point to remember.*

Yes, we need to protect our environment by choosing what we read, watch, and hear. But we can't always do that. An alcoholic chooses not to hang out in bars and liquor stores. But when he sits down to a meal with someone who has a glass of wine and offers him some, he must choose not to allow his current environment to affect him, or tempt him into participating. That takes strength of will, and conviction. *Happiness is just like that.* We are addicts to negative thinking and negative speech. If we are to be happy, we need to make the same kind of hard choices that every other addict needs to make. This is a battle for our mind and our attitude, every day, every moment. We must resolve not to succumb. We will *not* be swayed. We will *not* surrender. We must decide to find *happiness* today, this minute. It is all around us, if we just look for it. Get an attitude of gratitude and see if the world around you doesn't begin to change magically.

## **Perfection –**

One of the biggest excuses we have for avoiding happiness is the pursuit of perfection. For a perfectionist, anything that is less than perfect isn't worth having, pursuing, or enjoying - or allowing anyone else to pursue or enjoy either. It is only worthy to be an object of criticism, condemnation, and complaint. How infantile! And yet how familiar to an old perfectionist like me. If there's a flaw of any kind, I'll be the first one to spot it. But there's no satisfaction in that alone. I've got to let everyone else know about it too. I've been known to take perverse pleasure in pointing out imperfections of all kinds to total strangers, expanding on the lack of good taste and character that it represents, lamenting its very existence, and cursing its audacity for marring my perfect world. But bring me no mirrors, please. I might appear distorted and ugly in them. Well, if I did see such an image, I know it would be the mirror that is imperfect. Know anyone else like me, or am I the only one left in America? Ah, that proud tradition of being a critic-at-large. May all of us critics *put a cork in it!*

Andy tells us that the degree of our unhappiness is the difference between the world as it is, and the world as we think it ought to be. Boy, ain't that the truth! So what should I be doing to change my ways and find happiness? He tells me that I need to let go of my need for perfection. I need to celebrate the world just as it is, and enjoy people just as they are, with all their faults and foibles, bizarre behaviors and crazy desires. Shout with pride about our human diversity, and sing a *Song of Man* as Walt Whitman might have done a century ago. We wax large upon the landscape, and bold across the frontiers. We are as magnificent in our capacity for love and understanding as we are repugnant in our capacity for brutality and ignorance. Between the two, I choose love and understanding

as the measure of my fellow man. I expect it. I demand it. I encourage it. I fan it into full flame where it may be only a glowing ember!

I suppose I ought to refuse any longer to acknowledge that there are flaws in anything, least of all in other people, and most of all in myself. I need to treat life like the Japanese treat their art. In any given art piece, whether paintings or ceramics, Japanese artists embed an intentional flaw. It is a philosophical choice. They believe that perfection is nowhere to be found in life. Art is a reflection and abstraction of life, of reality as we experience it. So, to create an object of art without a flaw is to make a lie of its innate value and beauty. Women have been known to place a fake mole on themselves in a place that draws attention to their most beautiful asset. The flaw reveals the beauty and accentuates it. It doesn't take away from it. When we expect people to be perfect, we are robbing them of their inherent value and beauty.

Our failings are what make us human, and *approachable*. People want to be around someone who is forgiving, understanding, humble, and transparent. When we are confident enough to let down our barriers and expose our weaknesses to others, we are actually at our strongest. It is a powerful leadership skill to let others see you with all your fears, and then let them watch as you overcome your fears in pursuit of your dream. People will be *happy* for you. They'll cheer you on. They'll get behind you, and help you, and duplicate you. Why? Because you chose success over defeat, happiness over unhappiness, and fulfillment over emptiness. You let go of your desire to achieve everything perfectly so that you could at least achieve something *good*. And in God's economy, that's enough.

*Want happiness? Don't expect perfection. Leave that to God.*

## **Depression -**

If you've never been depressed you've never really lived. Without depression you can't grasp the complete exhilaration of being without it. Who, *me* depressed? Oh yeah. I spent my youth with a depressed and schizophrenic mother, and at the same time I worked with my depressed father in the family business. Do I know what it is to be depressed? Mmm-hmmm, you *betcha!* I quickly recognize it in other people, and I'm still terrified of experiencing it again in myself. Why terrified, you ask?

Because depression settles in around me like a warm blanket on a cold and rainy day. It's cozy, and inviting, and ever so subtle. It mesmerizes me into accepting little lies as true. It provides me with reasonable excuses for stepping out of reality for an hour or two - if I can just avoid my responsibilities until I feel better. After all, it's been a really trying day. If I can just sit here for a little while and vege-out, then I can gather my resources to confront what must be done... surely tomorrow is soon enough to do that.

Whoa! Wait a minute! That's procrastination, not depression. No. That's symptom and disease. Call it for what it is. If we're trying to escape reality, avoid confrontation, leave behind our chores, abandon our duty, then we are looking at the Titanic heading for a

little piece of ice floating in a very large ocean. It will destroy us if we don't do something about it. Why don't we just turn the ship? Well, a number of reasons come to mind. Foggy thinking. Complacency. Mis-communication. Over-confidence. Want more? Let's look at how Andy describes it for us.

*Depression is nothing more than a lack of perspective. It is what happens when we get out of balance.* Just that simple.<sup>5</sup> We're focusing on one thing so much that it grows completely out of proportion to reality. We begin to make mountains out of molehills. We over-react to circumstances and people. We let worry dominate us. First our fear throws us into a panic, then it exhausts our energy, and finally it results in frustration, anger, and apathy. Cynicism, like procrastination and apathy, is a symptom of depression. It's the way we express emotional bankruptcy, our belief that nothing can cure what ails us or the world. It is a sense of impending doom and helplessness.

So what's the cure for depression? First and foremost it is *action*, any action at all. Just getting up and moving helps. Cleaning the house, yard, or car is wonderful therapy. If we can just focus on the chore of cleaning, we can forget about the worry and the fear. We want to do familiar chores to reassure ourselves that we're not immobilized. We realize we're OK for the moment. And if we're OK for this moment, then we'll probably be OK for the next moment.

The best thing we can do for depression is to help someone else. That serves two purposes: we're moving, and we're also getting out of ourselves. *Depression equates to withdrawal.* Serving others is the exact opposite of withdrawal. That's what makes serving others the fastest way out of the basement.

What happens next is that we've acquired enough energy to begin asking rational questions about our irrational fears. We break down the issues or obstacles into small manageable parts so we aren't overwhelmed by the totality of it. There are some things we can do now, while other things must wait. Let's tackle what we can do now, and let go of what must be done later.

We ask ourselves, "*What's the worst that could happen?*" We accept that possibility as true. Then we take this thing to its logical conclusion. What then? Is it as bad as that right now? Probably *not*. I'm still alive. I have my faculties, my senses, my arms and legs... So, the difference between what we still have, and what we think we lost, begins to fill a treasure-chest of thanksgiving. We start to count our blessings. With each grateful thought, we climb another step out of our depression basement, and toward balance.

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<sup>5</sup> *Well, yes and no.* There is also pathological depression, which is a physical debilitation of the mind. It is often hereditary, and thankfully treatable *in part* by a number of modern medications. I say "in part" because the chemistry of the brain is changed in those who suffer from this malady. Medication can restore chemical balance for awhile. It is disputed whether the imbalance *causes* the malady, or it is an *effect* of it. I will tell you that professionals on both sides of the dispute acknowledge that when our thought patterns change, the brain's chemistry changes as well. And so, even if you suffer from this affliction, the suggestions made here may be helpful *if* you can get to the point that you are able to practice them. That's where the medication finds its value. It removes the fog long enough to figure out if any of your attitudes, past experiences, or present circumstances might be aggravating your underlying malady, and what steps you can take to lessen their adverse influence on you (i.e. changing how you think about things – your *perspective*).

Next we ask, “*Will this matter five years from now?*” Most things won’t. Some things will. And so we begin to put things in perspective. We weigh the things we’re experiencing against a long-term view of life. What’s really at stake here? Does the fact that my kid made a mess really matter so much that I’m willing to sacrifice my relationship with him or her for a clean house or a proper image? Will losing my wedding ring break up my marriage? I don’t think so. Now we’re getting a grip. One of the most important things we have to remember at this stage, is that we have not been, nor can we be diminished in our value as human beings because of what has happened to us, no matter what it is.

And then we ask, “What can I learn from this?” Probably a lot. I need to believe that. In other words, there is a lot of value in this if I will only search for it, recognize it, and then utilize it. It is not a loss. It is not a waste. It is not a disaster - unless I let it be. Here we go again. *It’s a Choice. A Decision. An Act of Will* to seek out the value in things that appear to have no value, and to expect to find it.

Depression is a sly enemy. It begins in doubt and ends in despair. We need to recognize its symptoms. Once we know the enemy is on the prowl, we can begin the mental and emotional house-cleaning that is necessary to defeat it. We can’t take ourselves or our world too seriously for too long without losing perspective. Lighten up!

## **Laughter –**

I suspect that if you can’t go down to the bank once a year, get a \$100 bill, and burn it while laughing uncontrollably, then you probably suffer from a fatal disease called *paucity*. You think you’ll never have enough, and so you take yourself – and life in general – way too seriously. You need to find a way to prove to yourself that you’re not holding on too tight to the merry-go-round. You need to laugh more.

Laughter makes every burden lighter. It unleashes love for those around you, even complete strangers. It overcomes you with the fragrant mist of forgetfulness. It brings balance and perspective. It dissipates anger and depression, fear and anxiety. What a medicine that can be! Andy points out that laughter cured Norman Cousins of a fatal disease. It reduces the risk of heart attack and increases your lung capacity. It makes your eyes sparkle, and your hands warm. It straightens the back, and smoothes the worry wrinkles in your face.

Now I’m going to give you my theory about what makes things funny. You won’t read this anywhere, but you’ll know it’s true. Ready? For anything to be funny, it has to be dangerous with no chance of actual harm. It’s the fine line between those two that thrills and excites us, and makes us laugh with delight. If there is no danger, there is no humor. And if we aren’t convinced we’re safe, there is no humor either. Let’s see if we can test my theory.

Take a roller coaster ride. If there were no danger, then there’d be no fun in it. A ride that only goes 6 feet off the ground at a foot a minute is just not fun. It’s the speed and the

height that make it exciting. On the other hand, if the ride in front of you derailed, there won't be much fun either. *The fear is too great.* It's the contrast between being threatened while feeling safe that makes things fun and exhilarating.

What have you done in the past month that was fun in that way: exhilarating and yet safe? Have you ridden in a hot air balloon? A glider? Gone kayaking or water-rafting? Skiing or motor-boat riding? What about driving a go-kart or rock-climbing? Why not? How about test-driving a fast sports car, or taking a sailboat out on the lake? Do you play board games with your family or card-games with your friends when there's something at stake? What about sports in the backyard or at a gym and you're keeping score? Risk is as essential to fun as it is to success. What do you do for *fun*?

Fun is what dissipates the intensity in our voice, converting aggressive passion into soothing charisma. A person who knows how to have a good time is a person who can attract a lot of people and keep them as friends. If we can't learn how to laugh easily at a joke or a movie, then we're going to have a very difficult time reaching out to other people. There's nothing to temper the tone of our voice or our spirit, nothing to lighten other people's emotional load.

Try talking for a half hour as if each sentence you speak is going to be the punchline to a great joke. Your eyes will crinkle, your mouth will reveal a smile while you're trying to stay serious, and your voice will become like honey. It's almost like flirting. That sweetness and sense of expectation will permeate everything you say, and make the person you're talking to listen very closely. They won't want to miss the punchline.

Here's what I recommend: watch a movie or two. Any Abbott and Costello or Marx Brothers movie will do. Try 1941 by Spielberg, or It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World, or The Great Race with Tony Curtis. Read almost anything by Patrick F. McManus. His short story "My First Deer" will crack a rib. Then try taking something that happened to you during the past month that really ticked you off, or that embarrassed you, and relate it to somebody else with humor. Keep doing that every day until you become accustomed to finding the humor in everything that happens to you.

Learn how to tell each story in a way that makes somebody smile or laugh - remember the secret to humor: threatening but safe. Timing is everything. Set it up, create the expectation, then trip the lever. It takes practice, just like most things in life. This will become a life-skill, something of immense long-term value. See if life doesn't begin to look a whole lot better to you, and people don't become a whole lot friendlier toward you. Enjoy life! Tickle your funny bone. The high may be addictive, but at least it's free - and all the side effects are beneficial.

## **Gravity –**

Today we begin Part 3 of *Being Happy*. In Part 1 we found out that we are creatures of habit, and that we have acquired patterns of behavior over the course of our life. In Part 2 we studied the external aspects of happiness: how we are influenced by other people, and

by our circumstances. In Part 3 we're going to study the internal aspects of happiness: what goes on in our head. This is the toughest obstacle to being happy, because the only thing that prevents our happiness is our thoughts. We need to control them, direct them, and master them. That's a tall order. So we're going to begin with the *Law of Gravity*.

I used to tell my kids that it didn't matter how much they disliked falling down, the Law of Gravity wasn't going to change. What is the Law of Gravity? It is the force by which one object attracts another in direct proportion to the mass of each object. So big objects with lots of mass, attract smaller objects to themselves. The larger the mass, the faster the attraction. What's that got to do with thoughts? OK, here's the rule:

[We tend to gravitate in the direction of our dominant thoughts.](#)

In other words, the things we think about most have the most weight in our mind. They guide all other thoughts and actions in their own direction until they align and become consistent with each other. We move in the direction of what we think about most. We direct our activities to match our thoughts. *Now think about the implications of that.* By changing what I continually think about, I can automatically change my behavior to match those thoughts. Wow!

[“The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart.”](#) (Mt. 12:34) Here's the fun part: there is a dynamic interplay between thoughts and speech. What I think about affects what I say. But what I say also affects what I think about. It's the power of self-persuasion. So what I say very powerfully influences my behavior, my success, and my happiness. Remember your mother telling you to “think happy thoughts?” Turns out she was right!

Here's the bottom line rule of thought control: [Always speak what you want, not what you don't want.](#) You get what you say, so say what you want. Here's the catch: the mind works on *pictures*, not on words. Whatever *picture* I put in my mind is what inevitably occurs. The id, the subconscious mind, ignores negating words like “don't” and focuses on the image instead. If I say to myself “I don't want a speeding ticket,” the image in my mind is of a cop handing me a ticket. I can't mentally put a line through the image. A speeding ticket is what I'll get because I will do whatever is necessary to realize the image created by my dominant thoughts.

For that reason, I want to become a creative artist and to see in my mind's eye what does not yet exist in my world. The pictures I want to paint in my head, that will dominate my thinking, are my dreams and aspirations. If I let doubt creep in, and I refuse to think about or speak about my dreams, and I think that somehow, some way, they are going to happen on their own, I am sadly mistaken. *Dreams are not fragile things that evaporate if I whisper them.* They are seeds that root themselves in the soil of my mind. They grow bigger and become stronger every time I repeat them.

Napoleon Hill once wrote, “*Whatever I conceive and believe I can achieve.*”<sup>6</sup> Once I carry those images about with me, and I can call them up at will, my behavior will begin to change, my appearance will begin to change, confidence will consume me, people will respond to me and opportunity will arise for me in a way that is consistent with those images. I will achieve in reality what previously existed only in my mind. The mind is a powerful thing to waste. Grab a crayon and start coloring your world.

## **Goals and the Subconscious -**

Recall the law of gravity: *we tend to gravitate in the direction of our dominant thoughts.* Whatever we think about most, whether good or bad, is where we end up dedicating our activities and our energy. Therefore, what we think about most determines our outcomes. During Christmas season, one of two things happens in our minds. We either get really busy and excited, or else we stop doing and we become depressed. Don't be disappointed if you have trouble engaging people in conversation about their future during the Christmas rush. They're waaay too absorbed in figuring out how to pay for the present. Hopefully that doesn't describe us as well.

What we want to do all year long is to maintain balance, to live only in the present without worrying about the past or the future. That's how we get to enjoy life - by living today for today's sake. It's always the most important day of the year. To live in the present, we need to train our subconscious to do that; we need to program it. We know a number of things about the subconscious mind.

*The most valuable thing* we know is that whatever the subconscious mind believes internally is what we attract in life externally. *The next thing* we know is that it is a very literal organ. It cannot distinguish truth from fiction. It believes whatever it is told as fact. *Third*, we know that its activities and its focus are the result of habits we intentionally create with our conscious mind or with our emotions. These become “programs” that play automatically when we trigger them. Once the habits are established, the conscious mind is free to pursue other interests. That's a huge benefit that saves us lots of emotional and mental energy... as long as the habits we build into our subconscious mind are *good* ones and not *destructive* ones.

Good habits are those which move us in the direction of our burning desire, our dream, our mission in life. That mission has short-range, mid-range, and long-range goals that we need to achieve if we are going to finally realize our burning desire. Bad habits are those which detour us on the path to our goals, delaying us or keeping us from reaching them altogether. So right here we see that we need to define our burning desire, that inner flame that can't be blown out no matter what obstacles it encounters. And we see that we need to set goals to attain that desire and make it a reality. Anything that moves us in the

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<sup>6</sup> This is often quoted by those who would reshape the world in their own image. The principle is actually an outworking of Mat. 17:20. *Please* don't confuse it with the name-it-and-claim-it nonsense that leads to magical incantations. We're not trying to make an external reality of our inner thoughts and will, as if we were God. We're simply trying to ensure that the way we think, speak, and behave, actually reflects the truth of God. We want to stop lying to ourselves (or listening to Satan) about our worth in God's sight. We're renewing our minds as commanded in Rom 12:1-3; we're not practicing divination. We are striving to evidence our confidence in God, not in ourselves.

direction of our goals we make a priority. Anything that is neutral or that deters us from our goals we get rid of, or we minimize it in our daily activities.

*Here's the first challenge.* Our subconscious mind is automated. It runs previously defined programs. Those programs are triggered by external events or internal emotions. We need to make a *conscious* effort to determine whether a program (a habit of thought or action) moves us in the direction of our goals, or moves us away from them. Once we make that determination, we encounter *the second challenge: we cannot erase a program.* All subconscious programs are permanent. We can only create new programs, new habits of thinking and acting, which will replace previously created programs in their order of priority and execution. We want new programs to trigger before the old ones do.

What we'll talk about tomorrow is how to assign a higher priority to the new programs we are creating: programs that move us in the direction of our goals and dreams.

## **Imagination and Self-image –**

Yesterday we discovered that how we think about things creates programs in our subconscious mind. Those programs process the information we receive from our world to determine how we should respond to that information. Programs form a framework of interpretation. The interpretation is very simple: each program assigns a value of good, bad, or indifferent to everything we experience within the scope of that program. There are food programs, relational programs, visual programs, music programs, physical programs, learning programs, analytical programs, etc. They are mostly learned. Some are built-in to ensure survival, like not petting wild animals that are bigger than we are.

Whichever program has been triggered, the subconscious mind seeks to affirm its prior experiences, and for the most part those prior experiences define its self-image. It wants to know if its self-image is safe or threatened. Familiar is safe. Unfamiliar is threatening. Safe is good. Threatening is bad. That's why we hate change. So if we taste new and unfamiliar food, we think it is good if it is familiar ("it tastes like chicken"), or it is awful if it doesn't ("tastes like road-kill" - as if we knew what that tasted like). If we're at a party and we don't know anybody, and we don't like meeting new people (based on past embarrassments), then we won't enjoy the party. But if we like the opportunity to meet new people and learn new things about them (based on past encouragements), then we thoroughly enjoy the party. The food and the circumstances were the same in each instance. But our self-image, which is based on our past experiences (i.e. our programs), determined our pleasure and joy under the circumstances. It seems our past experience tends to control our present responses, whether good or bad.

So how do we change our responses? How do we become confident when we're uncertain? How do we become outgoing when we're introverted? We can't change our past. And we can't erase our programs. **But we can change our self-image.** It's surprisingly simple to do. We have our conscious mind tell our subconscious mind a story. We paint it a picture. It doesn't know that the story is currently unfulfilled, or that the picture is in our future. It simply accepts the story and the picture as current facts,

because the subconscious always lives in the present. It then proceeds to interpret its circumstances and experiences in a way that affirms both the story and the picture. I said we'd talk about how to construct new programs and assign them a higher priority so they don't give old programs a chance to trigger. All it takes is a little imagination... and a lot of belief.

When we were children we had huge imaginations, capable of inventing whole worlds and universes populated with wonderful creatures and landscapes. I used to look into the puddles after a rain and see a whole other world down below when it was only the reflection of the sky and clouds above. The puddle became a portal to another place as I looked at it; I wanted to go there and fly. I used to lie on my back and look at the ceiling and imagine myself walking on it and stepping over the top of the doorway into the next room. When we want it bad enough, the things we imagine take on an air of reality. As children, that made our parents very nervous. They wanted us to be able to distinguish real from fantasy. And so we learned to tame our imaginations until only reality was left. What a shame. What a crime! Imagination improves our memory, sharpens our problem-solving, and enables us to relax by putting us in a place beyond reality.

Visualization is the ability to see what does not yet exist as if it were already here. That creative capacity is the very image and power of God. If we believe in our dream, then we will enlist all of our resources, all of our energy, our ambition, and our will, to ensure that it comes true. The subconscious mind will draw to itself every opportunity, every instrumentality, and every tool necessary to make it happen. But if we suspect our dream is only a fantasy, then the program our parents wrote for us will trigger instead, and we will never realize our dream. We will settle for what is instead of what could be.

That's not acceptable for anyone who wants to succeed in life. So ***to over-ride the old program and trigger the new one***, we speak what we want, not what we have. In speaking it, we tell the story and we paint the picture of the world we want to live in, and the person we want to be.<sup>7</sup> The subconscious mind is bound to accept them as fact and to affirm them in reality. We become what we think (and who we were meant to be). The best news is that our imagination can be exercised and strengthened over time.

What stories do you tell yourself? What pictures do you paint for yourself? Do you tell yourself that you're lazy, withdrawn, and incompetent, or that you're ambitious, outgoing, and skilled? Do you paint a picture of yourself as thin or fat? boring or entertaining? stupid or smart?

*Whatever you think you are, you are. Whatever you think you're not, you're not. If you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.*

Imagine yourself and your world as you want them to be, and that's what you and your world will become for you – but only if you believe it.

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<sup>7</sup> This applies as well, and more importantly, to being conformed to the "image" of Christ. (Rom 8:29) Hence we want to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2Pet 3:18