

***“We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life.” ~John Lennon***

In my own journey to become a better man, a good man, I was once clued in by a close friend that I must learn to love myself first. This loving yourself concept is something I have heard all of all my life but honestly, I never have had an idea of what it means, how it works, or how to obtain it. I am certainly not alone. Just look around at the world around you.

My whole life, I have not really liked or approved of myself. I have always been ashamed of how I look, the things I say, and actions I take. I even have always been horrified at the thoughts that run through my head at times. Mixed in with the good and well-intentioned thoughts, I also have the judgmental and mean thoughts, too. We all do. Not to be rude, but you are lying if you deny that. It is human nature.

How do you learn or come to loving yourself? What does it mean to love yourself? How will your life be better by loving yourself?

If you Google this concept, you will find tons of answers. They all sound great and they are promising. I looked up “What does it mean to love yourself?” and most of the results were varied and somewhat helpful. Actually, the results are not as helpful as they are hopeful.

I do not think that there is one answer to loving yourself, nor do I believe that there is a nice planned out course of action to reach that point in your life. I really don't know how I have been doing it myself. I simply set a goal to be a good man, studied externally and internally what character traits I wanted to reach, then began my journey. I was fortunate enough to have a friend that encouraged and supported me. I began feeling that I had value, was deserving of better, and importantly, I started realizing I have been suppressing my own self. I was missing out on so much joy because I was not allowing myself to be the real me. That guy was buried and hidden for so long.

How then? Start with forgiving yourself. Forgive yourself for the smallest things, too. For example, you say or think something that you don't like, hurts someone, or isn't truthful. It is out there and cannot be taken back. Accept the consequences humbly and forgive yourself. That releases you from carrying the mistake and you can move on. If you do not understand the concept of forgiveness, I strongly suggest you make that a priority to learn it about first.

Another way to help you move forward loving yourself is to set boundaries. Establish the areas of your life, your beliefs, and the tenants you want to live by and then set limits. Choose where you draw the line. Do not create these as militarized zones where you become defensive, absolute or isolated. The key is to stand by your principles but those boundaries should not be excluding. Being firm while also being empathetic, ethical and compassionate is mandatory.

For me, being a good man means being representative of my values and limits, but simultaneously being a beacon. That is easier said than done. You need to demonstrate those values so that others can not only respect them, but they just might see the value of having them also. The result is helping change lives for the better. Of course, you also feel your own value and love yourself a little more. See where I am going?

Loving yourself means you are valuing yourself. You begin feeling you matter. You become more confident and comfortable with yourself, and in turn, those around you. There is a point you will be finding that your confidence and self acceptance will be shining on people around you. They will look at you differently in a positive view. Many will long to be around you because of the great vibe you have

that's making them feel better. It is a contagious thing. In fact, the further you advance in loving yourself, the more you grow.

The last question I proposed was "How will your life be better by loving yourself?"

I would be lying if I said your life would be peaches and cream just from loving yourself. My life has taken some very big hits since starting my journey. God has pushed me to extremes testing my faith and resolve. I cannot say my life is better based on the circumstances of the last few months. But I did grow enough to withstand my challenges. Not without fail I admit, but I was and am stronger than I realized. Because I learned to love myself, to see my value and I kept up my values and boundaries, I am going to be ok. So, in essence and in a weird way, my life is better because I love myself. Granted, I am still working on that process and I think it is a lifelong and ongoing one.

Despite the darkest times of my life recently, I never lost sight, or even questioned, my resolve to love and aid others. I have a mission and it is to never give up on love. That means I never stopped helping and praying for others. If I did not love myself, I would not have had the clarity or mind or ability to be there for others. For me, I felt good about myself at the end of the day and stronger. The truth is that your life will be better in every aspect, and this world will benefit, too.

Taken from the Bible, I paraphrased Psalm 37:23 on a sheet of paper over my computer. It is how god defines a good man. It is the foundation for loving yourself.

A good man does not allow himself to be led by circumstances, other people, or even his own feelings. He allows God to be in control of his life.

Don't give up on love.