



Rapha's Step Studies for Overcoming Sexual Addiction

STEP 7

**We humbly ask God to renew our minds
so that our sinful patterns can be transformed
into patterns of righteousness.**

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,
that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:2*

FALSE BELIEFS

If what we believe about ourselves is founded on the truth of God's Word, we are likely to have a positive sense of self-esteem. However, as we mentioned in Step 2, Satan has deceived most of mankind by convincing us that:

OUR SELF-WORTH = PERFORMANCE + OTHERS' OPINIONS

The four false beliefs we included there serve as a summary of the many lies Satan tells us. These beliefs are listed again below. To what extent are you affected by them? Estimate the percentage which you think indicates how much you live by each belief, from zero to 100 percent:

- _____ % I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself
- _____ % I must have the approval of certain others (boss, friends, parents) to approve of myself. If I don't have their approval, I can't feel good about myself.
- _____ % Those who fail are unworthy of love, and deserve to be blamed or condemned.
- _____ % I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless. In other words, I am the sum total of all my past successes and failures, and I'll never be significantly different.

We will now examine these false beliefs with God's solution for each one:



THE PERFORMANCE TRAP

If we believe that our self-worth is based on our success, we will try to avoid failure at all costs. Most of us have become experts at avoiding failure. We attempt only those things in which we are confident of success. We avoid those activities where the risk of failure is too great. We spend time around those who are not a threat to us. We avoid people who, either by their greater success or by their disapproval of us, make us feel like failures. We have trained ourselves very well!

Another consequence of having to meet certain standards in order to feel good about ourselves is a rules- dominated life. Many of us know people who have a set of rules for everything, and who always place their attention on their performance. However, the focus of the gospel is on relationships, not regulations. Christ's exercise of His lordship in our lives is dependent on our attending to His moment-by-moment instruction. Focusing only on rules will relegate our lives to the prison of self-examination.

On the other hand, we may be feeling very good about ourselves because we are winning the performance game. We may be so talented that we are reaching virtually every goal we have set for ourselves. We can't afford to mistake this pride for positive self-worth. We must realize that God is able to bring about whatever circumstances are necessary to cause us to stop trusting in ourselves. God intends to bring us to Himself through prayer and the study of His Word so that we can know, love, and serve Him. Sometimes, He will allow us to fail miserably so that we will look to Him instead of to ourselves for our security and significance. Before becoming upset that God would allow you to experience failure, remember that any life less than God intended is a second-class existence. He loves you too much to let you continue to obtain your self-esteem from the empty promise of success.

GOD'S ANSWER: JUSTIFICATION

As a result of Christ's death on the cross, our sins are forgiven and God has imputed Christ's righteousness to us. We have been justified by Christ. Therefore, we are fully pleasing to God.

1. Read Romans 3:19-28; 4:4-5; 5:1-11. What does it mean to be justified?
2. Read Romans 3:9-23; 5:6--10; and Ephesians 2:1-3. Why did you need to be justified and have Christ's righteousness attributed to you? Describe God's view of you before your justification:
3. How does being justified and having Christ's righteousness lead you to the conclusion: I am completely forgiven by God, and am fully pleasing to Him?



APPROVAL ADDICT

Living by the false belief: *I must be approved by certain others to feel good about myself*, causes us to continually fear rejection, and conform virtually all of our attitudes and actions to the expectations of others. How are you affected by this belief?

For whatever reason and to whatever degree we have experienced rejection, our fear of going through that pain again can affect us profoundly. We learn how to deal with physical injury early in life, but because emotional pain is sometimes perceived as a sign of weakness, and because we have not learned how to respond appropriately to this pain, we avoid it. If we are hurt, we may attempt to deny our pain by ignoring it. We may drive ourselves to accomplish tasks which we think others will approve of. Some of us can't say no for this reason. Or, we may become passive, withdrawing from others and avoiding those decisions and activities which others might criticize, or which can't guarantee success for us. Our goal in these instances is usually to avoid the pain of rejection by not doing anything which might be objectionable, but this also prevents us from enjoying the pleasures of healthy relationships and achievements.

Other behaviors related to the fear of rejection include:

1. being easily manipulated
2. defensiveness
3. superficial relationships
4. shyness
5. exaggerating or minimizing the truth to impress people
6. being hypersensitive to criticism
7. hostility toward others who disagree with us
8. nervous breakdown
9. passivity

Evaluating our self-worth by what we and others think of our performance leads us to believe that any time our performance is unacceptable, we are unacceptable as well. To some extent, virtually all of us have internalized the following sentence into our belief system, and hold to it with amazing tenacity: *I must have acceptance, respect, and approval in order to have self-worth*. This is the basic false belief behind all peer pressure.

Be willing to ask, *What am I trying to accomplish?* in your interaction with others, and strive to communicate genuine, heartfelt appreciation because Christ has given them worth by sacrificing His life for them.

There are four basic levels of acceptance and rejection. Understanding these will help you understand the nature of your relationships with other people, concerning both how you are treated and how you treat them. These levels center around the question: *What does one have to do to be accepted?* These levels are:



1. *Total Rejection*: "No matter what you do, it's not good enough." Example: relationships characterized by deep bitterness or hurt.
2. *Highly Conditional Acceptance*: "You must meet certain requirements to be accepted." Examples: most jobs, relationships with demanding people.
3. *Mildly Conditional Acceptance*: "I will be more happy with you if you do these things." Examples: most marriages, most parent-child relationships, most friendships.
4. *Unconditional Acceptance*: "I love you and accept you no matter what you do. There is nothing you can do that can make me stop loving you." (This does not mean that we can do as we please or that we are to ignore unacceptable behavior in others. Unconditional acceptance may include loving confrontation, correction, and, in some cases, discipline. The focus here is on the individual rather than his or her behavior.) Examples: God, and typically, relationships in which one person's needs are not dependent on the other's.

GOD'S ANSWER: RECONCILIATION

God's answer to the pain of rejection is reconciliation. Christ died for our sins and restored us to a proper relationship with God. We are both acceptable to Him and accepted by Him. We are not rejected! We are His.

1. Read Colossians 1:21-22. Compare your former state to your present condition in Christ:
2. Read Romans 5:8-11. Who initiated restoring your relationship with God?
 - How did God reconcile you to Himself?
 - What is your response to God? (What does it mean to exult?)

What should we do when we have failed or when someone disapproves of us? A practical way of summarizing the truth we've examined is:

It would be nice if _____ (my boss liked me, I could fix the refrigerator, my complexion were clear, James had picked me upon time, or...), but I'm still deeply loved, completely forgiven, fully pleasing, totally accepted, and complete in Christ.



This statement doesn't mean that we won't feel pain or anger. We need to be honest about our feelings. A statement like the one above is simply a quick way to gain God's perspective on whatever we are experiencing. It is not magic, but it enables us to reflect on the implications of biblical truth. We can apply this truth in every difficult situation, whether it involves someone's disapproval, our own failure to accomplish something, or the failure of another person. Memorize the truth in the above statement and begin to apply it in your situations and relationships.

THE BLAME GAME

This false belief: *Those who fail (including myself are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished*, is at the root of our fear of punishment and our propensity to punish others. How deeply are you affected by this lie?

The proof of blame's effectiveness is that we use it so often. We often believe that we deserve to be blamed for any significant shortcoming, and think self-inflicted punishment will clear us of guilt and enable us to feel good about ourselves again. Why?

We have been conditioned to accept personal blame or condemnation every time our performance is unsatisfactory. After reading this, some people immediately recognize this automatic response in their lives, but others do not. You may think that you are not affected by this false belief at all-but you probably are. Do you generally have an urge to find out who is at fault when something fails? Do you look for excuses when you fail?

Rather than evaluating our problems objectively, most of us tend to defend ourselves. Counterattack triggers counterattack. The more we criticize other people, the more defensive they usually get, and the less likely they are to admit their errors (especially to us). Criticism can lead to a counterattack from both sides, and pretty soon, it's like a volleyball game, with each person intensifying the pace while returning blame to the other person's side.

However, it is sometimes even more destructive for people to accept blame without defending themselves. Tom was becoming an emotional zombie under his wife's incessant condemnation, but instead of fighting back, he kept thinking, Yes, Suzanne's right. I am an incompetent fool. He was like the worn-out punching bag of a heavyweight fighter.

Both self-inflicted punishment and the compulsion to punish others result from the false belief: *Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be blamed and condemned*.



GOD'S ANSWER: PROPITIATION

At the cross, God poured out His wrath against sin. This exercise will help you see that God's wrath has been satisfied; therefore, we have no need to fear punishment.

1. Read 1 John 4:9-10.

- Are you loved by the Father?
- How do you know you are loved?
- Do you feel loved?

God loves you, and He enjoys revealing His love to you. He enjoys being loved by you, but He knows you can love Him only if you are experiencing His love for you. Propitiation means that His wrath has been removed and that you are deeply loved!

Many of us have a distorted concept of the heavenly Father. We believe that God is thrilled when we accept Christ and are born into His family. But many of us also believe that He is proud of us for only as long as we perform well, and that the better our performance, the happier He is with us.

In reality, God loves us, and not a moment goes by that He isn't thinking loving thoughts about us (Psalms 40:5). We are His children, and we are individually special to Him because of Christ! Propitiation, then, means that Jesus Christ has satisfied the Father's righteous condemnation of sin by His death. The Scriptures give only one reason to explain this incredible fact: God loves you!



SHAME

When we base our self-worth on past failures, dissatisfaction with personal appearance, or bad habits, we often develop a fourth false belief: *I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.* This lie binds people to the hopeless pessimism associated with poor self-esteem.

If we base our self-worth on our performance long enough, our past behavior will eventually become the sole basis of our worth. We will see ourselves with certain character qualities and flaws because that's the way we have always been. We then have unconsciously incorporated Satan's lie into our belief system: *I must always be what I have been, and live with whatever self-worth I have, because that's just me.* Interestingly, we claim only our poor behavior as *That's just me.* We never hear anyone saying, "That's just me. I'm so wonderful, honest, and bright."

Another aspect of a poor self-concept relates to personal appearance. Most of us have some aspect of our appearance that we wish we could change, but much about our appearance can't really be altered. We may not only base our self-worth on our appearance, but may tend to base our acceptance of others on their appearance, even the color of their skin. We may never be any more cruel than when we accept or reject others based on their appearance.

If we insist on valuing our worth by our appearance and performance, sooner or later God will graciously allow us to see the futility of that struggle. God created our need for a sense of significance. However, He knows we will never come to Him until we find the importance of people's opinions to be empty and hopeless. At that point, we can turn to Him and find comfort and encouragement in the truths of His Word.

GOD'S ANSWER: REGENERATION

This exercise will help you see yourself as a new creature in Christ, with new potential and new capacities. The truth that you have been made new in Christ will enable you to develop a strong, positive self-esteem in spite of "flaws" in your appearance or past failures.

■ Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

- Define regeneration:



- What does your having been made a new creature mean to you?
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- Read Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. What process do you need to complete in order to experience your new self?

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