

## Chapter Two

# Dirty Mirrors

*“Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything.”*

*Pablo Casals*

You may be asking this question right now: if knowing my true value is that important, how in the world do I find out what it is? Let me ask you some questions. What do you think you are worth? What is your value right now? How have you determined your value in the past? We know that if you were totally broken down to just the chemicals that are in your body, you would not be worth much more than \$100. Obviously, there is a lot more to you than just your chemical make-up. Your capability, your intelligence, and your character all play a role in what you feel you are worth.

Recently, I sat with a friend who was fixing my iPhone. (I dropped it and smashed the glass, again.) I watched him take it apart and put it back together, and it was fascinating. On the way home, I was thinking about how incredible that phone is and what detailed work was done in order to make it so functional. Then, I started thinking about the human body. Human bodies are unbelievably put together. When you investigate how all the intricate details come together, it is remarkable. We are capable of doing such incredible things that, if you really think about it, it can blow your mind.

Think about how far we’ve come in building artificial limbs. We can now give injured people such as veterans a new arm or a new leg. Still, no matter how much technology and brainpower goes into this limb, it is never as functional as your biological parts. In other words, to try to duplicate what your fingers can do would cost millions of dollars, and the mechanical fingers would still not be as functional as what you have been given. You are amazing! The word “intrinsic” means something that is built in. It’s already there. You are going to see the word “intrinsic” often in this book because your value is like that. It is intrinsic. You were born with it. It is set. You are like a piece of pure gold. You can’t do anything to pure gold to add to its value; it has very high intrinsic value. It’s the same with you. You have value no matter what you have done to yourself, or any mistakes you have made, or how

tarnished you think you are. People can say you don't have value. You may even feel like you don't have value, but it doesn't matter. Your value is built in.

**If that is really true, then why are there so many people in our world that don't think they are worth much?**

After I spoke at a school in Iowa one day, a senior girl wanted to chat with me. She explained that she didn't see much value in herself, but when I was talking about dreams and not giving up on them, and I explained the difference between social value and intrinsic value, she began to see that she really did have value. We talked for about thirty minutes, and right before I got up to leave, she reached into her purse and gave me a dirty, cracked mirror. She explained that it had been in her purse since she was a freshman. She told me that the smudging on the mirror would never let her get a true image of herself, and that was the way she saw herself: dirty, broken, and incomplete. She wanted me to have it because it represented the old way in which she looked at herself, and she was going to start to see herself with value.

**Some people end up choosing the life they think they deserve.**

I hope she takes it seriously, because not-so-good things happen to people when they don't value themselves. When people don't feel valuable, they don't act valuable. A very important principle when it comes to value is that you have to abandon your feelings just like a pilot has to abandon his or her feelings when flying in a small plane. John F. Kennedy, Jr. crashed his plane on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999, killing himself, his wife, and her sister. Without going into too much detail, there was much speculation on how this could have happened. There were reports on the news that he was not trained on his instruments, so when it got dark, and he was flying through clouds, he got disoriented. A couple of weeks after his crash, I was flying somewhere on a commercial airline. There was a pilot sitting next to me, so I asked him what he thought happened. "Was he not trained on his instruments?" I asked. He said, "you can't have a pilot's license without being trained on your instruments. The problem comes when you don't believe the truth of your instruments." He said there are times that you will be flying, and you get so disoriented that you will swear that you are flying upside down. You're not upside down, but because of inertia, the speed of the aircraft, and the fact that you can't see anything, you can feel like you are. So instead of trusting your instruments, you rely on your feelings. You start to make little adjustments based on how you feel." He said that they call it a death spiral. You keep making little adjustments according to how you feel until you basically corkscrew the aircraft right to the ground.

I think the problem for a lot of us comes when we don't believe the truth of our own value. We don't feel valuable so we make small and sometimes big adjustments according to how we feel about ourselves instead of trusting the truth of our true intrinsic value.

I have looked in the eyes of so many teenagers that have told me with tears streaming down their faces about some bad choice having to do with drugs, alcohol, relationships, cutting, or even attempting suicide based on how they were feeling about themselves at the time. They made little adjustments based on their feelings that started a downward spiral.

I was standing around one day with a bunch of college students, and one of the girls suddenly asked, "Why do I always attract bad guys?" Apparently, she had a string of horrible boyfriends that treated her very badly, and she was seeing a pattern and blaming it on herself. My friends that were standing there were trying to be nice to her, so they said stuff like, "It's not you," "most guys are jerks," "you will meet your prince charming someday," etc. I said, "No, your first instinct was right, it's you." She said, "You don't even know me." I said, "I don't need to know you to answer that question. You attract what you respect. If you don't respect yourself, you automatically attract people who don't respect you, and you repel those that would treat you with respect. The opposite is true as well. If you respect yourself, you will automatically attract people who respect you and repel those that wish to treat you badly. It's that simple." People tend to follow your lead when it comes to your self-worth. So, the answer to happiness is not finding the right person that will finally treat you the way you deserve, it is in treating yourself that way first, which will attract the right kind of friends and even a potential quality partner for your life. Do you see how low self-worth tricks you into doing things that you wouldn't ordinarily do?

**I can't stress enough that you must abandon your feelings and search very hard for the truth of your intrinsic value!**

In many of my presentations, I ask teenagers to raise their hands if they have a dream for their lives. It never fails; most of the room will raise their hands. What I'm really asking them is, "Do you see value in who you are deep down, value enough to dream and dare to believe that your life and future matter?" We all want to believe that we are worth a lot, but things happen in our lives that can diminish what we think we are worth. I didn't say that the negative events diminish our worth; I said things happen to diminish what **we think** we are worth. It is very important that you see the difference.

Have you heard the phrase, "perception is reality"? What that means is that whatever you think something is, that's what is in your mind. You could be dead wrong, but to you it's right, because it's your reality. For years, people thought the earth was flat—that was their perception. They saw it that way in their minds, so they acted accordingly. Sailors would be afraid to go long distances for fear that they would fall off the face of the earth. That sounds crazy, but that was their perception, until someone came along and proved that the earth was round. Value is the same way. You are incredibly valuable. That is a fact, just like "the earth is round." If your

perception is that you are not valuable, then you won't see yourself that way, and to you, you are not valuable.

**When you don't feel valuable, you don't act valuable, and people don't treat you like you have value. Slowly, the lie takes root. It is a vicious cycle.**

Let me give you another example. Let's say I had a penny in my pocket. Generally, most of us don't really value pennies. In fact, I just see them as a pain in the neck. I hate when I have a bunch of pennies in my pocket. What if, all of a sudden, I learned that the penny that I had in my pocket was very rare and worth \$10,000? Well, that changes everything. I am going to treat that penny with great care. The first thing I'm going to do is to take it out of my pocket and put it somewhere very safe.

**My behavior toward that penny would change drastically, because now I know its true value.**

My perception changed. One of my goals for this book is to help you make the discovery that you have incredible intrinsic value. When you realize that, it changes the way you treat yourself. It also changes the way you allow people to treat you.

**At one point in your life, you knew you had incredible value.**

Think about it. You had to learn to be unvalued. When you were little, it was all about you. You were fed, bathed, played with, and taken care of at such an intense level that you couldn't help but feel valued. Your first steps, your first words—your first everything—was celebrated and most likely documented with pictures or video, or both. The world revolved around you. As we get older, things begin to happen that chip away at our self-esteem. We make mistakes. We get compared to others. We see limitations. We get labeled and pigeonholed into certain stereotypes. We get neglected and minimized by people that should care. We used to feel invincible and capable of anything, but that feeling gets replaced with feelings of self-doubt and worthlessness.

It used to frustrate me to hear motivational speakers say things like, "Whatever you think you are, you are." We have all heard the principle that what we think determines our destiny. In some ways, I agree with that, but the motivational speakers always stop there. They don't go into how you change thought patterns. I'm not a psychologist, but I know that if you have a pattern of thinking negatively about yourself, you don't change it by just deciding one day to think differently. There must be a motivation behind changing the way you think. You must unlearn some very deep things that got into your head in the first place.

**If you learned to be devalued, then you can unlearn it.**

Let's go back to when you were little and thought the world revolved around you. You felt valued. Most babies and toddlers are very in touch with their intrinsic value because of the attention they receive on a daily basis. If we were going to put you on a scale from 1 to 10, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that most of you, when you were very young, knew you were loved and valued. You knew you were a 10. As we get older, our self-worth begins to take hits because of certain events in our lives. Neglect or abuse occurs, and the people that should be confirming our worth, in some cases, have diminished our value because those people hold power in our lives. (We will discuss this further in the next chapter.)

**We must figure out exactly what happened to give you the perception that you are not a 10 at this very moment.**

If you feel like a 10 right now, then you can just put this book down. But if you don't, you owe it to yourself to do the work to help you raise the value of your own life in your own eyes. (It's already there; you just don't see it.) In the next few chapters, we will discuss six ways that you may have learned to devalue yourself: the source of self-worth, the social government, the power of words, the power of comparing ourselves, the power of failure, and the power of abuse. Before we get into that, let's look at what you really think about yourself.

**Answer these questions about yourself:**

Which of these groups of statements best describes how you feel about yourself? Write a short paragraph about why you chose that group of statements.

1. I don't like myself. I see very little value in my life. I get very irritated with people who act like they are better than me.
2. I don't like a lot of who I am, but there are some things I know are good. I often compare myself to others.
3. I feel okay about my life. I'm not really happy. I have some doubts about my worth. I feel like most people are better than me.
4. I know I'm not perfect, but I'm aware of my strengths. I see value in my life. I get along with most people.
5. I have a healthy perspective about who I am. I like my life and where I am going. I'm healthy enough not to be threatened by other people's differences because I'm comfortable with who I am. I like most people.