



# **Defining Your Own Worth**

## **Defining Self-Worth**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**This article explores the difference between defining your self-worth externally or internally.**

### **Who and What Defines Your Worth and Lovability?**

Do you define your worth externally, through others' approval of your looks and performance? Does your weight, your hair, your money, your job, your car, your clothes, your house, your mate, or the people you know define your worth?

The wounded self is the part of us that is externally defined. When we are operating from our wounded self, we are constantly trying to look right and perform right, in order to get others to like us, love us or approve of us. The wounded part of us feels worthy only when receiving validation from others.

This creates much anxiety. We feel unsafe when our whole sense of worth hinges upon having control over getting others' approval. We may even feel panicked when we fear making mistakes and running the risk of disapproval and rejection. We may find ourselves judging ourselves in our effort to get ourselves to look "right" or do things "right".

The wounded self believes we can have control over how others see us and feel about us. Therefore, according to the wounded self, if someone doesn't like us, it must be our fault: "Did I say something wrong?" "What did I do wrong?" Believing it is our fault gives the wounded self a sense of power and control: "If it is my fault that someone doesn't like me or rejects me, then I just have to figure out how to do it right, and then I can have control over how others feel about me."

### **Core Shame**

Core shame comes from the false belief that there is something intrinsically wrong with you - that you are inherently bad, wrong, defective, flawed, unimportant, unworthy, inadequate. As small children, if we didn't get the love we needed, we may have concluded that it was our fault, rather than recognize our parents' inability to love us in the way we needed to be loved. If we had recognized our parents' woundedness and limitations, we would have felt crushingly

helpless over getting the love we needed. Instead, most of us chose to try to have control over getting the love we needed, and over avoiding the rejection (or abuse) we feared. The only way we could feel this sense of control, was to believe that their behavior was our fault.

We concluded that, since their lack of love was our fault, we must have been somehow defective. Accordingly, we needed to believe in our own inherent defectiveness, in order to feel a sense of control over our parents' behavior.

The problem is, we forgot that we actually chose to believe in our core shame; many of us now operate out of our core shame as if it is who we are. When we believe we are inherently defective, we then have to hide our real self, our essence, and try to become what we think we need to be, to be acceptable. The wounded self takes over and loses touch with our core Self - who we really are. We are stuck defining ourselves through our looks and performance, and we are stuck suffering the anxiety that comes from being so vulnerable to others' disapproval.

### **Defining Self Through the Eyes of Spirit**

When we move into the intent to learn, one of the things we need to learn about is who we really are. However, we can't know this through our mind's eyes - the eyes of our wounded self who is filled with false beliefs. We can know who we truly are only through the eyes of Truth, the eyes of Spirit.

When we look at ourselves through the eyes of Truth, we can begin to move beyond defining our worth externally, and learn to see who we are internally.

Think for a moment about what you really value in others. Do you value a fancy car over kindness and caring? If you had a choice between two friends - one who was good looking, wealthy, closed and sometimes mean, and the other, who was plainer, not as rich, but open, loving and kind - who would you pick? Whenever I've asked people this question, no one has ever said, "Oh, I would pick the meaner one." In others, we often value honesty, kindness, generosity, compassion, understanding, empathy, vitality, humor, acceptance and so on. Yet many of us rarely define our own worth by these qualities.

Defining yourself internally means opening to learning about your core Self. Try to imagine who you were before your wounded self took over.

Were you loving, caring, fun, alive, creative, sensitive, passionate? If you had you as a child, what would you value in that child? Would the child be worthy in your eyes only if he or she performed right or looked right, or would you see inside to who this child really is?

In relationships, when we make another responsible for defining our worth, we will then try to control how that person feels about us. This creates many problems in relationships, since we are trying to get love, rather than share love. Only when we accept the responsibility of defining our own worth and learn to be loving to ourselves, will we have love to share with others.

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**Changing from external definition of yourself to internal definition can move you out of the fear of failure and into the joy of learning.**

Take a moment to think about this: *What defines your worth?*

Does your intelligence, your talents, your success, your money, or your looks define your worth? Does this mean that if you fail, lose your money, get old and lose your looks, or start to be forgetful as you grow older, you lose worth as a human being? Is your worth defined by externals or by your enduring internal qualities, such as kindness, devotion, compassion, warmth, honesty, openness to learning, sincerity, integrity, commitment, reliability and so on? Is your worth defined by your natural abilities, or by your willingness to work hard for what is important to you? Is it outside validation or the inner love of learning that you value the most about yourself? Do you have to succeed to have worth, or can you fail and still find joy in the process of learning and improving?

Now take another minute and think about this: *Who defines your worth and lovability?*

Is it your parents, your children, your partner, your friends, or your employer who decide whether or not you are good enough? Is it one person who defines you, or is it the important people in your life, or is it everyone - anyone you happen to meet?

Take another moment now and think about this: How and why would any of these people know your true intrinsic worth? Why would any of them have the authority to define your goodness or your worth as a human being?

I used to believe that if someone didn't like me or was upset with me, it meant I wasn't good enough. Everything changed for me when I realized that no one actually has the authority to decide this for me!

So who does have the information and authority about my intrinsic worth?

God, Spirit, my own Higher Self, my spiritual Guidance - whatever I tap into that is beyond my programmed mind and the programmed minds of others.

Unfortunately, our programmed wounded self believes that our worth is defined primarily by our achievements, and sometimes by our looks. The wounded self often believes that our abilities - such as our intelligence and our particular talents - are fixed quantities. Since they are fixed, why make any particular effort to learn and grow? These false beliefs of the wounded self stop our essence - the part of us that loves to learn - from tackling hard tasks, such as learning Inner Bonding and connecting with our spiritual Guidance. "I'm just not good at this," says the wounded self, "so why try? If I try and fail, then everyone will know that I'm not as smart or as talented or as enlightened as they think I am. If I were good at this, it would be easy for me. It's not worth taking the risk of failure." Since, to the wounded self, failure means "I am a failure," the wounded self often refuses to put forth much effort.

However, our essence is like all small children - intensely curious and wanting to learn about EVERYTHING! But if, in our families and schools, we learned that our worth is defined by our success rather than by our intrinsic qualities, and if we were taught that our abilities are fixed, rather than that they can be developed with effort, we might have given up making effort fairly early in life.

It is never too late to change your mind about who and what defines you. You will find yourself motivated and excited about life when you define yourself by your internal qualities and re-discover the joy of learning!

## **How Do You Define Your Worth?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**Our actions and feelings result from how we define our worth - externally or internally. Discover how you are in control of whether or not you feel lovable and worthy.**

Most of us grow up learning to define our worth by how we look, by our achievements, and by the approval we get for our looks or achievements. This is a hard way to live because you have to constantly make sure that you are living up to some standard that society has set, and at any moment you can be plunged into low self-esteem by disapproval, rejection and failure. By making your worth dependent on others and outcomes, you are constantly insecure.

Often, I will ask a client why they are not taking responsibility for themselves, and the answer is often, "I'm not worth it." They want someone else to make them feel like they are worthy of love.

What if you changed your mind about what your worth is? What if, instead of defining yourself externally, you decided to define yourself by your internal intrinsic qualities - your kindness, compassion, caring, desire to learn, and your willingness to make effort toward what you want to accomplish, rather than just valuing the accomplishment itself?

If you believed that you are intrinsically worthy, instead of constantly trying to prove your worth, you would be very motivated to take loving action in your own behalf and to express your intrinsic lovingness with others. You would take delight in learning and in making effort toward expressing your passion and purpose.

There is a very negative circle that gets set up when you define yourself externally, and need success and others' approval to feel that you are okay. The very act of making outcomes and others' approval responsible for your sense of worth is a form of self-abandonment that says to your inner child, "You are not okay. You have to prove, over and over, that you are okay, by succeeding and by getting approval." This creates constant anxiety and insecurity - the opposite of what you feel when you value yourself.

There is a very positive circle that evolves as you embrace the incredible wonderfulness of your essence and become a loving parent to your beautiful, magnificent inner child. When BEING LOVING, rather

than gaining success and approval, becomes your HIGHEST PRIORITY, you will take loving action with yourself and others. The more you behave lovingly toward yourself and others, the better you feel, and the better you feel, the more motivated you are to learn and make effort toward being all you can be. Your achievements become an expression of who you are, rather than an attempt to prove your worth.

The wounded self believes that you have to judge yourself to have control over getting yourself to do the things you "should" do - work hard, study, clean the house, practice something, etc. But judging yourself is unloving to yourself - another form of self-abandonment - and sets up that negative circle of anxiety over having to prove your worth. Doing this actually hinders you becoming all you can be.

I want to suggest that you try an experiment. Try practicing making loving action toward yourself and others uppermost in your mind. It's okay if you don't know the loving action - just ask your Guidance or do the best you can. When your intent is to be loving, you will eventually figure out what that means. Of course, taking loving action toward others does NOT mean caretaking them. Loving action toward others is never about giving yourself up. Giving yourself up is not loving to yourself, and is therefore not loving action.

Each time you take loving action - by what you say to yourself and others, and how you treat yourself and others - notice how you feel inside. If you feel happy and full inside, then you know that the action you took was loving. If you feel bad inside - empty, anxious, angry, depressed, guilty - then you know that there is some way you are abandoning yourself.

If you make being loving, rather than getting love, your highest priority, you will find yourself feeling deeply lovable and worthy.

## **Is It Possible to Heal Without Spiritual Guidance?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

### **Do you believe that God is a judgmental man in the sky? Is this belief serving you well?**

I have learned, over my 43 years of counseling, that no one heals without a personal connection to a spiritual source of Guidance.

William was struggling with issues of shame and depression. He had struggled with feelings of insecurity and jealousy most of his life, despite years of inner work. While he intellectually knew that he was okay, emotionally he never felt it. This was his first phone session with me.

"William," I asked, "what is your concept of God or a Higher Power?"

"Oh, you know, the traditional Judeo/Christian concept - an old dude up in the sky dishing out judgments."

"Is this old dude anything like your father?"

"Yes, exactly like my father."

"So you have projected your father onto your concept of God?"

"Yes, I guess I have."

"William, I wonder if you would be willing to consider a different concept of God."

"Sure."

"My experience of God is that it is the spirit of unconditional love, truth, peace and joy. Just as I know that when I take a breath, the air will come into my lungs, I know that God is always here, and I can experience that love and wisdom whenever my heart is open. Just as there is the law of gravity, there is the law of love. Gravity applies to everyone and so does the love that is God."

"I like that. I never thought of it that way."



"You use your personal computer to get online and access all the information on the Internet. You would never try to do research on a subject by just using what is programmed into your computer. I think of my mind like my personal computer - it is programmed and therefore very limited. But I can use my mind to get online and access the wisdom of the universe. When my intent is to learn about loving myself and others, my heart opens and then I can access the love and wisdom that is always available to all of us. My mind cannot know who I truly am, because it's been programmed by my parents, teachers, peers and the media. But my spiritual Guidance knows who I am.

"One of the reasons you continue to feel shame, insecurity and jealousy is because you are allowing your programmed mind to define you, instead of your spiritual Guidance. But as long as you believe that God is a judgmental man like your father, you cannot open to the truth that is here for you.

"William, right now, breathe into your heart and open to learning about what the truth is about who you are. Ask your higher self, 'What is the truth?'"

William does this. "I see a sweet, sensitive, and very smart little boy."

"Is there anything at all wrong with this little boy?"

"No!"

"So it is your limited mind, your programmed ego wounded self who keeps shaming you, telling you that you are not good enough or lovable enough. Do you want to keep defining yourself by your wounded self, or are you ready to let your higher self define you?"

William was more than ready to open to learning and allow his higher self to define him.

At our next session, William was a different person. He had started to treat himself with love and found that the more he valued himself, the more outgoing and caring he was with others. This was the first week in years that he had not felt depressed.

William was beginning to allow his higher self to define him and express itself through him.

