

Your Mirrors Can Help or Hurt Your Self-Image and Your Christ-Image

Chapter 2: (IMAGE / Mirrors). Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org / Studies

Resource: In His Image by Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1984). *In his two companion books, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made and In His Image, Dr. Brand with the help of Philip Yancey, places an emphasis on the individual human cells in our body and their varying roles within the body for the sake of the body as a whole. He then points to the Body of Christ (the Church) and makes insightful analogies about the connections and forces that unite and guide our human bodies (and the Body of Christ). The suggested process is to review the questions prior to reviewing the content. If time is limited, each person in a group discussion should read the content prior to spending time in a group discussion to answer the questions.*

Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:

1. Are you aware that you serve as a mirror to others and that your words and actions are very powerful in a person's rejection or acceptance in life?
2. What or who is your primary mirror? Others or Christ? Discuss how it can be both? Trust is a major factor.
3. Do you feed yourself daily from Scriptures as God's Word to you? Do you trust the Scriptures as God's Holy instructions about who you are in Him and how we are to live as a mirror that communicates to you your inherent worth as a person made in His image? What are we saying when we say we are "In Christ"?
4. Who is the one person today that you are led to encourage, build up and support? Who trusts you to be a trustworthy mirror? Or a mirror of hope?
5. Are you allowing something or someone to split your oneness with Christ? Share this in confidence with someone you trust to pray with you about having the courage to change so that you restore oneness with Jesus Christ.

Most of us have several mirrors. And each of us has an inherent worth but it is obvious that our personal assessment of our value or our self-image is immensely affected by the judgment of others – especially those people we value the most. This includes people that we know best such as our family members, colleagues in the marketplace or friends at our Church. People become our mirrors that we depend on and they are capable of affecting our personal sense of acceptance or rejection in our various communities – even our community of faith (the Body of Christ). As a mirror for others, we probably don't even realize the reflection we are offering them at times. Remember that people are in need of both our honesty and love.

As image bearers, judgments about people are judgments about the Creator of everything – the Image Maker. Proverbs 14:31 tells us – "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God".

Dr. Brand, in this chapter that he titled "Mirrors", shared about his experiences living in London during the German bombings in World War II. (This caused me to remember that my dad fought as a Marine in WWII but for whatever reason, he never told us any of the details. I don't think as children, we even knew what to ask.) Dr. Brand told of some terrible experiences as a physician in training when he saw a bath house and a children's hospital with newborn babies bombed.

Then he wrote about the brave Royal Air Force pilots and their acceptance for their performances as heroes. He quoted Winston Churchill saying, "Never in the history of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few".

These young men were bright, healthy, confident, dedicated and often the most handsome men in the country. However, some of those same men had ended up in Dr. Brand's medical care as a surgery intern. Just a second or two prior to ejecting their plane after being hit, their cockpit would burst into flames which would melt off every feature of their face. Most had multiple surgeries before being discharged to rejoin a society that wasn't always so kind. Their image, eternally and internally, was scarred for life. After being so accepted and praised by others, they were now rejected and de-valued by people who become their mirrors.

He told of many wives who once adored their husbands filed for divorce and of many fiancées who simply left and broke their engagements. Brand shared of one RAF pilot whose girlfriend stuck by him and married him before he was discharged. She became his trusted mirror as she gave him a new image of himself when he would see her smile and feel her acceptance. She was able to look beyond the ugly scars and see his internal worth which had not changed and probably was even stronger. She communicated that he was OK for her. What a dynamic grace-filled Saint! Dr. Brand said he would see many unfortunate leprosy patients who didn't have anyone to accept them in their challenges and loneliness

Personally, I saw some of this when serving as a chaplain intern at the Methodist Rehab Center in Jackson, MS while studying at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS. I saw and ministered to a young handsome guy dealing with many new challenges of being paralyzed from an accident but also the emotional pain of rejection when his fiancée walked away and broke their engagement to be married. It was easy to tell which pain was the worst.

I worked with another young man who became a quadriplegic from a diving accident. So, as a 19-year-old returning to his parent's home, as he prepared for his future as a quadriplegic, he "wondered why the world went on," he said. The answer eventually came after he began asking "big questions" about the meaning of life and existence of God.

In struggling with the reality of quadriplegia and its life-changing repercussions, Bruns Myers opened his heart to the Lord, reaching out in faith to Jesus Christ. He said, "The work of Christ in my heart and mind completely altered my perspective on living with quadriplegia." He was hospitalized once again in Methodist Rehab Center. He was about to give up the battle when he got pneumonia again. After asking him one late night what he would hope to do if he survived, I became a mirror of hope for Bruns to achieve that goal which was to attend seminary to enhance his study of theology. He was already a "theologian" from his personal studies but he wanted to extend his education and earn his degree in theology. I went to work on getting wheelchair ramps built at the seminary. I purchased a motorcycle and used my lunch breaks to go get Bruns loaded up in his special van to get him to his class on time then take him back home. He learned he had to earn an undergraduate degree as well.

Many years later, Bruns earned his theology degree and then become a hospital chaplain in the same Methodist Rehab Center. At the time of writing this, he is now retired after 16 years of service but is still hard at work in a Methodist Parish. "The fact that he was in a wheelchair meant more to the patients than I think we will ever know," said Janice McGee, vice president of nursing and program director at Methodist Rehab. "He could counsel and support people in a way that was unique." Speaking of his ministry work with Rehab patients, "I could show them the possibility of the future," Myers said. "I was a living testimony to the mission of rehab." And also, "I always was a believer in what Methodist was founded for and what it could do. I can remember people coming in young, frightened and uncertain and I saw their lives change and they had hope again." To read more about this unique story and testimony, do a Google search on Bruns Myers Methodist Rehab. (Postnote: Bruns recently graduated to eternity. He fought a long and hard battle.)

We learn from Dr. Brand about his work with burn victims, handicapped and leprosy patients – all who had their physical shells (bodies) altered or affected. He suggests that we humans give inordinate regard to the physical body or shell we live in for a few years. It is the rare person who can see the inherent human worth – the image of God inside another person. We all know the difference between rejection and acceptance. The challenge is how to help a person with a visible deformity develop a healthy self-image not based on the rejection of others. Only in Christ can some real change occur.

Oswald Chambers in My Utmost for His Highest (on August 19th) wrote about Matthew 11:28-30 when Jesus encouraged us by saying, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (NIV). We all can become complete in Christ. We cannot ignore unrest. We can be redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus if we ask Him to produce in us a Christ-like image or consciousness; He will always do it until we learn to abide in Him. Chambers wrote - Don't allow anything or anyone to split your oneness with Christ. And that "nothing is so important as to keep right spiritually".

Remember Mother Teresa who prayed to see the face of Jesus in everyone so as to serve Christ in every encounter. We can aspire to do the same.