

## A Desired Reflection

By Chris M. Coursey

As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man.

Proverbs 27:19

We rely on the people around us to help us develop a healthy sense of who we know ourselves to be. The concept of our self is known as our *personal identity*. Relational interactions and nonverbal exchanges over time, especially facial responses beginning by 2 to 3 months of life, weave together an internal understanding of who we are. Dr. Jim Wilder highlights this point when he writes; *Our deepest sense of self is in relationship to a face looking at us. By studying this face and eyes we know what they feel about us. Babies take all these facial expressions personally.*<sup>1</sup> We develop an inner set of beliefs and an internal foundation that is based on repeated early experiences, verbally but mostly nonverbally, with our closest family members. Touch, voice tone, smells, faces and interactions not only create strong bonds but they intricately fashion the impression of who we know ourselves to be. Faces become internalized in our mind and form what is called a three way bond. This is the bond I share with two other people, normally a mother and father.<sup>2</sup> Internally these faces may be smiling at each other or angry, sad, etc. depending on what I experience over time with my main attachments. According to attachment researcher Mary Main, all infants have formed attachments by seven months of life.<sup>3</sup> When we have faces who express joy at our presence we come to believe something about us is innately valuable, unique, special and important. Our existence and appearance produces a response of glowing faces, broad smiles and affectionate interactions with the people around us. This internal confidence generates security and stability. Conversely, an internal crisis is created when we experience a shortage of these responses from our personal people. An angry, upset, disgusted or sad look toward us produces great pain and negative emotions.<sup>4</sup> We internalize these expressions and easily equate these looks with ourselves. *What did I do wrong? What's wrong with me? I must be bad.* Unless there is a joyful reconnection in a timely manner, the results will prove catastrophic. Over time our identity becomes warped. We avoid negative emotions. How we view our self is distorted. Internal lies run rampant. When we look into the mirror what we see is interpreted from life experiences and relationships. This explains some of the reason why anorexics can weigh 80lbs yet still consider themselves to be overweight.<sup>5</sup>

Though there are several versions of the Greek mythological story, let's take a brief look at one description. There is a story about a young man named Narcissus (Narkissos in

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<sup>1</sup> **The Complete Guide to Living With Men** Page 15

<sup>2</sup> See **The Complete Guide to Living With Men** for more information

<sup>3</sup> **The Developing Mind**, Daniel Siegel. Page 68

<sup>4</sup> Read Dr. Karl Lehman's work at [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com) for more information on left and right hemisphere emotions

<sup>5</sup> Of course there can be numerous reasons why this phenomenon occurs besides what is mentioned in this brief article. The point is that one's view of self is influenced by experiences and relationships.

Greek) who, known for his good looks, fell in love with his own reflection in the water. The lad went to kiss his reflection only to plunge headlong into the water and drown. It is written that a beautiful Narcissus flower sprang up in the place where Narcissus fell, which is where we get the term *Narcissus* for the spring flower and narcissism to describe the engrossed love of self. Though I don't recommend looking to mythology for life lessons, we can glean something from the myth of Narcissus. First, we do well to participate in community with other like-minded people who convey authentic joy. Obviously the fictional Narcissus lacked healthy, life-enhancing relationships and he developed a warped reality. Seeing ourselves through the lens of joy creates a framework we rely on throughout life. We need people who can reflect Jesus to us. The Body of Christ should be your life preserver. Narcissus lacked people around him at the moment he needed intervention. He needed someone to pull him out of the water. Where was a comrade who knew how to swim when Narcissus fell? Encouragement, accountability, prayer support, worship and fellowship help us reach our potential and also lead us to our Creator. We cannot mature without people and we cannot swim apart from God. Just like Noah and his family, we also need an ark to avoid drowning. Only the ark we require is built from joyful relationships, loving fellowship and communion with the God who lives.

Joy to our life is like motor oil to an automobile engine. Motor oil lubricates moving parts of an engine and reduces friction between the parts. Oil protects the engine and helps maintain efficiency. Joyful relationships create an accurate self representation and protect our emotional, mental and physical health. Joy preserves and sustains our relationships from too much abrasive wear and tear. Joy leads to personal strength, security and confidence. There's no stopping what can be achieved when individuals come together corporately to establish life-giving relationships through joy. People in joyful unity who love the Lord their God weave a tapestry of beauty that can be compared with Solomon's Temple, which the Lord Himself referred to as "the height of astonishment" also rendered impressive and imposing.<sup>6</sup> God's people in joyful unity as well as His Temple have one major common denominator. They both bear His abiding Presence.

Like the car engine, numerous small parts function as a greater, unifying whole. Corporate fellowship molds our character and helps us be more like Jesus. Scripture likens this process of character fashioning to iron sharpening iron. The only oil allowed in the grinding process of Christian community is the oil of gladness. Along this vein, Saddleback Church pastor and author Rick Warren writes, *God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like Christ.* (Page 173) Joy helps us be more like our Creator and instills within us a healthy understanding of who we are and who we are meant to be. This is why Skill One of the 19 Skills *THRIVE* teaches is vital. The reflections, smiles, expressions and actions we fervently desire and need from our loved ones are a natural inclination toward a divine reflection from our Creator's face. After Moses spoke with the Lord, he walked away with a shining face. What's your face doing today?

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 9:8

Share Joy - Mutual amplification of joy through nonverbal facial expressions and voice tone conveys, "We are glad to be together." This capacity allows us to bond and grow strong brains as well.

Technical description: Right-hemisphere-to-right-hemisphere communication of our most desired positive emotional state is developed face-to-face.