

Adolfo Quezada
(1940-)

Adolfo Quezada is a retired professional counselor in Tucson, Arizona. Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, he was raised in Arizona and educated at the University of Arizona, where he earned a B.A. in political science and two M.A. degrees, in journalism and in counseling.

Quezada's extensive counseling practice, known as "Equanimity Center," offers various programs and seminars to help people get through difficult times; depression, anxiety, grief and trauma, among others. He also leads prayer retreats.

Quezada is married and the father of four children. One was killed at the age of seventeen. He also has four grandchildren.

He has written a number of books directed toward themes of faith in difficult times. Among these are *Wholeness: The Legacy of Jesus*, *Walking with God, Through the Darkness*, and the book from which the following selection is taken, *Loving Yourself for God's Sake*.

As you read, observe how supportive Quezada is. He wants to assure you of God's loving support on every step of your journey. When you can't believe in yourself, or forgive yourself for what you have done, God can.

Quezada's role is to be the one who reminds you convincingly of God's unflagging support and love. Listen to him. Also take note of the clarity that comes out of experienced counseling. He wants you to acknowledge wrongdoing but never to exaggerate it or wallow in a sense of guilt.

LOVING YOURSELF FOR GOD'S SAKE

Reconcile Your Past

Set your guilt before you. Be specific about the wrongs you charge against yourself. You have hurt others, you have committed acts that infringed on the rights of others. You have neglected to do the loving thing toward others. Now you can do something about it, but it is not enough to feel guilt or sorrow. Make restitution as best you can in ways that bring healing and restore harmony to your life and the lives of those you have hurt. Let go of whatever you have done...

Let go of memories that tie you to a darkened past. Release thoughts of yesterday that fill you with sadness, guilt, or shame. Allow the forgiving spirit of love to cleanse your mind and set you free. Release yourself from the bondage of your own judgment. Love yourself without condition. Love yourself through the walls of defensiveness and the darkness of your deeds. Love yourself beyond whatever you deserve for such is the love of God...

Love Breaks the Chains

Love breaks the chains that hold you to the past; it allows for growth, change, and new life. When you accept God's love, you also accept God's forgiveness. As you love yourself, you also forgive as you are forgiven and you love even more...

When you forgive, you also regain your own soul.

The memories of your childhood can be painful and crippling, influencing your present. They come back and haunt you when you least expect it. You hear the voices and see the faces of those times. The circumstances of life robbed much of your childhood. That child, neglected and repressed, grew up too fast. There were too many responsibilities, too many fires to put out... You were expected to know what to do to be perfect...

Whether they intend to or not, parents are capable of hurting their children and interfering with their self-love. God is not. The love of God is forever true. You will never feel rejection from God...

The love that you allow washes away all that encumbers your life. You will remember how it was, but these memories will be just memories. No longer will they rule your thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Love for yourself melts away the chains that bind you to the past and sets you free for the now.

Discard Unrealistic Expectations

Life has beginnings and endings, deaths and resurrections... In your life there may be unfulfilled yearnings. Your peace will depend on the acceptance of these unfulfillments.

Reconsider your expectations. Examine the demands you make on yourself. Are they realistic? What do you base them on? Does the pressure to meet these demands take away the centeredness you need to live in peace? Are these demands your own or do they come from others in spoken and unspoken messages?...

Discard the unrealistic expectations and appreciate what is actual in your life instead of constantly looking at what ought to be. Work from reality and release the tension that comes from discontentment...

God helps you to let go of unfulfilled dreams and expectations. God helps you dream new dreams and hope new hopes. Let go of control. Surrender it to the love and mercy of God...

Let God Control

The more control you try to grasp, the less you have; the more control you surrender to God, the more under control your life becomes. Surrendering control doesn't mean you have become passive or fatalistic. It does mean you trust that God has given you the physical, emotional, and spiritual tools necessary to negotiate life. To surrender control to God releases the tension within that keeps you from responding to life with all your capacity. When you stop pushing and pulling to have things your way, you are more apt to see things God's way.

As you focus love on God and on yourself, you detach from your obsession with control and perfection. You learn to relax and play as a child and protect yourself from harm. You see things from a spiritual point of view. You set aside anxiety, experience emotions fully, and express them effectively. You leave guilt and shame behind, embrace hope, and build on the foundation of good.

BIBLE SELECTION

1 John 3:18-22 (NRSV)

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

BREATH PRAYER

(Inhale) "His love endures forever ..."

(Exhale) "... (hurt)."

Try it this way: Breathe in God's love... Breathe out your hurt.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways I avoid admitting my failings?
2. After acknowledging my faults, how can I relax and release them? What steps can I adopt to avoid dwelling repeatedly on the wrongs I've committed?
3. Optional Stretch Exercise: Create a list of things that remind you of the abundant, generous and unconditional love of God. Examples could include sunshine, the arrival of spring, orchards ripe with fruit, messages from friends, and birthday celebrations.

REFLECTIONS FROM RICHARD J. FOSTER

Quezada is helping us move beyond the crushing condemnation of heart that John highlights for us in the Scripture reading. John writes, "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us..." but I find that many people do have hearts that condemn them. Now, let me be just as plain as I possibly can about this condemnation of heart: What is it? It is simply the feeling that I am not right, and there are three things, at least, that the heart uses to condemn us.

First, there is condemnation of heart for who we are. I mean very simply the fact that we are a man or a woman. Or that we have a certain kind of body; we feel we are too tall or too short, or that we are too fat or too thin, or that we have big ears or freckles or a big nose. Just think of the condemnation that people labor under just because of who they are. And the world is full of people who have something to sell or something to get out of others who will condemn them and who will build up associations in their minds to get them to condemn themselves. We are condemned because of the way we dress. We are condemned because of the way we smell. We are condemned because we have too much hair. We are condemned because we do not have enough hair. Now, how do we get out of that? We don't. It is an essential feature of a fallen world that it is filled with condemnation. We do not have to look very deeply behind that to see a fundamental strategy of the enemy of our souls to get us to believe that God is not good. We are who we are, and who we are is not right, and so how can God be good?

Second, there is condemnation of heart for where we are. It is a rare thing today to find people who feel completely right and good about where they live, or the job that they hold, or the family they are in. There is so much shame in families, for example: husbands ashamed of wives, and wives ashamed of husbands; parents ashamed of children, and children ashamed of parents. I wish it were not so. I wish I could tell you that it is only an illusion. But it is not. Condemnation for all of these places where people are.

Third, there is condemnation of heart for what we do. Now, right here we just have to say that a lot of the condemnation is completely justified. But, of course, if we are wanting to condemn someone and we are looking for a basis upon which to condemn them, we can find it in all of these areas, can't we? Condemnation for what we do and for what we do not do, and one of the reasons it is so hard for us to witness to those who are near to us is that they know what we do and we feel condemned. There is condemnation for sin, wrongdoing, and that is true guilt and Jesus came that the matter of sin could be dealt with. But there is also condemnation for things that are not sins, just mistakes. A failure in business, for example. Or a wrong decision about a job to take, or a place to live, or a purchase to make.

And all this condemnation just leaps up, and the effect of that is to make people completely without strength, completely without hope, completely without faith in God beyond the bare minimum of believing that he will take them to heaven when they die.

But here is the good news that is stated so beautifully right in the Scripture reading: "we will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts." If we find that we have a condemning heart we can know that God is greater than our heart. Remember that significant statement of Jesus, "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world" (John 3:17). And as we learn to trust God more than we trust our condemning hearts we can, as Quezada says, "relax and play as a child... leave guilt and shame behind, embrace hope, and build on the foundation of good."

Excerpts taken from *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin, Editors. Harpercollins, 2000.)