

There seems to be a point in everyone's life when they look in the mirror. They search in the eyes staring back at them, for something to recognize. How do our eyes tell us who we are? Frankly, I don't know but I can tell you it is true: we find ourselves in our eyes. Have you ever seen pictures of Santa Claus's eyes? They seem so warm, friendly and inviting. Yes, his face is that way too, but I have always felt there was something about the eyes. Goodness and safety just emulate from Santa through his eyes.

They always depict Jesus with soft blue eyes. Pat get off the eye thing already! Hey, just be patient with me, this is important. The reason Jesus and Santa (they are not the same thing you know) are depicted this way is because their story is one of warmth and care. We all can imagine them having warm eyes. When is the last time you heard someone say "those eyes on Santa or Jesus just look all wrong." You haven't because although we don't really know what they looked like their actions speak through the artist. When the painter thinks of these men they always paint soft caring eyes.

Ok, the reason I just wasted your last minute on an eye lecture was because our eyes hold the soul. Now you've done it Pat "the soul" that's ridiculous! The soul is in the heart right? Let's stop for a minute and take a small Bible lesson. The Bible might mean nothing to you but sometimes it spouts great wisdom so listen to these verses.

Mark 7:20-23 Jesus went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

Matthew 6:22-23 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Matthew 18:9 “And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

Ephesians 1:18 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.”

These four sections of scripture are more than just words. They are common wisdom that just happens to come from God. The statements about the eyes and heart ring true. You have met these people. You have seen their hearts in their eyes. Think about mass murderer Charles Manson, Hitler, and many others. They all have the look of crazy dark eyes. In every case they have done actions to reflect those eyes.

The Bible is telling us what we already know. What we take in is what ultimately resides inside our hearts. What comes out of our heart comes through the mouth and the eyes. Have you ever met someone who looks hurt, sad, or happy? Their eyes tell a story about them. People pick on passages like the ones where Jesus spoke about gouging out the eye, but in reality it makes some sense. Do you really want dark haunting eyes or hearts? His words are metaphorical not literal. In a way the eyes are the gateway to becoming who we are. It's the things we read, see, and experience that come into the heart through the eyes.

My ex told me as we split that I was unhappy in the marriage. She was nuts because I loved her. I wanted to stay. She said “I could see it in your eyes, your eyes always give you away.” That statement has never left me. I was horrified and shocked. It was like I was exposed in-front of thousands of people. Literally everywhere I went I knew they could see my heart in my eyes. How do you hide your eyes from the public? Does Jesus mentioning about gouging the eyes make just a little more sense now? Taking them out to hide our hearts might not be insane.

Now we are back to the mirror in-front of you. What do you see? What would others see through your eyes? I think that’s why shy or ashamed people look away: to hide their eyes. I have certain people in my life that only talk to me with shades on. I don’t even think they realize it. We can see fear and lust in our eyes. In the mirror we confirm who we are everyday as we gaze at ourselves in and through our eyes.

To become the man is to change your eyes. Not literally silly but in the heart. As we just read in the scriptures, it’s the stuff we let fester in the heart that kills us; our fears, disappointments, and failures. Success helps us but the other side of life is a heart killer. They say it takes 10 positive statements to erase one negative word. Its scary but true, our hearts don’t really ever forget. We are built by our experiences in life. This chapter is about taking a new path, a path that purposely reinforces who we truly are as a man. It’s the stuff that builds a happy strong heart rather than an abused hurt one. A heart like that can change our eyes.

Let’s pause for a moment and reflect on the journey so far. First of all men need to come face to face with who they are. We are born male and we are men. In the mirror you have to tell yourself that every day. We can be affirmed by other men, but if you are older like me, it’s almost too late. How other men have changed my view on myself can’t be easily undone. When I

think of my Dad, I don't believe he sees a man in me. In the mirror though, it's different. I can change my heart towards myself.

How do I know that? How can I say that my feelings about others are not the same as the feelings about myself? It's like this, a new understanding, a new knowledge, and a new insight can change perspective. I suppose that we can change views on how we view others too, but inside that is near impossible. I have a friend named Bob who is kind of a meathead towards me. I love to mention Bob in-front of the wife. She always gives the "humph" remark. Bob reminds her of that guy that irritates her. Her view of him is forever engrained. For us though we can change our own view on ourselves because we can change how we do things. We can't change how Bob does things.

Take for instance the Flagellant. These were men in the 13th and 14 century that whipped themselves out of shame for their sins. They can change their actions by not whipping themselves. A man can stop drinking, swearing, and abusing if he chooses too. A bee still stings and a lion is still dangerous: they will not change. A fire is still hot every time. We tend to view others the same way. Once bitten twice shy. I know I said our views about others can't change and that does seem a bit too harsh, but humans tend to remember what bit them. However, we can change a view of our selves much more readily. My dad told me once that Leopards don't change their spots. Ninety nine times out of one hundred that is true, but I know people can change.

When I first went through divorce I knew some people within the Christian community (although I was not a Christian at the time). They knew me as a God hating swearing cynical man. They knew I mocked their God. If someone told them I was a worthless piece of skin I bet they would have believed it. One day I asked them to go to church after 7 years of silence. They

were skeptical. One lady said “I just can’t believe it.” She went on to say “anyone but you in my church.” People in my past still have a hard time thinking I have changed. That sort of reinforces my view on remembering people a certain way. People still think I’m that horrible guy 14 years removed.

The reason I can and want to write this book is because I did change. Some stuff is still with me but I have changed. One of the cruelest things I had to endure 14 years ago was my changed life. I lost my wife, kids, and gained Christianity. The Pat of the past was blown away. I spent many a night searching in the mirror for myself. I thought for the longest time I had lost me somewhere in the journey. In the last few years I came to the conclusion I had always been lost.

As my new journey has unfolded I have started to discover me (still going on). Just like in the Bible, the writer Luke has the famous story of the prodigal son. **Luke 15:24 “for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.”** I found someone in the mirror: me.

Just as a person loses their leg or a job, things will change. To look in the mirror and see a man takes time, but it can be done. The beginning begins with telling yourself you’re a man. It won’t change you overnight but the positive seeds of who you are have been planted in the mirror. I was told once I have great “self- talk” ability. That came from practice not habit. I hated myself for a long time because someone close to me said I was less than stellar. They were dead wrong, but that truth took time to believe.

Eventually several people told me I was a man but I still doubted it. So how do you make a man out of a doubter? It began with a determined change. I ran a singles group in my former church. I gathered many people from several churches together to discover life. I was not naive that they might mingle but my goal was to have these single people feel wanted by others. Being

single can be fun but sometimes we need other people. What I discovered in this group is that people don't like to change. Living within your self can build walls and barriers to seeing the world and yourself clearly.

I had about 20 people coming regularly to the singles group. It began a fun and good time. I tried to branch out and help these people see others points of view. That's where I hit the wall. I heard them say "I will only do this; I will only try that"; and on and on it went. They were stuck in their ways. This is not a singles bashing moment. Being single is a gift and blessing if you are called to it. Sometimes though, people are single because they have barriers. They are not used to sharing themselves and experiencing others.

I also recognized within that group that I was stuck too. I wanted to be adventurous, fun, and exciting but I did not have a real clue what that meant. You see in 12 years of marriage we did nothing. I was working too much; terribly fearful of myself; and limited in my box. I lived within a marriage, but I also lived a sheltered life. We never went on trips or adventures very much. My ex-wife and I never went away without the kids in twelve years. That seems insane these days, but I doubted myself deep inside. My doubt in myself asked the question "What if I tried and failed"; "What if I wanted to share me and was rejected"; and "What if I was an important person but nobody cares"? I wanted those things but felt terribly insecure about revealing my hopes and dreams. So I hid in the marriage and my Ex never knew me and conversely I never knew her. I was stuck too.

Eventually we split apart and my life was at a crossroads. It was either hide from the world or discover a new life within a new world. I can only say that in those days something snapped. I met too many people that encouraged me to embrace this time of singleness. They said "Pat discover the world, discover yourself, and discover others." I began to read a lot of

books on relationships. I wanted to know what went wrong. I realized pretty quickly that I needed to branch out, and take a chance on life by exposing myself (figuratively) to the world. Hence the Dating chapter in this book was born.

The questions were coming fast and furious. What if the world does not like me? What if I am rejected again? Am I worthless? You know some of you might be in a relationship. Maybe you are in the same space I was in at the beginning of my journey. It does not mean you have to leave someone. It does however mean you need to have a heart to heart conversation with yourself and your partner. It's time for a change. It's time to be bold and be adventurous. I did when I snapped. I gained a fever for trying new things. I failed at some and found success in others. I made a pact with myself in that first year of discovery.

I decided to do something amazing every year from then on. I made a pact with myself to never leave a year of living wasted with no meaning. Life needed to be lived and special. I also decided that my kids would see their dad be brave and try things. I built stuff, tried stuff, and experienced new stuff. My motto became "gee I haven't done that before" (which was pretty much everything). The boys and I came up with a list of statements to live by. I called it the character list. Sure there are plenty more but we chose these 19. Here they are.

1. We are monkeys (because we can)

I could have said "why does a dog lick himself" (because he can). I chose monkeys because they are fun. They believe they can climb great heights without fear.

2. Be real (being popular may mean compromising who you really are)

Being real is very hard to do. People want you to be anything than who you are. Being real is not arrogant it's honest with yourself. Again in the mirror if you need change then change.

3. Be who you are (and be consistent)

This is similar to the last one with a twist. Know who you are and defend it too the death. You are the most important person in your life.

4. Make people laugh

I read that a happy song goes a long way. A laugh a day just might keep the doctor away and your friends closer.

5. Live for today (and don't plan too far ahead)

Jesus was right in saying don't worry about tomorrow, today has enough worries of its own. Try and have the best day **today**. Make it a good one.

6. Love your family and friends

These people at times are the hardest to love. I know because my family is not stellar. Some family needs to go if they are abusive, just don't be abusive yourself. We don't get to choose our family do we.

7. Talk to God he does care

The thought that God does not exist might be normal for most. Don't you need a friend sometimes when nobody is there? God does exist and he is always available to encourage and talk.

8. Read your Bible it's a great guide

The Bible is not just a book. Those people that say that have never read it. This book has a strange power in it's words to help.

9. Always admit failure but keep trying

Some people always look positive but we learn from failures not success. Failures are a path to success not a failure.

10. Serve your community

We all are so alone today. The individual is most important. No, a supportive community is. Be a support for your community.

11. Two steps forward and one step backwards

Always hope, always believe, and **never** ever give up

12. Satan and the past (don't go there)

Some people say we need to revisit our past. I will talk about that but dwelling there is dangerous. This Angel Satan looks like light but he wants us to dwell.

13. Be happy that the sun will rise tomorrow

Again we need to keep a positive stance. Nothing is so devastating that we can't overcome it.

14. God does not make junk (and he made you)

A man told me that once and I never forgot it. If someone took the time to make me I must have a purpose.

15. Strive to fill Gods great plans

So many people are reluctant and afraid of Gods plans. They only involve making this world a better place for others and you.

16. Be nice

Aren't there enough cruel people in the world: be the nice ones.

17. Give because you can in love

Having all our money to ourselves is just not the best for others and ourselves. Sharing ourselves and our money makes the world a best place.

18. Give your best that's all we ask

A good effort is all we ask. I say give more than what is expected if you can. We fail sometimes because we didn't give our heart to it.

19. Pray and be honest with God

Non-Christian still use the pray word even if they don't believe. Why? Prayer somehow and some way makes a difference. Just talk normal to God. He doesn't need buttering.

These statements have helped me over the years. They have encouraged and reminded me of both my and the world's importance. It all started with my mirror: telling myself that I am a man. From that point on you will become bolder about you. To see a man full of potential is liberating. Society loves to tell you who you are. When we start telling them all hell will break loose. They can resist you but don't you resist yourself.

This is a strange place to be. It's uncharted territory for some of us. I was asked if I had ever bought myself a chocolate bar in my first marriage. The honest answer was I hadn't. I was consumed with serving others. Being bold for you is somewhat arrogant, cocky, and self centered, but in a good way. We could easily go down the road of self-absorption. I just want you to like and love yourself, not flaunt it. Spoiling yourself with something as simple as a chocolate bar is a great start.

I have had people say I am intimidating and arrogant. Think of it this way. If someone said to you "Do you think you are handsome"? What do you say? I used to say "I guess so" or "Maybe." Today I say "Yes I am and I'm good at things too." Some people hate that. They want me to be humble and quiet. There are those people too that want you below them. For some reason they can't stand anyone feeling good about themselves. They tell you that you cannot, should not, and are not good enough. They say words like impossible and ridicules. The fact is that you can, should, and need too. Nothing is impossible with God or ridicules.

The beginning of making a man is confidence. One of the worst things I experienced is a wife and parents that berated me in public. If those you have trusted with your heart think less of you then you are in trouble. Who do you turn too? It all begins with two people God and you. I

think the most pleasant surprise about knowing God was that in discovering him we really discover ourselves. Many Christians say it's all about knowing God. That is true but not the whole truth. Self-discovery happens as we grow in the Lord.

God says a few things that changed me. You might not want to believe or care too but look at these few verses.

Matthew 10:26-31 “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

When I was a non-Christian I heard that God loved me, and Jesus loved me too. I remember saying “big deal my mother loves me also.” The fact has become clear that people close to us on earth don't always love us like we want them too. Those passages above helped me realize God is in it for us. His love makes him look good but it also makes us look good too. I have never felt that God has let me down. I have always survived and have certainly grown to love myself better. What more do you want?

The reason I'm writing this and the reason your reading it is because expectations in life suck. People and circumstances have let you down. Even you have failed. I believe with all my heart that we need to recognize our man-hood. Our very being depends on us being a man. It depends on us loving ourselves. The saying “if you can't love yourself then how can you love others” is so true. Discovering me was nerve racking but revelation too. I am worth something.

Ok, you know you're a man in the mirror, now let's take it a step further. It's time to go on adventures to becoming the knight in shining armour.