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The Self
That I Long to
Believe In



The Challenge of Building Self-Esteem

The Self That I Long
to Believe In:
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Self-Esteem

By
Craig D. Lounsbrough

Chapter One
A New Start
The Concept of a New Beginning

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”

- Romans 4:18 (NIV)

“You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call ‘failure’ is not the falling down, but the staying down.”

- Mary Pickford

Believing in New Beginnings

The word ‘imperative’ can be intimidating. It’s a tersely demanding word and we by nature shy away from demands of this sort. However, without abusing the word, it is ‘imperative’ that we believe in the possibility of new beginnings. For if we don’t believe in new beginnings we have closed the door to all the new beginnings that stand poised and at the ready just on the other side of that door. If we don’t believe in new beginnings, we have said that we don’t believe in life. But maybe more pointedly, we have said that we don’t believe in ourselves.

For many of us, the crippling nature of our low self-esteem has long destroyed our ability to believe in ourselves. As such, we are unable to believe that we have sufficient value to warrant a

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new beginning. For if we cannot believe that new beginnings are possible for us or that we are in some remote way deserving of them, everything that follows in the book that you are holding will be interpreted as a collection of nice ideas that might warm the heart and challenge the mind, but they will utterly fail to change your life. This book then will have failed for the single reason that we allowed it to.

Therefore, at the outset I would ask that we would be willing to entertain the idea that new beginnings exist, even if we don't see them as existing for ourselves. That life was created with ample space for new beginnings. That the entirety of existence itself is created upon, built around and has been perpetuated by new beginnings in such a way that without them existence itself would cease to exist. And if we are unable to embrace that reality as existing for us, may we at the outset at least acknowledge that new beginnings do exist.

The Struggle to Believe

Some of us don't believe in new beginnings because we've been brutalized by life in such a way that new beginnings have become the stuff of cruel myth. Some of us have watched our dreams obliterated to the point that dreaming itself is just a dream. We've witnessed the curt dissolution of our marriages and the violent collapse of our families within which all of our new beginnings had been trustingly and tenderly packaged. Jobs vanished with no warning,

dragging dreams down into some abyss that was deeper than the reach of our hope. Terminal illnesses squashed futures, abandoning us to the regret of a past we now have no time to correct. A child sits writhing in detox when only a handful of years ago they sat on our laps enraptured in stories of princesses and fairytale wonderment. Whatever tragedies have befallen us, they have destroyed our sense of worth and have seared a charred realism within us that leaves no room for the hope of new beginnings.

Renovations and Their Purpose

On the other side, we might believe in new beginnings but we've confused the reality of new beginnings with slick make-overs and tedious revisions. Or, since we don't believe in new beginnings for ourselves, we've replaced them with revisions and renovations so that we have something that looks new. Renovation is quite deceptive as it looks to be something convincingly new when it's nothing more than something old, cleverly veneered. We see it as new because we've surrendered to the fear that 'new' in the purest sense of the word doesn't exist, at least for us. And so we've opted for a bit of 'nip-n-tuck' or a vigorous spit-shine so that something 'old' in our lives has the appearance of being something 'new' in order to hide the disappointment of a life ever old and never new. However, God said, "I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5, NIV). I must say that I'm not

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hearing any renovation in that.

If we push those renovations aside, we are either left with the stunning, nearly improbable reality of new beginnings, or the hopelessness that new beginnings are not in the cards for us. If we abandon the pursuit of renovations, we will either believe in new beginnings or we will fall haplessly victim to a life of endless endings. All of that is terribly risky. And so, we tend to stick to renovation because it's a safer bet.

New Beginnings as Out of Reach

We often tend to shy away from the idea of new beginnings because the scope of them often exceeds the degree of our bravery, or the extent of our abilities, or the reach of our faith, or the degree of our worth. Are we sufficiently stalwart to abandon the definable comforts of the familiar for the trackless frontier of all that is new? Can we abandon control of such a lofty journey so that in our fear we don't irreverently cram all that is new back into the confines of all that was old so that what is new dies at the hands of our cowardice? Most profoundly, can we believe that we, in fact, are worth a new beginning like this? For if we are not, such speculation is a waste of time spent and dreams dreamt that will die in the dreaming.

Therefore, whether it's a seared realism, or an apprehensive fear, or a poor view of oneself, we

must move our hearts and our minds to a position where they can at least embrace the possibility of new beginnings. If we can at least accept the 'idea' of a new beginning, even if it is from an emotional distance because we cannot as of yet see it for ourselves, we can at least begin there. And if we can do that, we have then set the stage for phenomenal things to actually unfold in our lives.

The Chemistry of New Beginnings

So, what would we actually do with a new start, if it were possible? I mean a really new, 'new' start? Not something that looks new because we've vigorously buffed something that's old and caressed its finish to a new luster. Not some radical make-over of something that's radically old so that it looks convincingly new. Not a tedious and meticulous restoration that's going to erase the footprints of time and grant something old a few more years of life until it looks old again. Not history in reprise, or worn ideas given fresh soles so that they might eke out a few more miles.

Our definition of 'new' has become crippled to a sour limp by our paralyzing fear of failure. It has become tamed to a docile death by the soothing rub of mediocrity that is calming when the unknown is not. Bound by a chafing sense of personal inadequacy that stalks our deepest dreams, we have opted to let those dreams die that we might preserve familiarity and kill risk. We let the imposing hedge

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shaped of cultural expectations, the foreboding fence constructed of social norms, and our own egregious lack of self-confidence cause us to abandon anything new in a soiled trade for things accepted within hedge and fence and fears. This is not life. Whether we feel ourselves deserving of life or not, still this is not life.

New is not a revision or a recalibration. It is not an adjustment, a manner of tweaking, a bit of nip and tuck, or some creative remodeling. It is a vision cast out beyond 'what is' that sees 'what is' as a pivotal launching point to 'what can be.' Vision will break the bonds of 'what is,' because it is within the 'what is' that vision itself will be broken if it remains in that place. Vision trades a revisionist mentality for an explorer's vitality. It is boldness untethered and raw courage let loose to run. It shrewdly builds on the past, but it is not a prisoner shackled to it nor does it sense an obligation to stay there even though a chorus of visionless voices in opposition might say so. And it is here that we need to abandon what new is not and embrace what it is.

Such ideas are certainly challenging, particularly when we struggle with issues of self-esteem. They can be frightening, leaving us with a sense that a new beginning of anything is leagues beyond our reach. However, as a means of considering the possibilities of a new beginning for you, I would encourage you to think through the

following:

First, A New Future is Built from the Raw Materials of the Past

The nature of life is such that we plan for the future with the past shaping the nature of our plans. That's just natural. We build for tomorrow on the foundation of the past because, for good or ill, the past is what we've got. The past holds the raw material from which futures are built. The memories, experiences, wounds, trauma, gains, losses and various lessons of the past are the natural fodder that feeds a future seeking sustenance to foster its growth and fuel its pioneering expansion.

Oddly enough, we might want to consider the fact that the things that have run roughshod over our self-esteem are the very raw materials from which great futures are constructed. The more the damage, the more the material and therefore the greater the opportunities. The future cannot help but be shaped, built and ultimately fed by the past. The worse the past, the greater the feeding. However, in all the shaping and building and feeding, the future does not need to 'be' the past, nor can it be.

However, because the past was painful we presume that the future will be as well. We assume that if we build with the raw materials of a past fashioned by pain, molded by heartache, and rubbed raw with rejection, the future will be a mirror image

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of all the stuff that we don't want to see in any mirror. And in embracing this belief, we want nothing to do with the past but at the same we realize that we can't run from it. It shapes us whether we like it or not. It's the material that we have to work with regardless of how much we abhor it. It's not going anywhere. So if we're making a future out of that kind of stuff, it can only be bad.

But what we fail to realize is that it's the painful stuff that makes for the best futures. It's the lessons learned in the pain. It's the tenacity that grows strong in the angst of the struggle. It's the knowledge that we develop a deeper understanding of life when we're walking through the darkness. It's the wisdom that we gain in the wrestling. The insight that we develop in the isolation. The feelings that we come to understand only by weathering trials that we don't. This is the raw material, the precious raw material. And it has a potency and a power that we completely underestimate and recklessly discount. This stuff builds the best futures.

Second, a New Future Demands Risk

If our self-esteem is low, risk is not our friend. At those moments when we find the idea of a new future as unexpectedly tantalizing and a bit electrifying, we begin to hem and haw because we start realizing the rather steep risks involved in developing a new future. It means believing that a future exists to be

believed in. It means exercising some degree of faith that this future will be different this time when it has not been different any other time. It means placing this already shaky sense of self at great peril. It means making ourselves horrifyingly vulnerable to a future that we're not certain exists, and if perchance it does, it's trusting that it will treat us well once we get there. And finally, it's realizing that if we embark on this frightening journey, there's no coming back.

But when our self-confidence has been beaten to a pulp, every risk looks big. There is no little risk. Risk is risk, and it's formidable regardless of the nature of it. Risk is blatantly hazardous because it can be fickle, lending no sense of security as to what it will do with us. In a way it's slippery. It can turn rogue in a heartbeat. It's the worst of our fears unleashed because it can take us to the worst of places. But risk is the invitation to greater things, not the barrier to them. It's a fact of life that we must embrace if we are to move forward in the face of life.

But we have to think about the risk in *not* going forward. We have to consider the risk of staying where we are and remaining who we are. We have to ponder the price that we will pay for being apathetic versus pressing against our apathy and taking a shot at something better. We may not have the confidence that the future will be good, but neither do we have the certainty that it will be bad. Maybe not to risk is the greatest risk of all. So, we

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must weigh the risk in acting or not acting and in doing so ask which is the greater risk.

Third, a New Future Will Demand Something New

A new future cannot be entirely crafted from old material. Recycling is a great thing. Yet, our past can only be recycled so much. Everything that we recycle is limited to and constrained by the raw material that makes it up. We can possess a boundless imagination and couple that imagination with a wildly creative mind in repurposing the stuff of our past. Yet, the raw material that we work with will create limitations because the materials themselves are limited. If we have come to believe that we are not worth a new beginning, we possess no legitimate rationale to attempt anything new. Therefore, all we've got to work with is the old stuff. And while we can be ingeniously creative with it, creativity will soon turn sour without something new to refresh it.

If we want a truly new 'new' future, something about it must be new. 'New' implies something that does not possess any of the elements that we already possess. Something must be added that has not been added before. Some place that we have never been must be some place that we're now willing to consider going. Some direction that we've either adamantly avoided or never thought to consider needs to be considered and mapped out,

even if we initially embark upon it in thought only. Some decision that we may have avoided out of the fear that it may rock our world may need to be made and be granted permission to rock our world a bit, knowing that sometimes it's the rocking that brings the changing.

But it's the inclusion of the 'new' that interjects a fresh and unsullied dynamic. In the midst of our dread apprehension about anything new, we need to understand that something 'new' can be subtle. It can be small. It can be that toe in the water instead of the all-out plunge. A little 'new' can go a remarkably long way. And as we rather tentatively think about something new, we need to understand that just a touch of 'new' can gently nudge the trajectory of our lives by the slightest of margins but still break the worst of our cycles.

Fourth, a New Future Means Grieving What We're Leaving

Leaving something behind is one thing. But what we don't consider is the grieving in the leaving. When we leave something behind it will naturally leave a hole of some sort. Whether that hole be large or small, disorienting or desired, painful or painless, it is the now vacant space that was once occupied by whatever it is that we're leaving. Creating a space creates a measure of discomfort because we're not used to a hole being where something else used to be. On top of that, we're naturally prone to fill empty

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spaces for the simple fact that they're empty. 'Empty' doesn't mean that something's wrong. It means that something's coming. And because what has come before has been painful at times, that doesn't mean that it will be this time.

A low self-esteem is the belief that we carry because of the holes that we have. Whether those holes are made up of something we've lost, or something that we should have had but never did. Whatever the case, we are a prolific collection of holes strewn across the landscape of our lives that broadcast our inadequacy. Our holes hold out our deficits in bold relief. They tell us everything that we're not because of everything that should have been in those holes. They tell us that we weren't worth the few things that we accidentally did have, which explains why they were taken, leaving more holes than we can count in the taking. They convince us that we're a collection of holes because holes are what we deserve. But what we need to understand is that holes are a part of our journey, not a commentary on our value.

Sometimes the pain of accepting the hole is greater than the pain of the thing that once occupied the hole. In the ensuing emotional trade-off that we find ourselves embroiled in, we often take the very thing that was removed from the hole and attempt to put it back in order to fill in the hole and stop the pain. The problem is that the nature of both the hole

and the thing that we've removed have changed in the removing because the removed item wasn't supposed to go back. It no longer fits because it's not supposed to. Leaving the past means grieving the past, not attempting to put the proverbial round peg in what is now a square hole.

Fifth, a New Future is Not Building a Museum

We have this prevailing hoarding tendency. We simply like collecting stuff because it feels like all of this 'stuff' grounds us when our lives are spiraling so wildly that nothing's grounding us. We recognize the need to move on and we understand that we need to leave the past behind as we move on. We know that. But despite the often immense problems that the old stuff created for us, the old stuff grounds us as we deal with the bit of shifting that happens before the new 'stuff' is sufficiently developed to ground us.

So, we want to keep a few mementos. We want to grab a handful of assorted trinkets and knick-knacks to have something to ground us in the certainty of days gone-by, even though we wish that the pain associated with them would go 'bye.' However, too often keeping a few mementos turns into keeping a whole lot of mementos. Eventually, we're leaning toward creating a memento museum. Before long, we've managing a museum. And soon thereafter, we're living in it. We not supposed to live

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in it because it wasn't designed for that purpose. As we noted previously, this is the rich raw material from which we craft a future, not the raw material that we use to preserve our past. However, we want to sort and catalog and categorize and organize and stow and store all that stuff. And before we know it, the museum is managing us because our self-esteem constantly yells that we have no ability to manage a new future.

This is not to say that we shouldn't preserve our past as a sacred part of our journey. Indeed, we need to both remember and honor the past. However, when we set about creating museums, the task becomes so monstrous that we end up living in the museum that we've created. Or worse yet, it ends up living in us. When we do that, our future has become about preserving our past. Although we confuse the two, we need to understand that honoring the past is far different than living in it.

A New Future

We were not born into a world of immense and improbable possibilities just to be chained to the disillusioning limits of finite possibilities. We have a God who says that the impossible is just a rumor. It would behoove us to understand that that statement is not conditional as if it applies to a select few, but not us. We can remove ourselves from such an incredible promise, but we cannot remove the promise in the removing.

If we want a really new ‘new’ start, we’d be wise to realize that the idea of what has been will always be only ‘be,’ if we choose it to be. And in the oddity of life, we have the power and privilege to decide either way. In essence, we must forgo historical face-lifts and be willing to risk. We must be bold enough to incorporate something entirely new and we must grieve with a firm intent the hole of things left behind. We need to hold the past close to our hearts, but we must refuse to build museums around it. And if we can begin this process, even if that be a slight first step, the next things we must tackle may be the most difficult thing of all ... and that is our belief in our ability to do these very things.

The Hard Questions:

1. Which is your biggest fear, letting something go or anticipating something new?
2. Ask yourself why you fear either of these. Is the reason that you fear them substantial enough to cause the level of fear that you’re feeling?
3. Dealing with fear is not about resolving it. Rather, it’s about finding the courage to push through it. What is one thing you can do to begin to develop that courage?

Chapter Two
Beginnings
An End is Only a Beginning in Disguise

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

- Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.”

- Seneca

Both the character and the enormity of some endings are such that the loss we've experienced often leaves us believing that the ending is so final that there is nothing beyond it for any sort of beginning to get a foothold. We stand before endings that are so crushing and whose girth is so unfathomably massive that they become definitive in and of themselves. They are indisputably conclusive. They are the final 'final' statement. There is nothing after endings such as these because there is nothing left to be left. Therefore, endings are not just unfathomable. They become entirely irrefutable.

When it comes to self-esteem, it's losses like these that crush us. It's experiencing defeats that are of such gravity that any victories beyond the defeats

feel wildly incomprehensible. We come to believe that defeats are our lot in life, and as such they are the final word. They are the definitive period at the end of the sentence. They are the conclusion of what is now a forever conclusion. And as such, there is no room for any new beginning because everything behind us that we might have crafted one from was destroyed. Therefore, while the losses methodically erode our self-confidence, the belief that the losses are patently unredeemable renders the erosion a forever fixture of our failed lives.

Over time, a battered self-esteem comes to see life as a litany of irreparable losses. The crushing mass of our perceived personal deficits are so crippling that our ability to craft new beginnings (much less sustain them should they actually happen) is perceived as impossible. Life is not about new beginnings. It is about a journey of surviving old losses. It's not about looking forward. It's about avoiding looking anywhere for fear that looking at the past would be too painful and looking into the future would be too disappointing.

But every now and then we're compelled to take a peek at the horizon ahead of us. But as soon as we do, we immediately recoil from any fanciful thoughts of journeying to it because we assume that if we got there we'd just fall off of it anyway. What we don't understand is that a horizon is not something to fall off of. It's not an end. It's not a

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conclusion. It's not a period at the end of some sentence in the story of your life. Rather, a horizon is a horizon only because there's something on the other side of it that makes it a horizon. No ending possesses the power to make a horizon something without another side. And maybe that 'something' that's on the other side is your new beginning.

Endings Start as Beginnings

If we're honest with ourselves we know that endings are the product of some new start that played itself out in whatever way it did until it become an ending. So, at some point we had a new beginning; otherwise we wouldn't be experiencing this ending. Something might be concluding, but it's only doing so because at some point it started. However, by their very nature, we don't believe that endings possess anything to generate a new start because they ended. They're done. They're gone.

Clearly, endings are not beginnings. But they set the perfect stage for them. Because endings are happening right now and beginnings have yet to begin, endings require that we believe that they are only a small part of a much larger story that's already written out on a page that's already started to turn. We just don't see that part of the book yet.

Therefore, if we have solidified our perception of endings as being nothing more than endings, we will have effectively barred the majority

of beginnings from ever coming even remotely close to our lives. If by chance one sneaks in, our shattered self-esteem tends to label it as a fluke. If one inadvertently happens, we sabotage it because it can't really be real anyway. Or we turn our backs on it because it apparently showed up in the wrong place and so we let it perish in some shadowy corner of our darkened existence. Subsequently, the tempo and tenor of our lives will be perpetually cut short by the loss involved in endings, versus being eternally cut free by the anticipation of beginnings that lay staged in every ending.

If such a theme persists over a sufficient period of time, we will be beset by such cancerous maladies as depression, anxiety, pessimism, and a host of other debilitating attitudes that will cast our lives in tones of drizzling cold gray. In time, we will rather effectively validate our conviction that there are no new beginnings because we thwarted every single one of them. The page turned, but we weren't there to read it. Therefore, our self-sabotaging behaviors will leave us achingly barren of new beginnings and crushed to desperation by the belief that the beginning that might soothe the pain of our endings will never begin. And in it all, our worthlessness is reinforced at our own hands.

The Nature of Beginnings and Endings

In reality, there are many times when we welcome endings. Without question, there are a whole lot of

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things that we just can't wait to wash our hands of. We all have those nagging situations that we desperately wish would give us blessed relief by vanishing altogether. Sometimes we can't wait for the day to end, or for that looming deadline to pass, or for a particular event to be mercifully over. There are some endings that we joyously welcome with open arms, and by the time they arrive we find ourselves ecstatic that whatever's done is finally done. Nonetheless, despite these periodically ecstatic moments, our aversion to endings remains doggedly resolute.

Endings can be incapacitating and painful for an unfathomable range of reasons, most of which we never come close to identifying because we're too ensnared in the loss to see anything but the loss. We don't really identify what we're actually doing with whatever the ending is, or what the ending is actually doing to us, because we're too 'lost in the loss' to even begin to consider any of that. We're normalizing the loss as being our norm or we're justifying it as being the way that fate always shows up. Therefore, we can't see anything in the loss that we can harness in the service of what's about to begin because we're too caught up in that loss. We become lost in the loss. Therefore, this generous collection of rich resources and ever-expanding insights that were designed to maximize our new beginning are left to perish in the backwaters of an ending of which these things were not supposed to be a part.

And so, without remedy or hope thereof, the ending we are experiencing razes us flat. From this immobilizing point, any vision of a tomorrow is swallowed whole by the singular vision of the end that has beset us and the loss that has betrayed us. And because the loss is all that we can see, the ending becomes an end in itself when, directly ahead of us, new beginnings are being forged and fresh byways are being laid out from the very ending that has consumed us. We're simply too lost in the loss to see what stands but a mere step away or what lies within the turn of a single page.

The Seeds of a New Beginning

Because this occurs, we're left with the inability to see within the loss the liberally scattered seeds of a fresh beginning. We've lost the ability to comprehend that an end is always a beginning. We have recklessly exchanged the circular splendor of life for the arresting voice of fear that declares 'circular' as the muse of weaker minds. In doing so, we have forsaken the emancipating ability to fathom that whatever is ending for us is always more than an ending. And we would be wise to consider that without that ability, we will forever live the endless tale of endless endings that was anything but the story that God originally penned for us.

Such endings rob us of the vision (and the elemental conviction borne of such a vision) that

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things are escorted out of our lives so that better things have room to be escorted in. The awareness that death relentlessly begets life slips deeper into some murky cognizance of the cycle of life progressively abandoned. Rather than seeing life as an opportunist that persistently stands ready to build something out of the smoldering ashes and raise something up out of the tangled carnage, we are mired in the dreary fantasy of irresponsible idealism or the fate predetermined for losers such as ourselves. And in embracing such views, we begin to see the whole of existence itself as held haplessly captive to the very same forces and the very same fate that we ourselves face. And if life itself is hamstrung in just the same way that we are, how can there be any hope for anything?

While it takes very little imagination to conceptualize life as drowning in loss, it takes far more to see it as brimming with beginnings. In such a terribly fragile exchange, the sense that an end is only a beginning in disguise slips between our fingers and drains from the crevices of our souls. The fact of improbable new beginnings as being stitched into the very fabric of life becomes the fiction of what is purported as fact. It becomes the pathetic story of those who can't face the reality of this sordid existence of ours. Subsequently, we are left to wallow in the impoverished lie that life steals with no inkling any blessing that stands ready to sweep in in the exchange.

And so, how do we learn to see a beginning being formed in the ashes of whatever end we've experienced? How do we begin to look beyond the reality of the ending that stands looming over us to see the new beginning that stands a mere step away from us? We might do that better by getting some obstructive thinking out of the way:

First, How Our Loss is Shaped

What we're prone to do is visualize the loss within the agenda that we had created for that thing, or that person, or that life-phase. Everything in our lives is assigned some place or position, whether we realize that we've created that assignment or not. That placement is based on our determination as to how this person or this thing should be interacting with our lives. At some rudimentary level, we have a general awareness of this role as we've assigned it. However, it's not until we've incurred this loss that we recognize the full extent of its role. At times, the loss of the role exceeds the actual loss of the person or the thing, thereby leaving us confused, disoriented and wondering why we were hit so hard.

Because of that unrecognized role, we've not recognized a larger role that's simply playing itself out so it can play other things in. We assign a role to these things or these people, but we often don't assign a length of time for that role. We assume they will always be around. We grant them some sense of

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unrealistic permanence. We create a life that's fixed instead of fluid. Therefore, we lose the sense that life allows certain things to pass in order to make room for new things that will play new roles. However, that was not how we had planned it all out.

Second, We Don't Want to Lose Something

Quite simply, we tend to hate endings because many of our endings involve things that we don't want to lose. Certainly, there are many things that we're glad to be rid of, but many times some 'thing,' or some person, or some life-phase played such a potent role in our lives that we simply can't imagine going on without it. Or we feel that the end of this 'thing' has come far too prematurely, like some predatory thief having long stalked us in heartless silence, leaving us bereft of everything we could have gotten out of this thing, or it out of us.

In many cases, we had stitched that person or that thing or that success into our lives with such precise seamlessness that what was meant to be a gift to be enjoyed became a part of who we were. Often, we rob things of their true worth by granting them a place that they were never meant to have, or a position they were never meant to occupy. We made these things what they were not shaped to be and therefore our expectations of the role that they were supposed to play don't match the loss of the role that we forced them to play. If we had let them be what they were intended to be, our view of those

things and the loss of them would be quite different, likely radically different.

Whatever the case, we've been cheated, or short-changed, or short-sheeted in some manner that elicits a sense of bewildering and entirely unjust loss. To complicate matters, such supposedly premature and inappropriate losses elicit a gyrating spectrum of destabilizing emotions that compound the confusion of the loss. The loss becomes more about the fact that it shouldn't have happened rather than the fact that it did.

Third, We Fear That Whatever We've Lost Can Never Be Replaced

There's the rather paralyzing fear that what we've lost is so unique or so precisely suited to our lives that it can never be replaced. There's an immediate sense that losing something demands that it be replaced...immediately. Or better yet, we somehow expect that something should have shown up before the loss happened so that the replacement is immediate and seamless. There's that sense where we don't want to disturb the continuity of our lives and the fixed rhythm that we've created. Things have been disrupted, sometimes dramatically so, and we want to stop the disruption by instantly replacing whatever it was that we lost. We're caught up in the ever-accelerating fear that maybe it can't be replaced. Maybe there is no substitution. Maybe there is nothing to swap it out with, and we will

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therefore have to settle with the disruption of a forever “new normal” that we have absolutely no interest in or find appalling.

What we tend to miss is that replacement only serves to perpetuate the repetition of the past instead of realizing that creating space for something new creates space for something fresh. As unsettling as they might be, transitions are a move toward something better, not a lifestyle of something worse or a dulling perpetuation of what was. And it is out of something fresh that this journey of ours is so often refreshed when it would otherwise become repugnantly stagnant.

Fourth, Glorifying the End

If the nature of life is such that we are forced to tolerate endings, we want them to be good or even glorious. If it has to happen, we want an end to have some meaning to it; that whatever is ending was significant or possibly spectacular while it was around. If something's going to end and we can't stop it, we want to send it off with some sort of recognition, or with some degree of pomp, or with a rich flush of appreciation, or a final 'hurrah' of the most robust sort. If there's going to be an ending, we want it to be one that will be such an ending that it will never be forgotten. We can't hold on to that which we're losing, but we can make the end grand and glorious to the point that the memory of it all will always stay with us. There's nothing inherently

wrong about bringing something to a close in a manner that's respectful and celebratory, unless this becomes our one and total focus.

Consequently, the loss becomes about glorifying the end so as to ignore the loss or offset the injustice of it. We can't deny the loss, but we can shift our focus to something a whole lot less painful. We can eke out something that we can live with because anything else we feel we will die from. So let's make it grand and then move on with our lives letting that be the whole of our memory.

Fifth, We Fear That an Ending Might Be a Failure

What if the ending was really a failure? What if whatever it was that ended wasn't really supposed to end, but it did because somebody screwed up somewhere? What if this really wasn't the time at all? What if this loss really was grossly premature and achingly unnecessary? What if this loss was due to our stupidity or poor timing or lack of insight or lackluster commitment? What if this loss was the product of someone else's blatant failure, or a glorious manifestation of ignorance in all its ignorant glory?

Sometimes losses are so unexplainable and seemingly irrational that we think this way because we can't reason it out any other way. The fact is, given the apparent senselessness of so many losses,

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it doesn't seem reasonable that we can think beyond this kind of thinking. And it may well be that the loss did not have to happen and maybe it should not have happened at all. Face it, we live in a fallen world. Yet, life is plenty big enough and it has ample room to take the most tragic mistakes and weave them into the most wonderful of opportunities if we let it do so. An ending is only a failure if we choose not to tease out the manifold lessons in the ending. Therefore, if the ending was a failure it was likely a product of the fact that we did not tease out those lessons.

Sixth, We Fear That There Will Be No New Beginning

So, what if this is an end and nothing more than an end? What if nothing emerges from whatever it is that we've lost? What if life doesn't go on, or there are no opportunities beyond this, or it all dies right here? Could an end be irrevocably an end where a beginning of any kind simply does not exist? Is there a place where life stops because there is absolutely nothing else ahead? Could this be that dreaded chasm where there is no other side from which to pick up the journey? Could the 'end of it all' now actually be the end of it all?

And it is this very fear that makes most of our endings so terribly frightening. We often wonder will the road run out, will an irrevocable end eventually come, and will there be no place to go because the future simply won't exist and the past is

forever gone? Is that where we finally stand? And could it be that this place of a forever 'nevermore' is where we will now forever stand? Yet, it is looking at the nature and fabric of life, and in the looking realizing that things always find a way to go forward because there is always a place to go forward to. Always.

An End as a Beginning in Disguise

Life is a relentless perpetuation of things arising out of things that have passed. There is the coming and the going. The emptying out and the filling up. The uprooting and the planting. There is an unrelenting exchange that makes things unrelentingly new. It is much like the coming of spring which heralds a titanic resurgence arising out of the debris and decay of fall. It is a message woven into the most intimate fabric of creation where nothing ends because an end is only a beginning in disguise.

It's living with the understanding that loss is real, and that loss can be utterly devastating. But loss is only a precursor to something that will step in and grant us a new vantage point from which to visualize a new future. It might be different. It could take us in an entirely new direction. It may well be unfamiliar. However, it is the next step picking up where the previous step left off. And whatever the nature of this new step might be, life is such that it opens new horizons, paints new vistas, and calls us to perpetual adventure if we're willing to heed the

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call. An ending is only a beginning in disguise. And the negative view of ourselves will never be powerful enough to offset the reality that these beginnings are yours just as much as they are everyone else's.

To embrace what follows in these pages you must be able to 'entertain' the belief that you are worth new beginnings. This book is about a new beginning in your life. And so, to 'entertain' the idea that you can have one is the first step toward believing that you actually can. Your endings are only your beginnings in disguise. Your beginnings lie in the pages ahead.

The Hard Questions:

1. Pick an ending in your life that you've not been able to get past. Take a minute and ask yourself what kind of beginning could possibly come out of this ending?
2. Once you've determined what kind of beginning could come out of this ending, ask yourself if you want to deal with the pain and the work that may result in birthing this new beginning?
3. If you're up for it, what would the first step be to actually begin cultivating this new beginning?