Lesson 2

The Rules I Learned About Worth?

Opening Reflection

After beginning to notice how your sense of worth rises and falls, the next step is understanding what is driving that movement. Most people are not reacting randomly. They are following a set of internal rules that were learned over time.

These rules are often quiet and automatic. They don't usually sound like rules. They sound like thoughts that feel true.

"I should have done better."
"I can't let people down."
"I need to keep things together."

Over time, these thoughts begin to guide behavior. They shape how you respond, how you relate, and how you evaluate yourself. What starts as a belief becomes a standard, and that standard becomes the way you measure your worth.

This lesson is about slowing down enough to begin seeing those rules clearly.

Story Example

A woman once shared that she felt responsible for keeping peace in her family. If there was tension, she would step in, smooth things over, and make sure everyone felt okay. On the surface, it looked like care and responsibility. As the middle child, she felt the role of peacemaker.

But when we explored it further, she realized something deeper. Growing up, conflict was uncomfortable and often ignored. She learned that if she could manage the emotions around her, things would stay stable.

Over time, this turned into an internal rule:
"If others are upset, it is my responsibility to fix it."

As an adult, this didn't just guide her behavior. It shaped her worth. When others were okay, she felt okay. When others were not, she felt like she was failing.

She wasn't just helping. She was carrying a rule that quietly determined how she saw herself.

Core Teaching: The Rules Beneath Worth

Many of the struggles with self-worth are not just about feelings. They are about the rules that define what it takes to feel okay about yourself.

These rules often sound like:

- I must be strong at all times
- I should not make mistakes
- I need to be liked or accepted
- I have to meet expectations to feel good about myself

Over time, these rules become rigid. They don't leave room for being human. And when they are not met, the response is often harsh, critical, and immediate.

This is where the **inner critic** begins to show up more clearly.

The inner critic is not random. It is often the voice of these rules being enforced. It pushes, corrects, and evaluates, often in a way that feels intense or discouraging.

It may sound like:

- "You should have handled that better"
- "Why do you always do this?"
- "You're falling short again"

While this voice may have developed to protect or guide, it often creates pressure rather than stability.

Shifting Authority: Who Determines My Worth?

A central question begins to emerge in this work: Have I been allowing others, outcomes, or expectations to determine my worth, or am I willing to begin defining that for myself?

This is not about ignoring feedback or disconnecting from others. It is about recognizing where your authority has been placed.

If your worth is determined externally, it will always feel uncertain. If your worth begins to be defined internally, it becomes more stable.

This shift takes time, but it begins with awareness.

Introducing Boundaries as Self-Respect

As you begin to see these rules more clearly, another layer naturally follows. Many of these rules are maintained because boundaries have not been clearly defined.

If your worth is tied to pleasing others, it becomes difficult to say no.
If your worth is tied to being needed, it becomes difficult to step back.

Boundaries are not about pushing people away. They are a form of **self-respect**. They communicate that your time, energy, and emotional space matter.

Learning to set even small boundaries begins to shift how you relate to yourself. It moves you from reacting to expectations toward living with intention.

Skill: Noticing the Rule and Softening the Response

This week, the skill is not to eliminate these rules, but to begin noticing them and changing your relationship to them.

When you hear your inner critic or feel pressure to meet a certain expectation, pause and ask:

- What rule is being activated right now
- Where did I learn this rule
- Is this rule helping me, or is it creating pressure
- What would a more balanced response sound like

Instead of reacting automatically, you are beginning to create space.

Practice Challenge (This Week)

Throughout the week, begin to notice the rules that show up in your thinking and behavior.

When you feel pressure, discomfort, or self-criticism, pause and reflect:

- What am I expecting from myself in this moment
- What rule am I trying to follow
- What happens when I don’t meet this rule
- How would I respond if my worth were not at risk

Write down examples during the week. _____

Also, choose one small moment where you can practice setting and keeping a boundary. This does not need to be significant. It could be as simple as pausing before saying yes or giving yourself space before responding.

Think of your upcoming week. Is there a person or situation in your life where a boundary needs to be set?

Name the person or the situation:

_____

_____

What might you practice saying:

_____

_____

Often to maintain a boundary, we have to repeat the boundary.

Practice stating the boundary firmly, not in an angry or aggressive manner – write it out:

_____

_____

Worksheet: The Rules I Learned About Worth

Part 1: Identifying My Rules

Take time to write what feels true, not what feels right.

- I believe I have to _____ to be worthy
- I feel pressure to _____ in order to feel okay
- I tend to judge myself when I _____
- When I don't meet my expectations, I tell myself _____

Part 2: The Inner Critic Voice

Bring awareness to how you speak to yourself.

- When I make a mistake, my inner voice says…
- The tone of this voice feels…
- This voice reminds me of…
- When I listen to this voice, I tend to…

Now reflect:

- Is this voice helping me grow, or keeping me stuck
- What would a steadier, more grounded voice sound like

Part 3: Who Determines My Worth

- I tend to feel worthy when…
- I tend to feel less worthy when…
- These feelings are often influenced by… (people, outcomes, expectations)

Now consider:

- What would it look like for me to begin defining my worth from within
- What feels difficult about that shift

Part 4: Boundaries and Self-Respect

- Where in my life do I struggle to say no

- Where do I feel responsible for others' feelings or reactions
- Where do I overextend myself to maintain approval

Now reflect:

- What is one small boundary I could practice this week
- What would that boundary communicate about how I value myself

Part 5: Strength Recognition (Identity Building)

Even within these patterns, there are strengths present.

List three:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now reflect:

- How have these strengths been used in ways that may have also created pressure
- How can I begin using them in a more balanced way

Part 6: Identity Statement

"I am learning to see myself as someone who _____, while allowing myself to be human and still be worthy."

The Value of Accountability and Vulnerability

As you begin to see these rules more clearly, it can feel personal and, at times, uncomfortable. There is value in not holding this entirely on your own.

Accountability is not just about staying consistent. It is also about allowing yourself to be seen in the process.

Vulnerability plays an important role here. It is the willingness to set aside pride just enough to recognize that you are growing, that you are learning, and that there are people in your life who may benefit from that growth.

When you begin to understand your own patterns, you also begin to better understand others. This creates the potential not only to change your life, but to positively influence the people around you.

Choose someone you trust and share what you are working on this week. You might say:

"I've been noticing some of the rules I've been living by, and how they affect how I see myself. I'm working on changing that, and I wanted to share it with you."

Check in with them later in the week. Share what you noticed, what felt difficult, and where you saw even a small shift.

This is not about needing others. It is about allowing connection to support your growth.

Closing Thought

The rules you learned about worth may have helped you navigate earlier parts of your life, but they may not be serving you in the same way now.

As you begin to see them more clearly, you also begin to create the option to respond differently.

This is where change begins.

War Stories Daily Practice (End of Each Day)

At the end of each day this week, take a few minutes and write:

- One situation I handled differently was…
- What I did instead was…
- What this says about me is…
- Next week the facilitator will ask for any war stories to report – have yours ready

War Stories Log

Today's Date: _____ _____ _____

1. A moment I handled differently:

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2. What I did:

3. What made this difficult:

4. What this shows about me:

Today's Date: _____ _____ _____

2. A moment I handled differently:

3. What I did:

4. What made this difficult:

5. What this shows about me:

Closing, Repeat Together

When worth becomes tied to feelings and conditions, self-worth feels uncertain, because feelings and conditions are always changing. What I am beginning here is not a quick shift, but a steady one.

It is never too late to rewrite your story – Dr. John

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