

## LOW SELF ESTEEM

Imagine for a moment that a friend comes to you in tears. She's had a rough week and says "Nobody likes me. I'm too shy. Whenever I'm around other people, nobody even notices me. I'll never be popular. I have no self-esteem." How would you respond to her? Would you point out all of her positive qualities that outweigh the negative ones and try and pump up her self esteem or is there a better way?

What does God think of the topic of low self-esteem? Is it something to be avoided or not? And if we struggle with it how do we deal with it?

First of all, what do we mean by self esteem? The word esteem comes from the word estimate. Self esteem then is the estimate or value or the worth that we place on ourselves. We can think of ourselves highly or we can think little of ourselves. What is the correct way that God wants us to estimate ourselves? Let's look at some scriptures that relate to how God wants us to view ourselves.

Over in **Ezekiel 36:31** after Israel will repent after the Great Tribulation God says: "Then you shall remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall **loathe yourselves** in your own sight for your iniquities."

A similar thing is mentioned over in **Job 42:5-6**. After being humbled by God Job said to God: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I **abhor myself** and repent in dust and ashes."

On the other hand when Christ was asked which was the greatest commandment He said we are to love God with all of our being and also to love our neighbour as we love ourself. David Seamands in his book "Healing for Damaged Emotions" writes the following:

We do not have two commandments here, but three: to love God, to love yourself, and to love others. I put self second, because **Jesus plainly made a proper self-love the basis of a proper love for neighbour...**Paul also showed that it is the basis of a solid marriage when he wrote, 'Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. **He who loves his own wife loves himself**, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it' (**Ephesians 5:28-29**).

Experience confirms Paul's psychological accuracy. **Because some people love their partners the way they love themselves their marriages are in trouble. For self-belittling works its way out through marriage.** A proper self-nourishing and a realization of your own worth are essential if you are to be a good wife or husband (Healing for Damaged Emotions, p.77-79).

We have some verses that appear to say that it is right that we should think poorly and even hate ourselves while others indicate that we should love ourselves also. How can this be? Is this a contradiction? Does God want us to think highly of ourselves or little of ourselves?

**The answer to that question is - BOTH. In fact, there is both a right and a wrong way to think highly of ourselves and there is also a right and wrong way to think low of ourselves.**

Let's look at each of those four ways we can view ourselves.

Now the wrong way that we can view ourselves highly is labelled in the Bible as pride where we think too highly ourselves apart from God and often look down on others thinking we are much better than they are. The opposite of that is humility or the right way to think low of ourselves. In **Philippians 2:3** we read: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem another better than themselves."

This humility is where we realise that we are nothing in comparison to God's greatness. We realise that we are sinners desperately in need of the continual forgiveness of our many sins not just in the past but on an ongoing basis. This realisation of how little we are without God's grace motivates us to reject blowing our own trumpet. When we think low of ourselves in this way we are more willing to show mercy to others and to esteem others better than ourselves by putting the needs of others ahead of our own. This is the right form of low self esteem that we should strive for.

The Protestant view of sinful human nature is that it is something we inherit as if it is something genetic that Adam and Eve passed onto us after they sinned. The Church of God understanding of human nature is that is not something inherited but something that we acquire from earliest childhood as we choose to be self centred given we live in a world that encourages us to reject God's way and we are constantly bombarded with Satan's broadcasts of selfishness.

If morally we are born neutral why do we hear in sermons that we have to repent not just of our sins but of who we are? What is meant by that phrase? Even though we are born neutral and our choices are a mixture of good and bad we simply without the full measure of God's spirit cannot consistently and always choose God's way.

Without the full measure of God's spirit we morally do not have the spiritual strength to always choose what is right and often will yield to sin under pressure. Without the full measure of God's spirit we have a natural bent to being selfish and to sin. It's that natural bent towards sin that we have to turn from with the help and power of God's spirit.

**That part of who we are, our natural bent towards sin, though is not all that we are. We have talents that themselves come from God. We also have our own unique personality that God Himself created. There's a lot more to us than just our sinful nature.**

**We have an expression that we often use when it comes to how we view others that goes like this - love the sinner but hate the sin. This expression doesn't just apply to how we should view others but it also applies to how we should view ourselves.**

**We should love the sinner (our talents and the unique personality that God Himself created in us) but we should hate the sin (our sins and our natural tendency towards sin)!**

We've seen how humility is the right kind of low esteem we should have but there is also a wrong form of low self esteem.

If you suffer from a chronic sense of inferiority and inadequacy because compared to others you just are not smart enough, attractive enough, successful or rich enough that is almost

always the wrong form of low self esteem. This is what most people think of when they think of low self esteem.

**It is more accurate to call this wrong form of low self esteem what it is – insecurity. You are insecure because you are trying to anchor your value to the shifting sands of what others think of you or how you compare to others or you own lofty hopes and expectations rather than anchoring yourself to the bedrock of what God thinks of you and how much that He values you.**

If we have flaws and problems that eat away at us we should seek to improve those but not lose sight of how much God values us and that we are not alone. The God of the Universe is all for us and will always be there to help us.

Let's look at one biblical example of the wrong kind of low self esteem or insecurity over in **Exodus 4**. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush Moses kept on saying "Well what if the people don't believe that you have sent me to lead Israel out of Egypt?" Finally in **verse 10**, he admits the root of his fear: "I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

How does God respond to Moses' low view of himself? Does he tell him he's not as bad as he thinks he is? Does he point out all of Moses' positive qualities that outweigh the negative ones? No. Instead, He points Moses to Himself in the next couple of verses and says, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say'" (**verses 11-12**). When Moses continue to object it says that the Lord's anger was kindled against him (**verse 14**).

If our insecurities get in the way of our ability to do what God wants us to and to love others as we should then we have a problem. This is exactly what happened with the lazy servant that buried his talent in the parable of the talents.

On the other hand, a great biblical example of someone who was humble yet full of confidence not in his own ability but in God's power to back up his actions was David going up against Goliath. To Goliath he said over in **1 Samuel 17:45-47** "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. The Lord will deliver you into my hand today...And all this multitude shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's."

There is zero boasting of his own strength. He is only concerned with God's will and honour and has complete trust that God will back up his effort as God did with the lion and the bear previously. When you are passionate about God's will and caring for others you don't dwell on your own weaknesses.

The same story applies with the Apostle Paul who called himself the least of the apostles because he had Christians murdered before he was converted yet he poured everything into doing God's work. Paul wrote in **Philippians 4:13** that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Two things that people with insecurity often say are that they can't do something and that they are all alone. Paul says that we can and that we are not alone – we have Jesus Christ to strengthen us. He can make up for what we lack when we put forth the initiative to do it God's way.

Some well-meaning people mislabel insecurity as humility, but there is a significant difference between the two. A humble person does not spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about his or her own flaws. A humble person does not need to undervalue or disparage themselves. They are far too busy engaging in the world beyond their own self-drama.

We all want to feel important and loved by others. When those emotional needs aren't being met and we don't trust God to provide them often we go seeking them the wrong way. Insecure people will often fish for praise from others or likes on Facebook or manipulate situations and conversations to make others think that they are important. Those who are insecure may desperately try to hide their weaknesses from others and they will criticise others and bring them down so they don't feel quite so inferior.

How people treat us can play a big part in moulding our self-esteem. Often we do what Paul warns us not to do in **2 Corinthians 10:12** when we compare ourselves with others. Spiritually we need to compare ourselves with God and draw our self-worth from Him. We are all in the same boat when we compare ourselves to God. We should not feel inferior to anyone because EVERYONE is in the same boat when we compare ourselves with God!

Satan is called the accuser of the brethren in **Revelation 12:10**. Satan uses inferiority, inadequacy and self-belittling to defeat Christians and prevent them from realizing their full potential as God's own children.

**The healing of the wrong kind of low self-esteem or insecurity really hinges on a choice you must make: Will you listen to Satan as he employs all the lies, distortions, put-downs, and the hurts of your past to keep you bound by unhealthy feelings about yourself? Or will you receive your self-esteem from God and His word?**

In a heart to heart speech that I gave in our local men's club at a low point in my life I opened up about a number of failures primarily in my work life. I made the comment that "I have given Satan plenty of ammunition to destroy my self confidence but I refuse to play his game." It really is a choice that we make.

**How much does God value you? He values us so highly that He gave His son to die for us. The right kind of high self esteem is embracing the high value that God has for us while simultaneously hating our own human nature as we strive to replace it with God's nature.**

We are a child of God, a friend of Jesus, redeemed and forgiven of our sins, We are God's workmanship. When we fail we are well aware that we are a work in progress but what a work that is - God is gradually transforming us into a God being from the inside out. And for those who worry about their weight or not being attractive enough we even get an upgraded body in the resurrection. As Christians, we do not have to drum up overinflated views of ourselves to be acceptable. God makes us worthy of love and is saving us through Christ Jesus. Human criticism does not hold any weight when compared to God's opinion of us.

**In conclusion, the right form of low self esteem that we should strive for is humility where we realise that we are nothing in comparison to God and that we are sinners desperately in need of the grace and forgiveness of God and we esteem others better than ourselves by putting their needs ahead of our own.**

**The wrong kind of low self esteem is insecurity where we seek our worth from what Satan and others think of us rather than how incredibly much God values us. We should love the sinner (the unique personality and talents that God Himself created in us) while we hate our sinful nature.**