

“OVERCOMING LOW SELF-ESTEEM”

Psalm 130

At times, we all struggle with low self-esteem. However, for some, this problem is chronic and disabling. Such people view themselves as having no worth. They constantly worry that they’re not good enough, intelligent enough, or attractive enough to be loved and accepted by others.

This painful notion of “not good enough” is reflected in their speech; in expressions like “I can’t do anything right. I don’t have what it takes. I’m useless, hopeless, broken, unfixable. I hate myself. I wish I were dead. And sadly, dismal expressions like these can become self-fulfilling prophecies. People who expect to fail often do fail. With each failure, their self-esteem sinks even lower.

Low self-esteem can lead to self-defeating behaviors: substance abuse, compulsive lying, excessive boasting, being hypercritical of others, eating disorders, isolationism—a reluctance to socialize for fear of being noticed or criticized. Such behaviors are often attempts to conceal feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy.

Many factors can contribute to low self-esteem: failures, losses, relationships, divorce, especially comparisons to others. “I’m not as wealthy. I’m not as attractive. I’m not as successful, likable, tall, educated. Therefore I must not be worthless.” However, when making such comparisons, few stop to consider the foolishness of basing personal worth on personal possessions. As Jesus warned in Luke 12:15, **“Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”**

Self-esteem is also impacted by other people, especially family. Parents, how much influence do we have on the self-esteem of our children? I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home where I was hugged, loved, encouraged, and disciplined; a home-life that greatly impacted my view of self and the world.

Sadly, however, many children grow up in homes where they are ignored, unwanted, and ridiculed. “You are so stupid and useless. You can’t do anything right. You’ll never amount to anything. You make my life miserable. I wish you had never been born. Why can’t you be more like your brother or sister?” What view of self and the world will these children have? **“Fathers,”** wrote Paul in Ephesians 6:4, **“do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”**

There are also spiritual causes of low self-esteem: sin, guilt, surrendering to temptation despite the sincere desire to please God. “O God, how could I have done that again? I promised I wouldn’t. I am so worthless.” Are these words—and we have all spoken them—so very different from Paul’s words in Romans 7? **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do,”** Romans 7:15. And in Romans 7:24, **“What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?”**

Even the difficult circumstances in our lives—sickness, debt, disappointment, loss failure—can lead to a sense of worthlessness; as if God were not interested in helping us. “God, why are these things happening to me? Why do things always go wrong in my life? This is not how I expected my life to be. I know people who don’t have any problems; who are healthy, wealthy, happy. Do you have something against me, God? Are those people worth more to you than I am?”

When Lazarus of Bethany unexpectedly died, both of his sisters, Mary and Martha, spoke identical words to Jesus: **“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died,”** John 11:21,32. The words were respectful; but they also contained an implied or perhaps unintentional rebuke, ‘Lord, if You cared; if You had been doing what You should have been doing, our brother would not have died.’

And translating this to our own experience: “Lord, if you cared, my spouse would not have died. If You cared, I would not be struggling to pay bills. If You cared, I would be driving a new car, living in a mansion instead of a one-bedroom apartment. If You cared, I would have won the Publishers

Clearing House Sweepstakes. I must mean nothing to You, Lord. You must think I'm worthless. And maybe I am."

These are merely some of the causes and consequences of low self-esteem. And rest assured that I have not presented them indifferently or academically; that is, without the benefit of personal experience. Like most, I do have experience with low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy.

In my corporate career, for example, I went through three job losses. "Mark, we appreciate your efforts and service. But empty your desk; return your cell phone, laptop, and access card; and sign this document that doesn't say "we let you go," but instead says that you "left the company to pursue other interests. Oh, and have a nice day." Three downsizings of this sort did nothing for my self-esteem; nor did subsequent years of completing job applications and sending out unanswered resumes. "What is wrong with me? Am I of no worth to even one company in the United States of America; not even to Walmart, McDonalds, or Home Depot?"

How can one overcome the all-too-frequent and all-too-painful feelings of low self-esteem? When I typed the words "HOW TO CONQUER LOW SELF-ESTEEM" into an Internet search engine, I got 1,760,000 results. "Do this" and "try that" and "avoid this" and "believe that"—some helpful, some harmful; but many relying on human strength and human wisdom to solve the very human problem of low self-esteem.

Some 1,760,000 solutions, when all Scripture does is to direct us to the one true God and to the answers in His one inspired word. If today you are struggling with feelings of worthlessness or know someone who is—and we all do know someone, don't we?—I urge you to listen carefully to what the word of God says about having the right view of self; and about moving forward in life with godly confidence.

I said godly confidence. God has absolutely no use for sinful human pride. As stated in James 4:6, "**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**" However, those who humble themselves before God and trust in Him have every reason to be confident, knowing that their confidence lies

in God; knowing that every aspect of their lives is governed by the grace, power, and unending love of Jesus Christ.

Do you think Jesus Christ had low self-esteem or a poor self-image? He was born in a barn. He lived in poverty. He had no place to call home, no bank account, no important social connections. Talk about rejection, talk about being unwanted: **“He was despised and rejected by men,”** Isaiah 53:3. **“He came to that which was His own, but his own did not receive Him,”** John 1:11.

Yes, Jesus was humble. Jesus humbled Himself for our sakes, as Paul wrote in Philippians 2: **“Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing.”**

Yet, did Christ’s true humility result in a lack of confidence? Far from it. He confidently carried out his work as the Messiah. He confidently declared God’s truth. He confidently denounced sin and religious hypocrisy. He confidently went to the cross. The confidence Jesus displayed was not grounded in His true deity; though it surely could have been. Instead, as our Substitute and as our Example, His confidence was grounded entirely in His trust in His heavenly Father.

In Psalm 130, the psalmist declared, **“and in His word I put my hope.”** What hope does the word of God offer you if you are struggling with low self-esteem or a sense of worthlessness?

First, the word of God states clearly that you were created by God and for God. As Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16, **“All things were created through Him and for Him.”** If we were created for God, how can we expect to live apart from God?

Someone I care about deeply told me once: “There are days when I don’t feel like getting out of bed; days when I see no point to anything.” The point is God. The purpose and meaning you are looking for in life are in God and only in God. This is because within every human heart there is a God-sized hole that only God can fill.

And this is precisely why all the fame, fortune, and possessions in the world will never bring you true or lasting happiness, or a genuine sense of fulfillment and self-worth. You may be thinking, “I just want to be loved;” but what you really mean is “I want God’s love.” You may be thinking, “I’d like to be rich;” but what you really mean is “I want the riches of forgiveness and grace in my Lord Jesus Christ.” You may be thinking, “I only want to belong;” but what you really mean is “I want to belong to God.”

This is the life for which God created you. This is the life that the sin of Adam and Eve abolished. This is the life restored through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the one who said, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,”** John 10:10. Does that sound like a life from which anything is missing? Or Romans 8:37, **“In all these things we are more than conquerors.”** Does that sound like a life from which anything is missing? Or Philippians 4:13, **“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”** Does that sound like a life from which anything is missing? **“EVERYTHING,”** Paul wrote. Get a job. Forgive a hurt. Repair a marriage. Overcome low self-esteem.

Second, you are a unique creation of God, as unique as your own fingerprints, DNA, and retinal pattern. God has made billions of people since the creation of Adam and Eve; however, He has only made one you. He didn’t have to make you. But God chose to make you because He wanted you here, in this time, in this place, with these opportunities. Do you realize how special this makes you; what purpose and significance God’s choice brings to your daily life?

You are not a mistake. You are not a coincidence. You are not an accident of the universe or a random product of blind evolution. You are a unique creation of God. Read yourself into Psalm 139: **“For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.”**

Third, you are dearly loved by God. Of all the circumstances in life that cause low self-esteem, what is more common than feeling unwanted, undesired, and unloved? Even at a human level, telling someone “I love you” is like pouring water on a thirsty, dying plant. Love makes us grow, thrive, feel alive, and bear abundant fruit. Love puts a skip in our step and a song in our heart. Yet, despite best intentions, human love can change, fade, and disappear.

But God’s love for you is changeless and eternal. Even at the worst times of your life, when everything seems to go wrong, God is still loving you. I’m not asking you to take my word on this matter; take God’s word—which, of course, is the reason the Psalmist wrote, **“And in His word I put my hope,”** Psalm 130:5.

Paul wrote in the glorious eighth chapter of Romans: **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord,”** Romans 8:38-39.

And not only has God said “I love you;” not only has God written “I love you;” God has proven His love for you in the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is why so many Bible passages about God’s love are linked to Christ’s sacrifice. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,”** John 3:16. **“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,”** Romans 5:8. **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us,”** 1 John 3:16.

Fourth, you are of immense worth to God. Others may look past you or through you, ignore you, underestimate you, ridicule you, laugh at your accomplishments or pick you last for the team. But to Almighty God you are of immense worth. What should you care more about; what other people think of you or what God thinks of you? The reason for your worth lies not in you but in God; not in your personal worth, but the worth God conferred upon you in the priceless blood of Jesus Christ.

If the value of something is determined by the price we are willing to pay in order to have it, how much you must be worth to God. He willingly sacrificed His Son in order to save you and redeem you for Himself. And so Simon Peter wrote in his First Epistle: **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect,”** 1 Peter 1:18-19.

From this moment on, every time you begin to feel worthless, unwanted, or unloved, look at the cross of Jesus Christ. Look to that old, rugged exclamation point of God’s love, and know how precious you are in His sight. As you leave the Lord’s Table today, don’t return home commiserating about everything wrong in your life. Leave rejoicing in the sacrifice Jesus made to give you life, hope, forgiveness, and salvation.

Fifth and finally, you were adopted into God’s family. As the apostle wrote in Romans 8: **“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”** If God adopted you, dear friend, then God chose you. If God chose you, then God wanted you. And if God wanted you, how can you go on feeling unloved, unwanted, and undesirable?

You were created for God. You are a unique creation of God. You are dearly loved by God. You are of immense worth to God. You were adopted by God. These are the holy, undeniable, irrevocable truths of Scripture by which to overcome low self-esteem.

So, with the psalmist we say: **“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope,” Psalm 130:5.**