

## OVERCOMING LOW SELF-ESTEEM

### Psalm 130

Everyone has moments of low self-esteem. However, for some this problem is chronic and even disabling. Such people view themselves as worthless and useless, with no purpose in life. They constantly worry about being good enough, intelligent enough, or attractive enough to be loved, wanted, and accepted by others.

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

Low self-esteem can also lead to self-defeating behaviors: substance abuse, compulsive lying, excessive boasting, a hypercriticism of others, eating disorders, isolationism—that is, a reluctance to socialize for fear of being noticed or ridiculed or different.

Many factors can contribute to low self-esteem: failures, losses, loveless marriages, divorce, aging, and especially comparing oneself to others: “I’m not as wealthy. I’m not as attractive. I’m not as successful, likable, tall, educated, gifted, strong, popular.” 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, “**A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**”

Self-esteem can be impacted by other people, especially family members. 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, disciplined, and taught the word of God; a home-life that greatly impacted by view of self and the world.

Sadly, however, many children grow up in homes where they are ignored, unwanted, ridiculed, and torn down instead of being built up: “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 world will such children have? No wonder Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29, “**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**” And in Ephesians 6:4, “**Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**”

And then there are 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 am so worthless. How can even You love me, want me, forgive me?” Are these words so 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.”**

Certainly, the difficult circumstances in our lives—sickness, debt, the loss of a loved one—can lead to a sense of worthlessness; as if God were not interested in helping us. “O 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 many people who have no problems; who are healthy, wealthy, and happy. Do You have something against me, God? Are those people of more worth to You than I am?”

When Lazarus of Bethany died unexpectedly, his sisters Mary and Martha voiced identical words to Jesus. They said: **“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 criticism: “Lord, if You really cared; if You had been doing what You should have been doing, this tragedy would not have happened.”

Translating this to our own experience: “Lord, if You cared, my loved one would not have died. If You cared, my marriage would not be troubled. If You cared, my children would not have turned against me. If You cared, I would be driving a new car, working at higher-paying job, and living in a Beverly Hills mansion instead of a one-bedroom efficiency apartment. I must mean nothing to You, Lord. You must think I’m worthless. And perhaps 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 benefit of personal experience. Like most, I too have occasionally wrestled with feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy.

During my corporate career, for example, I went through three downsizings and three job losses. One employer called me into his office without warning and said: “Mark, I appreciate your years of loyalty, effort, and service. But it’s time to move on. So, empty your desk; return your company cell phone, laptop, and access card; and sign this document that says you left to pursue other interests. Good luck. Have a nice day.”

Downsizings and job losses did nothing to enhance my self-esteem; nor did subsequent years of completing job applications and sending out unanswered resumes. “What’s wrong with me?” I wondered. “Am I too old, too experienced, or perhaps too inept? Am I of no worth to even one corporation in the United States of America—not even to Walmart, Home Depot, or McDonalds?”

How can we overcome the all-too-frequent and all-too-painful feelings of low self-esteem? When I typed the words HOW TO OVERCOME LOW SELF-ESTEEM

into an internet search engine, I got 31,100,000 results in 0.51 seconds. Different websites about ‘doing this’ or trying that’ or ‘avoiding this’ or ‘believing that;’ some helpful, some harmful, but many relying on human strength and human wisdom to solve the very human problem of low self-esteem.

31,100,000 solutions, when all Scriptures does is to direct us to the one true God and to the answers in His one inspired word, the Bible. So then, if you are struggling with feelings of worthlessness or know someone who is—and we all know someone, don’t we?—listen carefully to what the word of God says about having the right view of self and about moving forward with godly confidence.

I said godly confidence, because God has 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 Him have every reason for godly confidence, knowing that their confidence lies in God; knowing that every aspect of their life is governed by the grace, power, and inexhaustible love of Jesus Christ.

Did Jesus have low self-esteem or a poor self-image? After all, He was born in a barn. He lived in poverty. He had no place to call home; no bank account, no university education, no five-figure salary, no designer clothes, no cell phone, no followers on Twitter or Instagram. Talk about rejected. 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 humility result in a lack of self-confidence? Did He despair, fear, or surrender? Far from it. Instead, He confidently carried out His work as our Messiah. He confidently proclaimed God’s truth. He confidently denounced the sin and hypocrisy of Israel’s religious leaders. He confidently went to the cross. And the confidence Jesus displayed was not grounded in His true deity, though it surely could have been. Rather, as our Substitute and 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 and a sense of worthlessness? Consider the following.

**First, the word of God states that you, as an individual, were created by God and for God.** Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16, **“All things were created by Him and for Him.”** If we were created for God, how can we expect to live—to be happy, fulfilled, purpose-driven—apart from God?

Years ago, a friend of mine told me: “There are days when I don’t feel like getting out of bed; days when I see no point to living.” The point of living is God. The purpose and meaning we seek in life are found in God and only in God. This is because there is a God-sized hole in every human heart and that only God can fill.

And this is also precisely why all the fame, fortune, possessions, pleasures, and lottery tickets in the world will never bring anyone true happiness or a genuine sense of fulfillment and self-worth. People say, “I just want to be loved.” But what they really need is God’s love in Christ. People say, “I’d like to be rich.” But what they really need is the wealth of God’s grace and forgiveness in Christ. People say, “I only want to belong.” But what they real need is to belong to God.

This is the life that God has created for you—a life of hope, expectation, fullness, love, forgiveness, confidence, and worth. This is the life that the sin of Adam and Eve abolished. This is the life restored to you through faith in Jesus Christ. For He is the one who said, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,”** John 10:10. Does this sound like a life from which anything is missing?

Or Romans 8:37, **“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”** Does this sound like a life from which anything is missing? Or Philippians 4:13, **“I can do everything through Him who give me strength.”** EVERYTHING, Paul said. Get a job. Forgive a hurt. Repair a marriage. Overcome low self-esteem. Does this sound like a life from which anything is missing?

**Second, you are a unique creation of God.** According to a recent poll in the United Kingdom, nearly ninety-percent of people surveyed—ages sixteen to twenty-nine—believe that their lives have no purpose or meaning. Aside from having no foundation in the word of God, how many of these young people developed such a dismal view of self and the world because of the theory of evolution? After all, evolution teaches that we were all random accidents of a cold, uncaring Cosmos. Therefore we are immaterial. We don’t matter. The Bible teaches something else; namely, that each of us matter greatly to God.

You, dear friend, were not only created by God and for God, you are a unique creation of God; as unique as your fingerprints, DNA, and retinal pattern. Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has made billions of people. But He 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?

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 Almighty God. Read yourself into these words of 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."**

**Third, you are dearly loved by God.** Of all the circumstances in life that cause low self-esteem, what is more common than feeling unloved? Even at a purely human level, telling someone "I love you" is like pouring water on a thirsty, dying plant. Knowing we are loved 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 eventually disappear.

But God's love for you is changeless and eternal. Even at the worst times of your life, God is still loving you. I'm not asking you to take my word for it. I am asking you to take God's word. As the psalmist said: **"And in His word I put my hope,"** Psalm 130:5. In that glorious eighth chapter of Romans Paul wrote: **"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."**

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 only 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, underestimate, or ridicule you; laugh at your accomplishments or choose you last for the team. But to Almighty God, you are of enormous worth. What should you care about more: what other people think of you or what God thinks of you? And the reason for your immense worth lies not in you but in God; not in your personal worth, but in the worth conferred upon you through 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, of how much worth you must be to God. How can you know? God willingly sacrificed His Son to save you from your sins and to redeem you for Himself. And therefore we can never rightly say, "God, You don't love me. God, You don't care about me. God, you must think I'm of no worth." The cross of Jesus Christ declares otherwise. 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 1:19-19.

From this moment on, every time you feel worthless; every time you feel unwanted or unloved; look at the cross of Jesus. Look to that old, rugged exclamation point of God's love, and know without doubt how precious you are in His sight. And as you leave the Lord's Table today, don't return home commiserating about everything wrong in your life. Leave rejoicing in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made to give you life, hope, forgiveness, and salvation.

**Fifth and finally, you were adopted into God's family.** As Paul 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, then God chose you. If God chose you, then God wanted you. And if God wanted you, how can you go on feeling unwanted, unloved, and undesirable?

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

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