

Christian Growth Course - Developing Healthy Self-Esteem

Introduction: Many of us do not like ourselves. We compare ourselves with others and wish we were like them. We don't think others can like or accept us--how could they when there are so many things wrong with us? We may give a lot of attention to whether people are approving us or not. Low self-esteem is a problem for many people, and it leads to still other problems. It is the opposite of pride. When a person thinks too highly of himself (Romans 12:3), he is "proud" and "full of himself." But we seldom realize that the person who constantly worries about his low worth is also "full of himself" or obsessed with himself. Attaining a healthy self-respect is a vital step toward spiritual freedom and usefulness.

1. Low self-esteem can lead to other problems, such as:
 - A. Fears and anxieties, lack of confidence.
 - 1) Shyness, inability to make friends.
 - 2) Inability to assert oneself.
 - 3) Inability to perform well, for fear of failure.
 - B. A need to always be proving something.
 - C. Drug and alcohol abuse.
 - D. Broken homes and rebellion.
 - E. Inability to give love because of an abnormal need to receive love.
 - F. Promiscuity, immorality and marital unfaithfulness in a search for acceptance.
 - G. Emotional illness.

2. Some dangers centering around the problem of low self-esteem:
 - A. Letting a poor estimate of myself become a false humility or a form of false penitence.
 - B. Thinking that because my parents or some experience damaged my self-image, I am not responsible for my actions and choices.
 - C. Thinking that adjustment of self-esteem is all I need (a cure-all). Self can never save us; only Christ can.
 - D. Thinking God cannot use me if I have an inferiority complex.

3. Some evidence of self-rejection (Based on a list from the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Textbook).
 - A. Over-concern with outward appearance (clothes, cosmetics, impressions, etc.).
 - B. Bitterness about one's faults or defects.

- C. Wishing you were someone else or were like someone else.
- D. Being overly critical of self.
- E. Inability to love others enough.
- F. Excessive shyness.
- G. Perfectionism.
- H. Overspending to impress people.
- I. Boasting or showing off.
- J. Neglecting real priorities because of pursuits that will impress people.
- K. Over-concern about hiding defects.

4. Some causes of low self-worth:

- A. Parental mistakes and family influences.
 - 1) Demanding too much of children too soon.
 - 2) Demanding too little.
 - 3) Making damaging comparisons.
 - 4) Ridiculing or joking about a child's appearance or failings.
 - 5) Careless statements that communicate rejection, worthlessness.
 - 6) Partiality to one child over another.
 - 7) Undisciplined, disorderly lifestyle.
 - 8) Lack of consistent discipline.
 - 9) Discipline without reconciliation.
 - 10) Fatigue and time-pressure - no time for children.
 - 11) A harsh, critical spirit.
 - 12) A failure to notice and praise positive features and accomplishments.
 - 13) An inability or failure to communicate love and acceptance, to show the child that he or she is valued and valuable.
- B. Certain stages of life, such as:
 - 1) Adolescence

- 2) Mid-life
- 3) Old age
- C. False or inadequate standards in the media and in our culture, such as:
 - 1) Physical attractiveness
 - 2) Athletic ability
 - 3) Intelligence
 - 4) Wealth
 - 5) Youth
 - 6) Power
- D. False, worldly ideas about the value of homemaking.
- E. Handicaps.
- F. Traumas such as rape and sexual abuse.
- G. Divorce
- H. Failure in, or dropping out of, school, career, etc.
- I. Mental or emotional problems.
- J. A habit of negative self-talk. (Examples: "I always fail at things that are important." "Nobody could admire me." "If I try to make friends, I know that they will reject me.")

5. Some truths that will free us and help us to accept ourselves (John 8:32):

- A. The desire to be accepted and approved by others is one of the strongest drives we have (probably even stronger than sex). Understanding this natural desire will help us to control it.
- B. We are hardly ever objective about ourselves; we do not see ourselves as we really are.
 - 1) Because we feel so badly about ourselves, we imagine that others feel the same way about us. We often read rejection into the words and actions of others when it is not there.
 - 2) Most people do not see us as we see ourselves.
 - 3) Many attractive and able people do not see themselves that way.
 - 4) Most people see themselves as less valuable and capable than they are.
- C. Many people whom you envy and think of as secure and gifted have the same self-doubts that you do.

- 1) The person you envy may be envying you.
 - 2) The person you are afraid to meet may also be afraid to meet you.
 - 3) You worry about what the other person is thinking while he/she worries about what you are thinking.
- D. It is futile and wasteful to grieve over an unchangeable defect when you could rise above it and have a happy life in spite of it.
- E. Your concern over your self-worth decreases your attractiveness as a person, and a freedom from such concern makes you more attractive.
- F. The pain of low self-esteem often creates behavior that further damages self-esteem. Examples:
- 1) The over-weight person despises himself, eats to console himself, and adds to his problem.
 - 2) The person who drinks to forget his unhappiness with himself only adds to his lack of self-respect.
 - 3) The person who shows off to impress people looks back and discovers that he has made a fool of himself.
- G. Rejection by another human or humans is no dependable indication of what you are worth. (In fact, rejection by some people might be a sign of great worth - Luke 6:26).
- H. Self-acceptance does not mean you have no "minuses." You are aware of them but are also aware of your "pluses."
- I. Personality and inward attractiveness are far more impressive to people than outward attractiveness - 1 Peter 3:3-6; Proverbs 15:30; 31:30.
- J. Self-esteem is necessary to a good marriage and to all good relationships. The person who likes himself does not need to pretend; he can be transparent. He can communicate, give love, does not always need extra approval or to be handled with "kid gloves," and does not imagine rejection.
- K. The world's standards for personal worth are deceptive and incomplete. We need to have our eyes opened by God's truth to what is really valuable - 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:32.
- L. When we resent our unchangeable features, we are questioning God who made us as we are for a purpose - Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:20; Psalm 139:13-16; Exodus 4:11.
- M. God can be glorified and his work accomplished through our weaknesses - Romans 8:28; John 11:4; 9:1-3; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
- N. Our suffering can change us into more attractive, wholesome people - 1 Corinthians 11:28-33; Hebrews 5:8; Romans 5:3, 4.
- O. Comparing ourselves with others is foolish. It is God's valuation of us that matters - 2

Corinthians 10:12; Romans 2:29b; John 5:44.

- P. God values inward beauty - 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Matthew 5:3-11; Galatians 5:22,23; Psalm 29:2.
- Q. I am made in God's image - Genesis 1:26, 27 - and am being re-made though I had fallen - Colossians 3:10; Isaiah 61:3; Ephesians 2:10. "God is not finished with me yet."
- R. Real life is not in possessions or wealth - Luke 12:15.
- S. Life is worthwhile because Jesus is living in me - Galatians 2:20; 4:19.
- T. We are going to be made beautiful like Jesus - 1 John 3:1, 2.
- U. Jesus had many reasons by the world's standards to feel badly about himself, but he did not - Isaiah 53:2, 3; Matthew 13:53-58; John 7:5; Mark 3:21; John 1:46; Luke 9:58; Galatians 3:13.
- V. Many of God's greatest servants have had defects or problems that could have caused self-rejection:
- 1) Joseph - Genesis 37:3-36; 39:20
 - 2) Jacob - Genesis 32:30, 31
 - 3) Elisha - 2 Kings 2:23
 - 4) Jephthah - Judges 11:1
 - 5) Gideon - Judges 6:15
 - 6) Moses - Acts 7:23-29; Exodus 4:10
 - 7) Paul - 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; 10:10
 - 8) Zacchaeus - Luke 19:2, 3
 - 9) Timothy - 1 Timothy 5:23
- W. No member of Christ's body has all the gifts - 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Romans 12:4-8.
- 1) No member is to be jealous of another member's gifts - 1 Corinthians 12:14-18.
 - 2) There is no member who is not important - 1 Corinthians 12:21-26.
 - 3) The members who seem less honorable are honored even more by God - 1 Corinthians 12:22-24.
 - 4) Since the gifts are given by the Lord according to his own wisdom and will, it is not right to question him because he did not give me a certain ability - 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18.
- X. God does not de-value a person because of age, race, sex, poverty, orphanhood, handicaps, etc. - 2 Corinthians 4:16; Proverbs 16:31; Galatians 3:28; Psalm 72:12; 68:5.

- Y. Every person is valuable because he is unique.
- Z. Most important of all, God sees every one of us as greatly valuable.
 - 1) He gave his own Son to redeem us - John 3:16; Romans 5:8. He would have done this even if you had been the only person on earth - Matthew 18:10-14.
 - 2) God is personally concerned about each of us and has tender affection for us - Luke 12:6,7; 1 Peter 5:7; Luke 12:32; John 13:1; Luke 22:14,15; 2 Peter 3:9.
 - 3) God wants and values our friendship and wants us to call him "Father" - Exodus 33:11; James 2:23; John 15:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18.
 - 4) God longs to help your weakness and to redeem and change each person - Galatians 4:19.
 - 5) God wants to give us what we ask for - Matthew 7:7-11.
 - 6) God accepts us in spite of our failings just as any loving parent does his child - Luke 15:11-32.
 - 7) God wants you and invites you to be his. He has a purpose for your life. There is no life, however ruined, that cannot be made beautiful if submitted to God - Isaiah 1:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 1:12.

6. Some steps toward more healthy self-esteem:

- A. Learn God's standards of worth and don't measure yourself by the world's unreliable standards.
- B. Add to your self-discipline. Self-discipline is closely connected with self-respect.
 - 1) Set a pattern for improvement. Set goals.
 - 2) Drive down some symbolic "pegs" to remind you of your new direction and organize your life around the priorities you know are right.
 - 3) Develop an orderly lifestyle:
 - a. A time to go to bed and a time to get up.
 - b. Work before relaxation.
 - c. A balance of kinds of activity.
 - d. A place for everything and everything in its place.
 - e. Moderation.
 - f. Set aside times for accomplishing priorities.
- C. Forgive yourself as God forgives you. Accept what he has done about your sins. Dobson

says, "Make friends with yourself." It's OK to be human - Psalm 103:8-14.

- D. Correct reasonably correctable defects (such as hairstyle, complexion, speech problems, teeth, weight, facial expression, posture, neatness of clothing, knowledge, etc.).
- E. Seek ways to serve God through your unchangeable defects - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. This will change the way you perceive things.
- F. Do things that you can do well. The sense of accomplishment will help your self-worth.
- G. Serve other people redemptively and give yourself to service. The joy you have at seeing Christ reproduced in others and lives restored, will transform your feeling about your life - Romans 15:1-3. The life filled with Christ's redemptive servant spirit is beautiful.
- H. Look at your pluses, not just your minuses. Take time and write down all of your positive attributes you can think of.
- I. Respect your parents as scripture teaches. Then you will respect yourself more.
- J. Avoid dropping out of things you start, as far as possible.
- K. Stop wrong and damaging "self-talk." Examples: "I am not good at anything." "Nobody could like me." "Everyone still thinks of my sin when they see me." "If I try to talk to people, I know I will say the wrong thing."

Ask yourself what reasonable evidence there is to support these things you tell yourself. Consider what the real truth may be. Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk. Tell yourself regularly that you are valuable and able and have your own gifts just like anyone else. Picture Jesus affirming his love and appreciation for you (this is not pretended, because he does).

- L. Husbands and wives should continue to build each other up as they did during courtship.
- M. Do what you know is right; turn away from sins and you will respect yourself.
- N. Cooperate with God in developing a beautiful inner person - Galatians 5:22, 23.
- O. Spend time with loving, accepting people in God's family.
- P. See yourself through God's eyes.

Conclusion: When you love yourself in a wholesome way, you can forget about yourself and become occupied with other people and their needs. You will be able to act confidently for Christ's sake.

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The Christian Family - Lesson 11

Building Healthy Self-Esteem in Children

Introduction: Low self-esteem can make our children much more vulnerable to many moral, spiritual and emotional problems. Not just because it is psychologically wise, but because of God's teaching, we need to build our children up, not tear them down, in this area. God teaches us to build up and encourage each other - Romans 14:19, and to remove causes of stumbling - Romans 14:13. (Low self-esteem causes much stumbling.) When God's children receive grace, they are to give grace, the grace that produces happiness, ability and strength - 1 Peter 4:10; Matthew 10:8, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; John 7:37-39. We are redeemed in order to be redemptive; to have a saving effect on others, including our children - Hebrews 12:13.

This study is greatly indebted to Dr. James Dobson's book Hide or Seek, which we recommend.

1. Some problems arising from low self-esteem:
 - A. Assorted fears and anxieties, lack of confidence.
 - B. Inability to assert oneself or perform as needed.
 - C. A need to always be proving something.
 - D. Drug and alcohol abuse.
 - E. Broken homes and rebellion.
 - F. Inability to give love because of an abnormal need to receive love.
 - G. Promiscuity, immorality and marital unfaithfulness.
 - H. Emotional illness.

2. Some dangers centering around the problem of self-esteem:
 - A. Letting a poor estimate of myself become a false humility or a form of pseudo-penitence.
 - B. Thinking that because my parents, or some experience, damaged my self-image, I am not responsible for my actions and choices.
 - C. Thinking that adjustment of self-esteem is all we need.
 - D. Thinking God cannot use us if we have an inferiority complex.

3. Some causes of low self-esteem in children:

- A. Being too demanding on children.
- B. Putting a child under too much responsibility too soon.
- C. Giving children too little responsibility.
- D. Making damaging comparisons.
- E. Joking about the child's appearance.
- F. Careless statements that communicate rejection, worthlessness.
- G. Partiality to one child over another.
- H. Undisciplined, disorderly lifestyle.
- I. Discipline without reconciliation.
- J. Fatigue and time-pressure - no time for children.
- K. False ideals and standards on TV and in our culture (beauty, athletic, ability, intelligence, wealth).
- L. A harsh, critical spirit.
 - 1) Notices every failing.
 - 2) After a time, the child sees himself as stupid or hopeless or worthless.
 - 3) Where does such a spirit come from?

4. Some ways to build self-esteem in children:

- A. Avoid the negative things mentioned.
- B. Be as ready to praise as to blame.
- C. Help the child put his imperfections in perspective.
 - 1) In real life, everyone has different endowments and weaknesses.
 - 2) This is very important for non-athletic, less-attractive, slower-learning children, or handicapped children.
 - a. Use examples of great achievers who were handicapped.
 - b. Stress achievements of people who were not athletic, beautiful, geniuses, etc.
 - c. Show how personality outshines physical attractiveness.
- D. Love the child for himself, not for performance, ideal behavior or beauty.

- E. Have time for the child.
 - 1) Nothing else shows the child as well how much you value him.
 - 2) Children are not fooled about parents' love for them.
 - 3) Some parents make "dates" for each child.
 - 4) Quality is more important than quantity.
- F. See that the child gets to do some things he or she can do well.
- G. Ask the child to help you do things.
- H. Let the child know we parents are not perfect.
 - 1) If he thinks we are, and measures himself by that, he will see himself as a failure.
 - 2) Confess and apologize to children when needed.
- I. Stop the child when he depreciates himself.
- J. Show that you want to do things together with the child.
- K. Help the child make the best of what he or she is.
 - 1) Work on clothing and appearance.
 - 2) Correct defects as possible.
 - 3) Special schooling?
- L. Develop an orderly, disciplined lifestyle, with requirements on all, and a time for all things.
 - 1) Meeting requirements gives self-worth.
 - 2) Control TV.
 - 3) Control dating (who, when, how, where).
 - 4) Control time-use and expect the child to meet his responsibilities.
- M. Preserve masculinity and femininity.
- N. Discipline (punish) children carefully so as to correct without damaging self-esteem.
- O. Let the child cope with some problems on its own level. Don't over-protect.
- P. Prepare the child for adolescence by explaining changes that will come.
- Q. Be sensitive and careful in how you speak about the child.
- R. Make the child proud (in a healthy sense) of being a Christian.

- S. Teach the child continually how God values people and accepts imperfect people in grace.

Conclusion: The attitude that builds others is perfectly expressed in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). This attitude does not come naturally. The carnal mind in us is likely to tear others down. But as we grow in Christ-likeness, we will want to protect our children spiritually and build them up for life ahead. We need to repent of any past failing and pray for the help of God's Spirit.

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