

**LOVE YOURSELF GOD'S WAY**  
**Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others**  
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This is the first in a series of five messages that is going to consider the subject of building self-esteem in yourself and others. One of the special features of this series I think we're going to do something that's rarely done. We're going to talk about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in equipping our self-esteem. We want this to be more than just pop psychology. I trust that what is communicated in these five evening sessions will be life transforming teaching that comes straight from the heart of God. And that God will burn up all the wood, hay and stubble that is pop theology and take what is the metals that are precious, the gold of his word and drive it deep into our life. That he can reform our image. He gives us a whole new marvelous identity and brings things to bear that we never thought could ever take place. I pray that the Holy Spirit would be alive to us in this series that we'd be quick to see the Spirit's vision of our life and not simply our own.

Jesus himself, no less than the authority of Jesus gave this teaching. The most important commandment is this: Mark 12:30 "Hear o Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second commandment is this: love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus tells us that there are three loves that are vital for a healthy person. Love for himself is first, love for self is second, love for neighbor is third. Love your neighbor as yourself. Some say love others second and love yourself third.

Loving yourself is a command of Jesus. And I've never been the kind of person to take any command of Jesus lightly. Is any order from the commander in chief subject to negotiation or disobedience. Not at all. It's a firm command. If we don't know any reason other than he said it, that's enough.

Loving ourselves is a direct order of the Lord. Jesus knows, as the one who created us, that the love for our neighbor – and neighbor is any person who is in relationship to us – will be no better and it will be no worse than love for ourselves. The only love that we are to ever have that is greater than self love is love for God. Jesus here does not tell us, "Love the Lord your God as you love yourself." That would be to place a limit on our love for God. He says Love the Lord your God without limit – with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then love yourself so that you may love your neighbor.

Jesus teaches us that loving him must be put first, and even denying ourselves to take up the cross is an order and is the mandate of the believer. But it is the healthy person who loves self who's able to be free to love God and put the cross first.

I want to share a few minutes on why we have some problems with loving ourselves. If you don't have problems in this area you are fortunate.

We may feel that it is wrong. There may be something in our spiritual or psychological background that would suggest to us that it is wrong to love ourselves. There are some people that can never just enjoy time alone, just to love themselves, never take any leisure moment, feel guilty about spending anything on themselves. Maybe the reason we feel it's wrong is because we have what I call a *worm* theology. A worm is something squishy and crawls along the

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ground. I'm not sure that's the identification of the image that Christ wants to bring in us. Usually I have found that people who operate with a worm complex are groaners, complainers and a whole lot of other things go with their worm idea of themselves because they're unable to love loveliness. They have such a negative view of themselves. Somehow we have perhaps communicated as ministers or teachers that it's wrong to love yourself – always put somebody else first, always pay attention to others, never pay attention to yourself.

A second reason we may have problems with loving ourselves is we may have an inadequate definition of self-love. Such as some people think that self-love equals selfishness. Self-love is really not selfishness. Selfishness is a perversion of self-love. Selfishness shows a lack of security and trust.

Jesus faced this in the temptations. He demonstrates a security and rest in the Father's care. Persons who love themselves rightly are not preoccupied with shortages, things running out. They have a self-love that is confident to believe "My heavenly Father watches over me. He'll take care of me."

Another wrong definition of self-love is that self-love equals pride. Or a sense of offishness. Stuck up. Maybe we're just projecting our own feelings when we think that of a person. A person who has pride is attempting to draw other people's attention to themselves. True self love rises from an inward security that people will notice you in due time. You don't have to make a case out of yourself to be recognized or noticed.

We have problems loving ourselves because we may feel it's wrong, because we have an inadequate definition of self love, and third...

We may have problems loving ourselves because we lack one or more of the three necessary components of self-love. Three things that go with healthy personality.

One is a sense of identity. A sense of identity means I know who I am and I'm comfortable with who I am and I like who I am. I know who I am and I'm not trying to be like somebody else any more. When I'm sure who I am I try then to just live with the gifts and grace and talent God has given me. But when I'm not sure who I am I try overly hard to match up to somebody else's expectations.

Sin has marred us. Humpty Dumpty describes all of human nature. We've all had a great fall and it's impacted our identity. God wants to help us realize we have a new image in Christ and we can be comfortable with that. Ephesians 4:11-12 the Lord says "He gave some apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry."

The word "equipping" is a word I love. It's used in a totally different context in the Greek in the gospels. It's used in Mark 1 where it describes the four fishermen mending their nets. The word "mending" and the word "equipping" in Ephesians 4:11 are one and the same word in the Greek. To me one of the whole purposes of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to bring us back to a condition of restoration, to mend us.

A sense of identity. If you're not sure who you are and you're trying to be like someone else down the block, God wants to bring you to a place where you can be at peace with yourself.

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A second thing that goes into making up the necessary component for self-love is a sense of worth. We must feel that we have a sense of worth. That we count for something.

How do we measure worth? We measure it in all kinds of external ways. We may measure it by grades. Looks. How much you're paid. Level of education. Level of success. We need to keep coming back to scripture and find that these externalities are not what measures worth. The prophet Samuel long ago learned the lesson that it is not the externals. God looks not as man looks but God looks upon the heart. So David was selected.

"Let each man," Paul says, "let him look on himself no more highly than he ought." And I would say in addition to that, let each man or each woman look on himself no more lowly than he ought. But let each with considered, sober judgment regard himself.

A third thing that is a necessary component for self-love is the sense of competence, a sense of ability, a sense that we can do something, that we can be a success in what it is we have set out to do. We must have a sense that we can. If we're always looking for ourselves to fail, if we expect failure continually in everything across the board then we can be in real trouble with a positive self image.

I think these are some of the kinds of ingredients of why we have problems loving ourselves. We may feel that loving ourselves is wrong. We may have an inadequate definition of self-love. We may lack one or more of the necessary components of self-love. Part of this series is to try to help us get those components in place.

Some consequences of not loving ourselves. That has an impact upon us, a deep impact.

Thoreau said what a man thinks of himself determines his fate. That's the same as the Proverbs, "As a man [or woman] thinketh in his heart so is he." There's some consequences for the lack of self-love. If you do not have good self-love first of all you will be over competitive or over compliant. Over competitive because if you are not secure of who you are you drive and drive yourself to succeed and come up against someone else. There's nothing wrong with ambition. Ambition can be a godly fire in the heart. But when it comes to the point you drive yourself to the point of over competitiveness you're saying there's not a center of rest in your life.

On the other hand, the other extreme is over compliant. Anybody can do to you anything. Let them walk on you and step on you and do everything to you and you simply let that go because you don't have a strong enough sense of self worth and self identity to resist that. Only when the person is ready to be accountable for their actions are they ready to begin to change.

Secondly, the consequence of our not loving ourselves. You will be easily defeated or uncharitable in success. Easily defeated because you don't have the stamina and perseverance to see something through. You try it and it doesn't work and you easily give it up and turn it off. On the other hand many very successful people, many entrepreneurs are extremely successful but extremely insecure and lacking in self-love.

A third characteristic would be over sensitive or under sensitive. A person lacking in self-love is thin skinned. What someone else may mean as a helpful criticism they take as a personal jab.

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How many conflicts in church situations have occurred because of this? Well meaning people have made good suggestions and maybe the person in the place of leadership is insecure, maybe they're in a lay role, maybe they're in a pastoral role but they're insecure. They think the person has ideas, they're dangers because they're different from my ideas and I can't take that pressure.

Paul was told he was a poor preacher. His response was "If I am a poor speaker at least I know what I'm talking about." Very secure. Not over sensitive, not under sensitive.

The third consequence of inadequate self love is you will not handle anger well. The more I live, the more I pastor, the more I look within myself, the more I see people the more convinced I am that anger is a manifestation of self hatred and that it spills over into almost every area. If you are an angry person, you're having problems accepting others, accepting God, accepting yourself. It just spills over in so many different areas.

A fifth consequence of lack of self-love is you will not be happy. You will never be happy. You know why you'll never be happy if you lack self-love? Because you're always going to be waiting for something to happen to you to make you happy. Happiness will not arise from within you. It will arise from outside you. So you wait for the right circumstance to come along and make you happy. It takes something more than yourself to make you happy. I agree. It takes God to make us happy in terms of something more than ourselves. But we ought not to be waiting for right circumstances.

It's not the externals that make us happy. The word "happy" derives from the old English word "hap". It is used in the word "happened," as in "It happened to me." Therefore a happy person by technical English definition is someone to whom something has happened. The scriptural teaching on happiness says that joy comes out of the core of the inner well. Out of the most innermost reaches of your being will flow rivers of living water. If we are waiting for something in the external to happen to us to make us happy we will not be happy.

Answer these questions about yourself:

Are you considered overly sensitive by friends or family?

Are you argumentative or do you never stand up for yourself?

Are you a critical person or a totally passive person?

Are you intolerant of others?

Are you an excessively angry person?

Are you unforgiving? There are things in your life you will not let go of. You will not forgive.

Are you excessively jealous?

Are you a poor listener? Why would this be a mark of self-love? Because the person who loves themselves is willing to take time to listen to someone else and not be preoccupied with their own world. Poor listeners inevitably are locked up in their own world.

Are you excessively materialistic? An excessively materialistic person surrounds themselves with things to make them happy. Again there's nothing wrong with material things. But excessive materialism where we're just looking to things to make us happy or the converse, do we have a poverty complex?

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Are you greatly impressed by titles, degrees, honors and badges?  
Are you a poor loser? A bad winner?  
Do you find it hard to accept compliments?

If these are all true, you need this series.

How can we love ourselves God's way? This whole series is going to be looking at that. But tonight I just want to put three things before you as principles. We'll look at this more in expanded detail in the weeks ahead. Three key things about loving ourselves God's way.

First, God loves our bodies. Physical being. Something we often neglect. I'm convinced that a good healthy definition of self love will occur when we get used to this tabernacle, this house of clay that we live in and become comfortable with the fact that we look like who we are, we're in the shape we're comfortable with. If we're not we can go on some kind of a program but we ought not to afflict ourselves with self-hatred along the way to getting our body in whatever shape that we want it. Many self esteem problems begin at the physical level. We look in the mirror and don't like what we look like.

There are three reasons from the scripture we know that God loves our body. We've got to have God's perspective on our body to liberate ourselves to love them. One thing that shows us that God loves our bodies is he created them. Our body is the most complex marvel of engineering that anyone could have designed. God knows the tremendous beauty that is in us because of the marvel of engineering that he has done. God gave us life. Life is precious. Our bodies are precious. God wants us to love our bodies. God didn't make junk.

Jesus became human. Jesus honored our bodies by becoming flesh. If Jesus could honor the human tabernacle by becoming one with us we ought to have a high esteem for our bodies.

Thirdly God thinks enough of our body that it is incorporated in the resurrection. Christianity has never carried the doctrine of the immortality of the spirit divorced from the resurrection of the body. Many religions in their view of eternal life have taught the eternality of the spirit. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that teaches that eternality is wrought up in the resurrection of the body. The transformation of the body in ways that I don't understand. I don't understand all the marvel that's associated with the resurrection. But in the resurrection our bodies are involved. God has such a high regard for our body that he incorporates it into the eternal nature we will forever have. We need to love our bodies.

Second major thing about loving ourselves God's way God loves our bodies – he made them, he became Son of man in our body, in our flesh and the incorporates our body in the resurrection. The second thing about God loving us and we ought to love ourselves God's way is that God knows everything about us and he still loves us. Do you know something about yourself that you don't like that no one else knows? God knows it. Have you quit loving yourself because of that something you don't like? God hasn't stopped loving you. God knows everything about you and he still loves you.

Ephesians 1:6 "He has made us accepted in the beloved." Romans 8 tells us that God does not condemn us. If God does not condemn us we can stop condemning ourselves. We don't have to

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whip and lash ourselves, "I did it again. I'm a good for nothing worm!" God loves us and God accepts us.

Is that then an incentive for permissiveness? Since God loves me I can go out and do whatever I want. Whenever the doctrine of grace is preached that question will arise. The doctrine of grace, God's acceptance, is so radical that people will misunderstand it and even abuse it. But that doesn't mean we should quit preaching it. Grace is God's gift to us in Christ Jesus. He says I accept you no matter what. I know everything about you and I love you and accept you. You can abuse that truth if you want but if you will step into the reality of it, God will set your spirit free.

The third major strand of thought about loving yourself God's way is that God's attitude towards us remains constant through all our ups and downs.

All of us have feelings like roller coasters. Some days we feel great about ourselves and other days we feel terrible about ourselves. Some of the worst moments I have in my life are when I'm the most tired and pressed and I feel I've been a failure again. But God never feels that way about me because he sees me as a person in process. Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." God's attitude remains constant. We labor and labor on the canvas of our life. And when we have done our best, and maybe it hasn't been the best and we go to sleep God is at work with his great brush and he's making our lives better than we thought because his attitude toward us never changes. It's always an attitude of helpfulness, encouragement, consideration and building up. We have a loving heavenly Father.

Now heavenly Father as we bring these moments of time to a conclusion we want to ask you to bring into our lives the image which you have for us. We spend time talking about the image of Christ in us, the nature of Christ in us. Lord, it's really the prayer of my heart that this would not just be just a term, not an abstract religious concept. But that this would be a tremendous reality in our lives, the wholesome Christ in us. Repair our shattered, torn images of ourselves. Build within us the kind of dynamic that releases us to be who you called us to be and then releases us to really love you and love others. Help us to see ourselves as you see us. Beautiful people whom you were willing to die for because you cherished us so very much. Grant that these words find a safe lodging in our hearts. Through Jesus. Amen.