

DEVELOPING SELF ESTEEM
Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others
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Romans 12:3 “For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. But rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to you.”

I would hope that you would understand the message you hear is not the totality of what needs to be said on the subject. We’re looking at a span of five weeks on the theme of developing self-esteem. I’d always like for you to realize anew that I am not a psychologist. I am a student of scripture. On the other hand I believe that scripture is the surest psychological guidebook for the formation of the inner life that we can have. When any psychologist discovers truth or any scientist discovers truth they are not discovering truth as truth separated from the word of God. For all truth is God’s truth. Whether it is discovered psychologically or scientifically or in the scripture. We embrace all truth as being God’s truth. So if some of the concepts you hear this evening in the message strike you as having been heard elsewhere by even non Christian sources, yes, they are picked up by non Christian sources. There has been that residue of the nature of God revealed even in fallen human nature that perceives God, albeit, dimly. We may now as God’s people, gifted of the Spirit, walk in the fullness of what some perhaps the secular sense can only look at from the perspective of being in a distant land, hoping that someday they might travel into the realm of reality of which they speak. We, as the people of God, may actually be in the land and not view it from a distance.

One of the things that was noted last week in the introduction is that there are three vital self concepts, three vital ingredients of self esteem: a sense of identity – I accept who I am and I am comfortable in being who God has made me; a sense of worth – I am valuable to God. Jesus Christ died for me. That makes me worth everything; and competence – with God’s help I can pursue the course and fulfill the mission that God has for me in life.

We begin developing these aspects of identity and worth and competence when we are very young. Perhaps even before we’re aware of developing these things they are happening in our lives. Reinforcement that we are getting from our parents. Reinforcement that we’re getting from our friends. We all know that that is part of our past development. The word of counsel that I have is that we must be careful not to accept the assumption that our life is deterministically controlled by the past. You may have had awful parents. I don’t know the individual backgrounds that each of you’ve had. You might have a terrible background from which to come. If the development of our future is limited by our experience in the past then we are deterministically controlled. We are fated.

But the scriptures pull us to another star. The scriptures tell us we’re not to find our identity by simply looking to our past. That’s part of what is in us. But that scriptures point us to the goal of the future, of being transformed into the image of Christ Jesus. We hitch our wagon to a star and let the future pull us.

Let us at the start as we look at developing strategies for self esteem recognize that we can be different than we are if we are unsatisfied with where we are and who we are.

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Allister Cooke in his book America tells the story of a shiftless, rolling stone of a husband married to an illegitimate girl from the Virginia mountains. He tried 5 or 6 farms and kept moving on. A man afflicted with a character neurosis who thought by picking a new place, like a movie actress who keeps picking a new husband, he would somehow change the plot. He didn't of course. They went to Indiana and did a little better. In time they had a barn and a few animals, a little coral and a rail fence and they planted corn and flax and beans. But then neighbors came down with the milk disease picked up from cows who chewed on snakeroot. Our farmer's wife died, so the vagabond father and son moved on to a new state and new ground the son passing from an almost animal boyhood into a bleak manhood.

Yet out of that frail woman and her listless husband and the poorest ground there came something strange and holy admirable. The slow moves son who sees a republic and held it through its first cataclysm – Abraham Lincoln.

We're familiar with Lincoln's failures. His business failure that saddled him with the debts of a dishonest partner. Failure after failure in seeking political office. Yet a man who somehow had a God given inner strength to pull toward the future.

The five strategies I share with you this evening for developing your self-esteem come from the assumption therefore that your personality development is not frozen. That anyone who tells you that your personality development is frozen is not telling you God's truth. We operate instead with the desire of the songwriter who said, "I have no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay. I'm pressing on to higher ground." These strategies for developing self-esteem are not exhaustive but they are suggestive. I'm like a doctor, starting with the most conservative treatment first. There's a progressiveness in terms of dealing with areas of our life where maybe we're not completely content in God with where we're at.

So the first counsel that I give you that flows out of a concept in God's word is a very simple one. It's simply this: develop a positive life space environment.

We are created by God to be intricately linked with the environment we possess. There is a relationship between our environment and who we are. I speak specifically of three things in regard to that environment. Our personal appearance, our living quarters, our schedule.

Personal appearance. How we feel about ourselves is often determined by how we precede as to what our looks are and what we wear. If you can't do anything about your looks and you don't like them just start looking in the mirror and give God thanks for making you the way you're made. Be comfortable with your appearance. And a simple matter of clothes. Often what we wear describes who we are. If we feel dirty about ourselves how often it is we look dirty and we look unkempt. I don't think it takes expensive clothes to feel good about yourself. But it helps to have clean clothes. Pressed clothes. And know the clothes you need to wear when you're down. It helps to feel good about what we're wearing. Look your best. Don't try to look like someone else. But look the best that you can do.

Another aspect of personal life space environment is keep a clean and orderly living environment. People who feel good about themselves get the most done.

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A third area of our life space is order in our day. All of us can start the day letting the day control us or we can control the day. I believe that one of the things God wants us to do with the day is to be with him a regent over that day. I believe that Genesis teaches us that when God created man he gave him dominion. That meant authority. The executive operating officer. I believe that part of what it is to be a faithful servant of God and build self esteem is bring some discipline into your day and not let it simply escape from you without knowing where it's going. Plot it out and plan it. Otherwise you become the captive of other people, other interests, terrible television programs and soap operas and endless, mindless time frittered away because we did not adopt a strategy of that with God's help we were going to accomplish that day.

You say, pastor do you have any scriptural defense for this line? Yes. I do. The creation. God made everything in order and when he got done with everything he said it was good. There isn't a thing that God did that was sloppy.

Secondly, I have a unique scriptural insight from Romans 8:19-21, which speaks of the future and the present. "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by it's own choice but by the will of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself would be liberated from its bondage to decay and bought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." What Paul is saying in that passage is there is coming a day when the created order itself will be delivered from the second law of nuclear dynamics, which is everything, is winding down and falling apart. There is coming a day when everything is going to be as put together as the sons and daughters of God. The creation he says is linked with the fate of God's new humanity. Even as we are going to have new bodies and a whole new perfect existence so creation itself is going along groaning saying I can't wait until these sons and daughters of God come into your liberty.

There are some things that you have on a physical level that are intricately linked with you. There is a connection between us and life space. We cannot disassociate ourselves from the things physical around us. Paul himself is telling us that in the age that is coming there will be that vital link which will exist forever between a renewed creation and a renewed humanity. We can get on with that now.

Everything in heaven is beautiful, orderly, clean. Develop a positive life space environment. The second major strategy for developing self-esteem – get a right self-picture of yourself. How do you see yourself? One of the intriguing scriptures in the New Testament and one I love is from Mark 5. There was a man at Gadara who was beside himself, possessed with demons and he never could keep clothes on. He was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. When the Lord healed him and delivered him from the demons, Mark 5:15 tells us he was sitting there "dressed and in his right mind." He now had a new identity and a new picture of himself.

As I go through the scriptures I find key examples of people who were given by a God a vision of what they could be and lived with that self picture.

Joseph, a 17 year old boy, saw himself one night in a God given dream as a person to whom the sun, the moon and the stars bowed down – mother, father, brothers. He made the mistake of being a 17-year-old kid who told everything that happened to him. He earned the ire of his family for it. But nevertheless it was a picture that God him through all the years of hardness, slavery, betrayal, imprisonment and the like. He saw himself as having an identity.

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Abram was taken out of his tent one night by God and shown the stars of the heavens and given a whole new picture of what he could be, and a new name, Abraham.

David at the beginning of his experience was taught that he was to have the self-picture as a man after God's own heart.

John, the disciple, learns the self-picture of himself as the one whom Jesus loved. I don't think Jesus loved John any more than any other disciple. I think John had a greater comfort with the fact that he was loved so he saw himself and confessed himself in those terms. He had a self-picture of one intimately and deeply loved by the Lord.

Real mental pictures begin to emerge when we see and practice things that we want to do. If you want to step into rolls you're not now doing begin to ask God to enliven that vision to your heart that you'll begin to step into that dream that you are having.

We know from psychological studies that have been done on American prisoners of war in Vietnam that it was picturing things. For example, several made guitars out of strings and sticks. Although their crude instruments made no sound at all they practiced their songs from memory and when they got back to the United States and got a guitar they knew how to play the guitar well because they had imagined playing it.

An Airforce coronal who was a POW for several played an imaginary round of golf every single day. He had played on a number of courses around the world so he envisioned every single hole. Plotted out his tee shots, his fairway shots, approach shots, putts. He played around the world for seven years, a different course every day. When he got back to the states after seven years of not playing golf within a month after his return he entered a Pro-Am preliminary round and had a four-stroke handicap, which is superb.

A woman one-day came to Dr. Cho the pastor of the world's largest church. She said, "I want you to pray for my daughter. I can't do anything with her. She is a wicked girl. She is now making her living off prostitution. I am ashamed of her. She has been a disappointment to me and to God and she is lost in her wickedness. I want you to pray that God will save her from her wickedness." Dr. Cho said, "You have the wrong picture of your girl. You're seeing her as your wicked daughter. I want you to see her instead as your beautiful daughter and begin to pray that the Lord will save your beautiful daughter." About a month later this mother came in and introduced her daughter to Dr. Cho with the greatest smile on her face saying, "When my picture of my daughter changed our relationship began to change."

Picture yourself.

Periodically I have the joy of addressing ministers. About a month or two ago I had the chance to address a number of ministers in Southern California on the subject of preaching. How do you talk to ministers about preaching? That's our field of expertise and we don't exactly appreciate somebody coming in telling us how to do it. I have to walk on eggs when I speak on this subject. One of the doors of entry is an example that one of my professors shared with me one time about building on your own strengths. It was the word of counsel I was given when I left Evangel College to come here as pastor eleven years ago. He said, "When you go out there keep in mind

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this story from Charles Blair's ministry in Colorado. When Calvary Temple began to have its phenomenal growth a number of years ago, they began to have people descend upon it asking Charles Blair and Calvary Temple how they did it. Everybody's interested in the mechanics of how you do things. They'd have seminars and run people through the church and tell them what they were doing. They'd go home and try it and it would flop. Charles Blair began to be concerned about what was happening. He realized they were using the wrong strategy. What he did is he began to say to ministers, come and learn all that we are doing but please do not go home and build upon Charles Blair's strengths or Calvary Temple's strengths. Learn what you can while you're here but go home and build on your own strengths.

That's really the key. We can't do everything. We can do something. And we need to know what our strengths are. Years ago God gave me knowledge that there were two things I did better than other things. And if I would do those and let other people do the rest God would be with me. I've tried to build upon those strengths rather than spend all my time correcting weaknesses of things I'll never do well, even if I did them to the best of my ability.

Build on your strength. Learn who you are and quit trying to be like someone else. I have learned that the more you become like Jesus Christ the more you will become yourself. But the more you try to become like someone else, the less you will become yourself. If you become like Jesus you will truly build on your strengths. You will learn how to follow him and he will teach you your strengths. But if you spend your time building upon the things you don't do well then you're going to have continual frustration because it's not a good self-picture.

Get a picture of yourself and let that picture include strengths and spend time with God in prayer, and alone with the word, asking the Lord to reveal to you the areas of your life that will give you a positive picture and positive orientation to build upon. That's what faith is all about. We think of faith as something mystical. Faith isn't mystical at all. Faith is getting a picture of something that is not now but which with God's help will come into existence and faith is breathing that picture into existence. It is taking the things that are not and bringing them into being the things that are. You must, if you're going to grow in self-image, get that picture that God can have of you and go for it and grow into it.

The third key in developing self-esteem is give of yourself. If you try to develop self esteem in putting all the emphasis on being number one you will never break it. That's the problem with all the number one books on how to dress for success, and the like. They wind up with an emptiness on the inside with an outer shell. Give of yourself.

When we have a total self love that is absent of love of others we will be self-destructive. In contrast to this there is the love that operates in other spheres that moves out toward other people. Part of good self-love is having a healthy relationship with others. The scripture is filled with things we are to do for/with one another. Love one another. Not simply as we love ourselves but Jesus takes it beyond that – As the father has loved me and as I have loved you, that is to be your standard of love toward one another. Wash the feet of one another. Brotherly love one another with family love. Honor one another above yourselves. Live in harmony with one another. Build up one another. Be of the same mind toward one another. Receive one another as Christ received you. Instruct one another. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Come together to eat. Wait for one another. Have the same concern for one another. Serve one another. Bear one another's burdens. Bear with one another in love. Speak the truth to one

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another. Be kind to one another. Submit to one another. In humility esteem one another above yourselves. Forgive one another. Encourage one another. Pursue the good towards one another. Consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Confess your faults to one another. Pray for one another. Be hospitable to one another. Fellowship with one another.

All of these are tremendous terms. Instead, what often we do to one another is groaning against one another, taking others down, putting them down to our size. We have a ministry of correction towards others. Inevitably a person who is excessively critical towards others is uncomfortable with themselves. The scripture turns us around by focusing on the positive things we are to do with one another – some 28 different positive things we are to do for one another can be found in the New Testament. As we take those concerns into our heart and mind we begin doing these things ourselves. The love we show for others begins to be the love we receive back to ourselves.

Give of yourself to one other. Don't live behind a wall of isolation.

Fourth strategy for developing self-esteem. Watch what you say about yourself.

Here is where the positive confession movement has a tremendous point. Any teaching in the body of Christ that is having a great popular following that may have traces of hereticism in it also has traces of truth or it wouldn't be so widely received. The problem is it stretches orthodoxy to the point of heresy. But the heresy is about 25%. The orthodoxy is about 75%. What we ought to do with the positive confession movement is throw the junk in the trash and take the test that is scriptural and embrace it. The positive confession people are right when they say what you say is what you get. And what you say about yourself is what you get almost every single time.

We do not need to accept the labels other people put on us. We can instead say things about ourselves that are true and not always use negative references to describe ourselves. I found that just the words "I'm tired," can be a crippling instrument in my life. Probably most of the people in this room are so busy, you feel like you're on a constant merry go-round. I sometimes wonder where I'm going to get my next breath. You feel exhausted. Very easily you can get into this subliminal kind of consciousness. "I'm fine but I'm tired." All of a sudden I'm so tired I can hardly move because I've said to myself over and over again "I'm tired." There is a sense we need to creatively faith it at times and said, "I feel great and I'm getting better."

I like what Jesse Jackson teaches the young kids in the ghetto: "I am somebody." I can't think of a better thing young kids need to learn to do to God and to others. God has made us somebody.

The story is told of an incident in the mid 19th century in America. A black lady by the name of Mary Carver, a slave of Moses Carver in Southwest Missouri. A cruel gang one day road into the Carver farm carried off Mary and two of her children on a winter evening. The next day Moses Carver hired a man to find his slave Mary and the children. Six days past and the man finally came back. He didn't have Mary. He only had a little bundle under his coat and that was the baby. He had found it. He man explained that the gang that had stolen Mary didn't want to be bothered with this sick baby so they gave him to some womenfolk down in Conway, Arkansas. The man said to Moses Carver, "This little baby ain't worth nothing." The baby that ain't worth nothing survived to grow up to be George Washington Carver one of the most

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creative inventors in America, a man whose standards could not be measured by human instrumentality and worth.

What you say is what you get. One of the things we have problems with just as people in terms of thinking about ourselves and talking about ourselves is how we even accept compliments. Somebody says, "I like what you have on." And you'd say, "I don't quite have the colors coordinated right...." Or I cannot accept a compliment on a suit. I always have to tell the price. I know that ministers are to be models of sacrifice and I've had a thing all my life about ministers and ritzy clothes. Somehow I feel that the pulpit ought to be a model for a measured life, not an extravagant life. So if a suit cost more than a certain fixed amount in my mind it was an unbiblical suit and one shouldn't wear it to the pulpit.

When you've given a message that people have enjoyed and you're standing at the door greeting people who are saying, "I really enjoyed that message." What do you do as a minister? The credit really belongs to the Lord. What do you say? "It was the Lord, not me." But yet the Lord worked through me." How do you take a compliment? Somebody said, "Here's how to take it as a minister. Just say thank you." No comment.

Do you have a rough time accepting gifts? But that's also part of my hang up. Ministers can be freeloaders. One thing that really helped me get balance on that was seeing the Lord in action. He's sitting at a dinner and Mary comes up with a vase with perfume in it that's worth like \$20,000 – a year's salary – and she dumps it on the Lord's head. How did he receive it? Graciously. Everybody else got real uptight, terrible problems with it. He received it because he had sufficient self-esteem for himself and for her that he could make the giver feel right at home.

Accept compliments. Don't suspect a motive. Accept it. Say good things. What you say about yourself is important.

Finally, important strategy for developing self-esteem is choosing positive relationships. Friendships. Associations. What we do within family is so vital because we can pull one another up or tear one another down. We need to be with people that can build us up. It's much easier to pull down than pull up. You'll be pulled down a lot easier than you can pull somebody else up.

I've experienced this as an adult. At Evangel college when I was on the faculty, fresh out of seminary, I fell into association with a group of people that had this marvelous ability to find out and continue to pick on everything that was wrong in the college. Administration, constituency, headquarters. Pretty soon everything was wrong with everything. I was miserable. I became a professional critic. If there was anything wrong, I spotted it. After a year and I thought if this is going to be the rest of my life, being critical of everything, I don't want to do this the rest of my life. Toward the end of the year it was like the Lord said to me, one of the reasons why you're so negative is you totally run with negative people who don't see good in anything. You need to change your associations. Over a period of time I either readjusted a friendship and began to be positive in a negative situation so that the person became positive with me. Or if the person continued totally on the negative side I became more distanced from them. I'm a person who is more easily pulled down in areas like this.

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If you are going with persons in fellowship or in the company of persons who are always negative and critical – there is a place for the negative and critical – you need to test that relationship because ultimately it will pull you down and it will poison you. Please don't go up and say to somebody, "I've been evaluating my relationships and you're a pretty negative person so I'm not going to be seeing you any more."

Maybe you're a low self-esteem person. One of the problems with low self esteem is we do not see ourselves as important and likable and don't maybe see why other people should like us. We really don't view ourselves, if we have low self-esteem as the source to do what we want to do. Nor do we believe we can do it even if we try. Low self-esteem people therefore prefer to stick with what is known and safe. They don't believe they have much control over their destiny anyway. Therefore low self-esteem people raise a lot of defensive mechanisms when you begin talking about change. "That's fine for the rest of them but it will never work with me. It's too simple." But you can change. It may take time. It may take a year to get organized. It may take a year to make transition with friends. You maybe can't take on all five strategies at once. But get going with one or two or three. Get going and start changing.

The Holy Spirit can give us help to put the whole package together because God wants people who are walking in the renewed image of Jesus Christ. Jesus has come to bring our image, which was shattered by sin in the fall into a restored...

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