

HOW TO LOSE IT
Faith and Self Esteem
Part 1
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I'm going to read two separate scriptures that appear to not be related at all. Later they will be worked into the text of my message. Romans 12:3 "For by the grace given 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 you." And then a scripture that appears to be totally unrelated to self-esteem and the like, Mark 10:46-52 "Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples with a large crowd were leaving the city, a blind man Bartimaeus, that is the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus. Son of David. Have mercy on me.' Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they called the blind man. 'Cheer up. On your feet. He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak a side he jumped up to his feet and came to Jesus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him. The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.' 'Go,' said Jesus. 'Your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

Before we get to that particular scripture which I'm going to use on how to lose faith and self esteem I want to give you some general introduction to this series which is going to span four Sunday nights. Faith and self-esteem. What I'm going to try to do in this series is relate scriptural teaching on faith to the concept of self-esteem. I have some problems as a pastor, as minister of the gospel in dealing with the subject of self-esteem. I need to get those out in front first of all.

I have problems in just the very subject of self-esteem itself seems to be rather man centered than God centered. Any time you start out with a man centered basis – "What do I need?" – rather than starting from a framework of who is God and what does he want your life and your theology will get askew. So as we look at self-esteem, relax. We're not going on some psychological trip. To discover self-esteem apart from the nature of God himself who calls us first to be like him and then as we find out who he is gives us then the chance to begin developing the image of God that is placed in us.

Another problem that I have in dealing with self-esteem is I kind of like to say away from faddish and trendy topics in a certain sense because it's so easy for the ministry to ride on sort of coasting and in doing so just take whatever the latest fad is and surf it for a while. When we do this on a consistent basis we get our roots out of scripture and we become topic oriented rather than what is the totality of God's word saying to us. That's why in dealing with this subject we especially need to be careful to understand what the scripture is saying.

I think a third concern I have and hesitation as a pastor is that over reliance on self help or even other human help to resolve the problem of self esteem without the introduction of salvation and God in our life is going to only produce people who are more comfortable on their road to hell. My task as a minister is not to make people more comfortable if they're going into eternity lost. You can seek to develop all the self-esteem and read all the literature and hear all the great speakers and try to become a better person. All that in its proper context is well and good. But if

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you don't know the Lord in your life you're simply not dealing with the fundamental question of life – Where are you going and who are you serving?

Why then am I speaking on self-esteem? Let me site some reasons why I'm speaking on the subject for these weeks.

First is that I have first hand personal experience with the crippling effect of low self-esteem. I know what an inferiority complex can do to you. It can sort of develop these kind of traits in your personality – excessive desire to please others – because you don't have sense of who you are in God or a sense of self worth, you overly bend your personality to try to make someone else happy. Rather than knowing what God wants for you, you're trying to always figure out how to approach another person to get their smile of approval. Often when we do that we're simply trying to get the approval from a parental figure that perhaps we never had when we were a child.

Another thing that can happen if we have a low sense of self-esteem is not only are we seeking other people's approval but we try to adopt other people's mannerisms and habits and even voice patterns because we accept that as "If that's what it is to really be successful." And we begin to imitate, and carbon copy other people when God made us as an original.

I know as a young person preparing for the ministry I was always trying to find out the right voice inflection to use. That sounded most like a *great* evangelist. I'd do all the voice intonations. I finally had to come to a perception that God gave me a particular voice pattern and inflection and kind of speaking tone and I didn't have to be like some other. I could be content to be myself.

I think another thing that happens when we have a low sense of self esteem is we over react for acceptance. Because we're trying so hard to get people to accept us we wind up doing stupid and even denigrating things. I fought so hard to get self-esteem when I was in college and get people to like me. I had this quest for popularity. If I could run for office and get votes it told me how much I was worth. If I didn't get votes then I wasn't worth much. That's a very poor way to monitor your self-esteem if you're depending upon people to vote for you. One of the reasons why I had rough time winning major office in the student body was that I would go to ridiculous lengths to ingratiate myself to people. I acted in extreme behavior patterns to attract attention because I needed attention. Some kind of sense of self worth would have kept me from those kinds of bizarre mannerisms, which greatly dented my personality!

Interestingly on the other side, low self-esteem can inhibit us in our relationships. While on the one hand we're over reacting to try to get the acceptance of a multitude of people. When it comes time for relationship authentic one to one relationships, we're so unsure of ourselves and unsteady that we can't open up. So maybe our conversations with people don't achieve a serious level. You do dumb things because you're inhibited and you're over reacting or you're under reacting and you can't express yourself because you don't think you're worth anything.

The reason why we have inhibitions in relationships is we're afraid that if people find out who we really are they'll reject us out of hand.

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That leads to something called non-actualization. If you have low self-esteem you're not becoming the person that you can become and that God wants you to become because you're convinced it can never happen for you.

I'm convinced that low self-esteem robs the church of a great deal of ministry – a tremendous amount of ministry. People say, "I could never do that." The church of Jesus Christ gets robbed of enormous amount of talent because people have talked themselves into the idea of "I could never do that." That's why I love the book of Acts so much. Jesus says when you receive the Spirit you're going to be made competent. You'll receive power. You'll be competent to do what God has called you to do. You'll have the sense of "Yes, with God's help I can."

I've also seen young people settle for less than the best in their life because they've had low self-esteem. An article said, When someone does not allow us to get close [talking about sometimes when girls who are physically beautifully choose the macho man who mistreats them. It has to do with low self-esteem.] we interpret it two ways. First we feel rejected and unloved. Then we idolize them and assume they are better than we are. Finally we set out to prove them wrong. [If you're going with a guy that's not being gracious and loving to you like you're being to him there must be something wrong with me. Surely I can change the person. So we set out to prove them wrong.] Did you ever notice you never want the men who want you and you desperately want those who don't? They become a challenge to our self worth and us. We become addicted to proving their rejection wrong. The more we are rejected the more we chance. That woman really believes there is something wrong with her. So any man who is going to be attracted to her can't be very smart. There must be something wrong with him so she feels comfortable going out with him. As Groucho Marx put it, 'I'd never join any club that would have me as a member.'"

Young people settling for second best in their life because they don't have sufficient confidence. I've also seen persons who are robbed from a sense of self-esteem because as a child they were victims of physical and verbal abuse. Many times the nerve to risk has been cut and persons in adult life and middle years that maybe have an opportunity for advancement shrink back from that in their work because they're not sure they can do that. So they settle for safety. There is damage to marriage and family. If I don't amount to much as a husband then I really don't have much to give to that relationship.

Somewhere it seems to me we need to strike the balance in self-esteem that scripture strikes. That is reflected in Romans 12:3. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. Once we are saved we are no longer regarded as sinners but as saints. Paul says "For by the grace given me..." that is, we owe our standing in God to a free gift he's given to us. We're not to think of ourselves more highly nor more lowly than we ought. The dangers of wrong thinking about ourselves is that if we think too highly of ourselves we get an exaggerated sense of self worth. That leads to pride. That is wrong. The prideful person has an over estimated importance of themselves. Seeks to be served rather than to serve. Their idea is how can I shine rather than how can I serve. They have a disregard for grace.

On the other hand is the person who has a too low opinion of themselves, an under estimated opinion of their self worth and therefore they are absorbed in themselves and refuse grace. Paul strikes a beautiful balance. In Philippians 3:3-6 he reviews all the things that he was, that he could be proud of a head Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He says I count it all refuse. Then

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he turns right around in Philippians 4:13 and says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” On the one hand I am nothing and on the other hand I can do everything. Grace is a balancing act.

That’s introductory statements and the longest introduction I’ll give to the messages. Tonight I specifically want to address Faith and Self-Esteem: How to Lose it. Start with the negative.

How do we lose our self-esteem? If we know how we lose faith we’ll know how we lose self-esteem since the two are very closely related. One of the things I want to do in this series is take scriptural concepts of faith and translate them into self-esteem.

None of us here tonight with a low self-esteem started out deliberately to lose our self-esteem. We know that low self-esteem results from a deficiency of love and faith in those who have been closest to us. Somewhere in our development perhaps we didn’t get all the warm fuzzies that we needed that would help us gain a sense of identity (who we are), a sense of worth (how valuable we are), and a sense of competence (the idea that we are able to do something). For whatever reason we have that in our background and because also of the fact that we are broken in terms both inherited and actual sin that we’ve committed we have a damaged self image. We the humpty dumpies who sat on a wall and had a great fall and all the kings’ horses and all the kings men, could not put us together again.

My purpose is not to play psychologist and figure out how we got the low self-esteem nor to suggest to you that there is a way to suddenly wave a magic wand over the past and undo it. What I would suggest is we start where we are right this moment. The gospel of Jesus Christ always gives us a chance to relocate the magnet that is drawing our life. The magnet of the past where we’ve had the negative experiences which may have pulled us down or with the help of the gospel and Jesus relocating the magnet to the future and to the upward call that Christ as for us. We can put the magnet there and be drawn back by a continual rehearsal of the reason why we got to the place we got to. Or we can as Paul says, Forgetting the past look forward to that which is ahead.

I would suggest that I’m most concerned about what you’re doing right now which will cost you your opportunity to change. When I say Here is a message on how to lose faith or how to lose self esteem I’m not going back to the years of your life and researching the five or the twenty or the fifty years. I’m saying that there are some things from this moment on once you hear this account of Bartimaeus that you can know that if you will practice you will from here on out continue to lose self-esteem. Or if you would reverse the lesson that is coming out of the gospel you will be able to get on a pattern as we develop this series of gaining that standard with God and that standing with self that is such a necessary ingredient of our life.

In preparing for this series I went through my Greek lexicon and concordance and isolated in the New Testament all the words that dealt with the Greek terms for faith. Especially for this message concentrated in the synoptic gospels. Mathew, Mark and Luke – trying to identify those incidences in the gospels where faith stands out. I discovered that in the gospels there are only three miracles where the word “faith” in noun or verb form is used all three times are the four friends who bring the paralytic through the roof, there is blind Bartimaeus the second time it occurs, and the woman who pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of Christ’s garment.

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Those three are all described in each gospel as having faith present and faith is a very big word in those descriptions.

I use blind Bartimaeus as a prototype of how to lose faith because I'd like to say that there are some things at that particular moment when Jesus came through Jericho that had Bartimaeus used he would have never experienced healing. Some attitudes that could have been present in his life that would have kept him from ever having a different day in his life.

I would suggest by transference that if we take these same kind of attitudes and bring them to the concept of self-esteem if we will do them, practice them, we ourselves will always lose self-esteem. We'll never gain it. There are four things that Bartimaeus could have done that would have kept him from Jesus. And from healing.

The first thing that Bartimaeus could have done is simply stayed fixed with the subject of blame. Why did I get to be the blind beggar of Jericho? Who made me this way? Is it God's fault? Was it my parent's sin? Was it my own sin? Who's at fault? Who's responsible for the condition that I am in?

I would suggest to you that many people live their lives out with almost an unconscious desire to tag blame on somebody. "If you'd had the father I had... if you'd had the mother I had... if you'd had the wife/husband that I had..." I'm not making light of suffering and trauma that occurs in family. There is no more serious trauma than the relationships I just described so I'm not making light of it. But I'm seriously suggesting that if you find out who is to blame it's still probably won't make a difference. Blame invests its energy in finding the cause and if it ever finds the cause and doesn't move past blame it avoids a sense of personal responsibility. I am the way I am because someone made me the way I am. It's all their fault and I don't take responsibility for the attitudes I have. I don't take responsibility for making any responsible changes in my life. If you had my background you'd be exactly in my same shape. It's all their fault!"

Bartimaeus could have done this. Here are some things that happens when we fixate on blame in our life for why we are like we are. Blame makes bitter. If we get stuck on blame we cannot look with thanksgiving on our past. But we can only look back on our past with a negative sense of bitterness, anger, recrimination, a wish that we could get even. Bitterness will not release us to self-esteem. That's why the scripture speaks so deeply to us about not keeping any root of bitterness in our life because bitterness poisons a proper concept of self-worth. It can't be cleansed if there's bitterness. Blame is also oriented to the past. Self esteem for it to change and to grow must get moving into the future of what God is calling us to. We cannot undo the past. The only thing we can change about the past is our perception of it. But I cannot change any detail of my life that I've lived up till now.

When you look back at your past, if you take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to find how that past, no matter how extreme it may have been, how that past God is using the details of it to make you a better person and give thanks for it rather than being bitter about it and apply a different lens to it, a lot of things can be freed up in your life.

We give time for people to be themselves. We quit being bitter. We quit establishing blame. Blame orients towards the past. Blame makes comparisons. Bartimaeus could have been sitting

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there saying, "I'd like to have grown up with eyesight! Look where I'd be now!" Blame creates self-absorption and blame excuses responsible behavior because someone else is responsible. Therefore Bartimaeus could have said, "If you were blind you'd be mean and nasty and bitter and angry and foul mouthed too."

Use what has happened in your life for ill and just be irresponsible. But what does faith do? Faith takes responsibility. Faith may not find the cause. Blame is trying to find the cause. Faith may not find the cause because faith is too busy trying to find the cure. Bartimaeus is going for the cure, not the cause. What's the cure in regard to self-esteem? To accept your past. To say it's there. It happened. There's not a thing I can do about it. If I come to Christ and I'm made a new creature everything that's bad in the past is all under the blood and God can work it for the good anyway. Deeply on a deep level, accept the past and forgive the past. Forgive. Let there be no person in your life whom your forgiveness has not been extended to. And trash your past.

You can hit somebody with an empty trash bag and it doesn't hurt. But what happens as we go through life we pick up hurts and we dump them in our bag. If I come across a person and hit them with the bad it can hurt them. It probably doesn't kill them but it hurts them. But if I come to the Lord and take that hurt out of my bag by forgiveness then the bag is empty again. But what so often happens when we're out for blame is we don't ever take what we put in out. And it remains there. In the argument are bricks from the previous arguments. Even though I've said, "I've forgiven" I haven't forgotten. By this time the trash bag is big enough to kill you. That's exactly what we do in our relationships if we don't forgive. We keep carrying that bag around until it gets so big and we become so angry and we are so filled with blame that we can't be anything other than a destroyer, wrecking not only the person we started off to love. But wrecking ourselves in the process. It takes a lot of strength to carry this trash bag around all the time and hit somebody over the head with it. We need to simply empty the past, pour everything out of the bag so I'm light again. So that the next time I come to a conflict with someone the bag is empty. When the devil tempts me to rehearse the long litany of all the past failures I say "It's under the blood and it's forgiven."

Accept your past, forgive your past, trash your past, find the good in your past.

Bartimaeus could have got stuck. He'd have never got to Jesus, if he's have stayed with blame in his life.

The other thing that would have never got him to Jesus if he would have continued to live with despair.

Despair is a by-product of blame. Despair convinces us of hopelessness. Had Bartimaeus totally despaired he would not have cried out. He'd not have said, "Have mercy upon me, Son of David." If he had been totally despairing he would have been saying to himself, "I'll always be this way. So I might as well give up. Whoever heard of a blind man seeing. There is no hope for me. I'll never be different." That is a lie. That's the key to all healing on the counseling level when we begin to believe that God can help us change. And we don't have to be whatever the past has made us. We don't despair any more but a light bulb of hope goes on. I don't care if it's just a five-watt light bulb. It's better than no watt light bulb. A light goes on and we begin to hope.

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A beggar, that's what Bartimaeus was. A beggar is someone who lives off what other people give him. Low self-esteem – Bartimaeus had to have a bad sense of self-esteem. Reduced to a nothingness. He didn't even have the dignity of working. Reduced to being a beggar in the dust of the road. Despair is a natural by-product of living off the tidbits other people give us to keep us going.

Another thing that Bartimaeus had to overcome – and of course you lose faith and you lose self esteem if you blame and if you despair and if the third thing comes in... put downs.

Look at the put down Bartimaeus gets in our text of scripture. Mark 10:48 Bartimaeus had begun to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Verse 48 says "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet."

I don't think that "many rebuked him" was all of a sudden fifty people all at one time told him to be quiet. It was one person after another kept coming to him saying, "Shut up! Be quiet beggar. You're not worth anything." I've seen people in the orient treat beggars like you'd treat dogs. People were bothered by Bartimaeus' crying out.

The gospel of Matthew tells us there were two blind beggars while Mark only gives the story of the one. I think the difference is probably the one out of the two becomes a well-known disciple later whose name was Bartimaeus. So Mark in telling the story zoom lens in on the one. Whereas Matthew gives us the photographic lens of two.

When everyone's coming along to Bartimaeus saying, Be quiet according to Matthew's account they're doing it to both of them. Both of them are saying, "Jesus, Son of David have mercy upon us." One of the great things I got out of this story was if you are a Bartimaeus it helps to have someone screaming with you. It's an encouragement if two of you are in the same boat together. That's why it's great that we share our needs with one another and be open with one another. If we find somebody else that's wanting the same healing we want we're all that much more encouragement to one another, spurring one another on.

We've got to get past the put-downs. Every time somebody would put Bartimaeus down and say "Nothing's ever going to happen to you, beggar." It's obvious from the text of scripture that this as something he was doing not once, not twice but again and again. He was resisting the people that told him, you will never be different. Have you ever had that told you? Put-downs. Bartimaeus when Jesus gets near him begins to sense here is my chance for freedom."

It's great to know that Jesus doesn't put people down.

The fourth thing that could have caused Bartimaeus to lose his faith and therefore help us lose our self esteem is what I call "blockage."

I define it as a failure to act on an opportunity when faith has been aroused. Suddenly Jesus is coming through town and there was that brief window of time when Bartimaeus faith was stirred up to believe that something might happen in his life. It was critical that at that moment he began to do something about it. If he sat passively, if he let that opportunity pass then it's the same old thing. There may not be in the near time another such window of opportunity. That's why when we're in a service and there's an opportunity to respond to the Holy Spirit in some

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way and the Spirit is tugging at our heart to take some action whether it's in corporate worship or personally, it's important to develop a responsive life that keeps saying yes to what the Spirit is doing because that's a window of opportunity where the Spirit is breathing some faith into our life and saying, "You can change. I can use your life. I can minister to you and minister through you. Do something."

Bartimaeus did that. Psychotherapists talk about primal scream. Getting back to that kind of state where you from the depths like a new born infant cry. I believe Bartimaeus that day had the primal scream. Jesus! Son of David. Have mercy on me. Out of that Jesus intervened in his life. Jesus will meet the heart of the hungry.

Jesus had at first fact ridiculous response to Bartimaeus. Jesus could look at him, one look at his clothes and he knew he was a beggar. Dirty, grimy. He could tell Bartimaeus was blind. Isn't it interesting how people's attitudes change when somebody up top changes? Everybody I saying, Shut up! But the minute Jesus says, Bring him to me, they come say, "He's calling for you." People change.

Jesus says, What do you want me to do for you? Jesus could see what Bartimaeus needed. But Jesus knew that Bartimaeus needed to articulate it clearly and plainly to him, the Lord. So Bartimaeus does. "Rabbi, I want to see!" Jesus is the one who causes people to change, to see. What he did on the physical level for Bartimaeus he does on the level of faith being released in our life when we come to him with all the earth, all in our life to change. He says to us in the quiet of our inner sanctuary of our hearts, "What do you want me to do for you?" As we tell that to the Lord, "I want to be whole. I want my personality made well. I want you to cure me of the injuries I've received in my life through verbal and physical abuse and the put downs and the let downs. All the things I've gone through. Lord, I want you to help me to be a productive person, a loving person, a kind person. A person whose living life not out of control. But a person who has a gift of the Spirit called self-control. I want you in my life." The Lord is pleased when we articulate that and he will do it for us.

We have a choice in this battle for self-esteem between living with blame and despair and letting put downs keep us from changing and being blocked in moments when we should be acting. We have a choice between that and forgiving our past, going for the cure rather than the cause, going for the hope rather than the despair, being oriented toward the future rather than the past, being oriented toward the Lord rather than toward the devil and our background that helped produce us what we are. Getting past the put-downs and past the blockage to Jesus. Letting him in his own way and often through his people bring his healing into our life.

Lord, we want to take this moment to activate our faith, to put ourselves by the side of the road of life with blind Bartimaeus. I pray for the friend in this service whose life is loaded with stuff and who can't move on because the past has become such burden. I pray that in this service that from our hearts there will come a freeing up from deep within us forgiveness and gentleness and kindness. Through forgiveness it will cause change to take place in our life. Work a work of healing. Especially I pray for the persons here who are most damaged in spirit. That you would do your work of repair. We thank of you in this context as the master potter who takes and applies your beautiful touch to perhaps the ruined clay fragment of our life where the pottery has become dry. Since you're the master potter you have your way of taking that dry clay and putting water back in it and making it most

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and pliable and shaping it into a vessel for your purposes. I pray that rather than fixing on the brokenness of our life we will fix on the repaired and whole vessel that you're making. We ask this Lord Jesus in your name. Amen.