

Blows to Our Self-Esteem

Life can deal us some pretty crushing blows. And often our tendency is to react to them in a negative way. We begin to dislike ourselves and have a feeling of disgust. We form a mental picture of ourselves that is negative and unlovable. What you think of yourself, your self-image or sense of self-worth, influences every part of your life.

Persons with a good, healthy sense of self-worth feel significant. They believe that they are important - to themselves, to others, and to God. Such persons can interact with others and appreciate their worth also. They radiate hope, joy and trust. They are alive to their feelings. They see themselves the way God sees them - no more, and no less. They believe in themselves as lovable, worthy and competent parts of God's creation, sinful by nature, but redeemed and reconciled to God to become all that He wants them to be.

Persons with a weak or unhealthy self-image operate in life from any number of the following perceived factors and motivations that Josh McDowell has enumerated in his book, *His Image, My Image*:

1. A pessimistic outlook on life.
2. Lack of confidence in social skills.
3. Extreme sensitivity to the opinions of other people.
4. Self-consciousness about appearance, performance or status.
5. A view of other people as competition to beat, not friends to enjoy.
6. A sense of masculinity or femininity felt only through sexual conquests.
7. A striving to become something or somebody instead of relaxing and enjoying who they are.
8. A view of the present as something to be pushed aside, focusing instead on past achievements or future dreams.
9. A fear of God or believe that He is uninterested or angry with them.
10. A habit of mentally rehashing past conversations or situations, wondering what the other person meant.
11. A critical and judgmental view of others.
12. A defensiveness in behavior and conversations.
13. An attitude of carrying a chip on their shoulder.
14. Use of anger as a defense to keep from getting hurt.
15. A tendency to develop clinging relationships.
16. An inability to accept praise.
17. Self-defeating habits and behaviors.
18. A habit of letting others "walk" on them.
19. Fear of being alone.
20. Fear of intimacy, because it might lead to rejection or a smothering relationship.
21. A problem in believing or accepting God's love or the love of another person.
22. Dependence on material possessions for security.
23. Inability to express emotions.
24. A habit of using negative labels in referring to themselves.
25. Anticipation or worry that the worst will happen.

26. A tendency to follow the crowd and avoid independent behavior.
27. Perfectionistic behavior regarding details.
28. Perpetually rigid, legalistic and ritualistic preferences in worship.
29. Interpreting their world as hostile and overpowering.
30. A shifting of responsibility to others for unwanted or negative situations or feelings.
31. Need for lots of structure and external control in life.
32. Overly sensitive conscience.

His Image, My Image, Josh McDowell, p.42, 43.

Let me give you a word of caution to not overly react to the above list. A poor self-image is not the sole cause of all those factors. There may be many other causes: unconfessed sin, rebellion, emotional hurt, etc. Further, just because someone has extremely poor self-esteem doesn't mean that all these factors will be true of their lives.

I. Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us

We need to begin to see ourselves as God sees us. We will get an accurate picture of that from the Word of God.

Read Psalm 139:13-16. Describe what these verses tell you about yourself.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (NIV)

Now read these verses from Genesis 1. How were you created?

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning -- the sixth day. (NIV)

Read Matthew 6:25-34. What does this passage tell you about how God is involved in your life?

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NIV)

Complete this thought: In view of God's involvement in my life and His care for me (Matthew 6:25-34), I should . . .

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is true about you now that you are a Christian?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (NIV)

Look up each of the following quotations from your New Testament and consider the following list to begin to see yourself as God sees you. Write down any significant insights that you gain from these passages.

I have peace with God - Romans 5:1

I am accepted by God - Ephesians 1:3-14

I am a child of God - John 1:12

I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit - 1 Corinthians 3:16

I have access to God's wisdom - James 1:5

I am helped by God - Hebrews 4:16

I am reconciled to God - Romans 5:1

I have no condemnation - Romans 8:1

I am justified - Romans 5:10

I have His righteousness - 2 Corinthians 5:21

I am His representative - 2 Corinthians 5:20

I am completely forgiven - Colossians 1:14

I have my needs met by God - Philippians 4:19

I am tenderly loved by God - Jeremiah 31:3

I am like a pleasing fragrance to God - 2 Corinthians 2:15

I am a temple of God - 1 Corinthians 3:16

I am blameless and beyond reproach - Colossians 1:22

Which of those statements mean the most to you? Why?

II. Evaluating Ourselves According to the Word of God

Consider the adage, *"I'm not what I ought to be, but thank God, I'm not what I used to be, and, by the grace of God, I'm not what I'm going to be."* Then consider specifically how this might apply to you.

List ways in which you are not what you ought, or were made, to be.

List ways for which you can thank God that you are not what you used to be.

List characteristics which, by the grace of God, you hope - and even expect - to manifest in the future.

Write out a prayer expressing thanks to God, to the degree that you are able, for making you who you are.

I have heard many people quote the phrase, "*Please be patient; God isn't finished with me yet.*" That's very true. But I think that often **we** are the ones who must be patient with **ourselves**. It's sometimes easy to give others grace as they become all that God wants them to be - but many times it is hard to give ourselves that same grace.

Ask God to give you the grace to accept yourself just the way you are. And then pray Ephesians 3:20-21 back to the Father:

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or thin, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.
(NASB)

Suggested Reading

Building a Positive Self-Image, Dick Purnell (Thomas Nelson)

His Image, My Image, Josh McDowell (Here's Life Publishers)

Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem, Dennis and Barbara Rainey (Word Publishers)