



## Changing Your Self-Image

*“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12, NIV).*

**Body Image** – the thoughts, feelings and beliefs you have about your physical body.

Society focuses on external beauty above other characteristics such as character, morals, and effort. Many of us have a specific physical characteristic that we hyper-focus on and assume others notice as much as we do. Our body image also affects how feminine or masculine we perceive ourselves to be. We spend a significant amount of time thinking about how we look and wishing we looked different.

**Self-Image** – the thoughts, feelings and beliefs you have about your total self including abilities, relationships, achievements, intelligence, personality, and looks.

These are judged as adequate or inadequate and whether or not as a result you are loveable or unloveable; worthy or unworthy; acceptable or unacceptable. We also assume other people think the same things about us that we think about ourselves and judge us as we judge ourselves. Both are affected by societal norms, Christian norms, expectations of significant others, past experiences, our own comparisons, our distortions about ourselves, and our own personal ideals.

- ❖ Societal norms: Society has a version of who is below average, average and above average in terms of beauty, achievement, intelligence, personality, and success.
- ❖ Christian norms: The church has a version of the ideal Christian in terms of how you talk, live, pray, serve, and give. There is also an image of the ideal parent and spouse.
- ❖ Expectations of Significant Others: The people in our lives whose opinions matter or who have a close relationship with us have expectations for how they think we should be and the basis on which they judge us. We use their opinions as a reflection of how we are doing.
- ❖ Past Experiences: Our past experiences of measuring up or not measuring up are still part of the measure we compare ourselves to.
- ❖ Personal Comparisons: Each of us has things that we value and identify as good. We use these things, traits, and characteristics, to measure ourselves against and decide whether we are adequate.
- ❖ Distortions about Yourself: We hold distorted views about our abilities, looks, achievements, personality, and intelligence.
- ❖ Personal Ideals: Each of us has an ideal image that we use to compare ourselves to. When we don't measure up, we typically shame ourselves. These typically manifest themselves in our thoughts with “I should/shouldn't” statements.

All of these things are part of our self-image and body-image. As we look in a mirror to see how we look, we also look at these images to see how we are doing. We make a judgment of good or bad; success or failure; adequate or inadequate.

These judgments are made as a result of how we think about ourselves. As you think in your heart you will be (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV). When you think a certain way, you conclude that is actually how you are. But the truth is that it isn't necessarily true.

### **Changing your body image and self-image:**

1. Recognize what you don't like about yourself. (Pay attention to the emotions and thoughts connected with your body image and self-image.)
2. Recognize what is behind that dislike. (Is it a comparison, distortion, societal ideal, Christian norm, another person's expectation, past experience, and/or personal ideal).
3. Work on rejecting the things that are unreasonable: expectations of others, church and cultural norms, and unreasonable expectations for yourself.
4. STOP COMPARING yourself to anyone else. (Comparing is the problem; not comparing is the solution.) You will judge yourself as better or worse; instead, compare yourself to yourself (Galatians 6:3-4).
5. Work on treating your body/self right through healthy living and good choices. Learn to value yourself (Ephesians 5:29).
6. Change negative self-talk. (Examples: I'm so ugly. It is so embarrassing. I hate my \_\_\_\_\_. People are looking at me. People notice it and think I am \_\_\_\_\_. If only I were \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_. I'm a failure. I'll never be anything. I'm not good enough. I don't measure up.)
7. Work on acceptance of your body and yourself. Accept what you cannot change (Psalm 139:14).
8. Set reasonable goals for YOU. Change what you can. You can work on specific things to make yourself more competent.
9. Strive to view yourself as God does with an eternal perspective. You are worthy, adequate, and loveable in his eyes. God judges the heart/inside instead of external looks/outside (1 Samuel 16:7). Value the inside more than the outside (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Meditate on the following scriptures that help you see yourself as God sees you. How do they affect your image of yourself?

- ❖ "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Solomon 4:7).
- ❖ "But, my dove, my perfect one, is unique" (Song of Solomon 6:9).

- ❖ “How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!” (Song of Solomon 4:10).
- ❖ “You have stolen my heart” (Song of Solomon 4:9).
- ❖ You are the apple of my eye (Psalm 17:8).
- ❖ I have an everlasting love for you (Jeremiah 31:3).
- ❖ I’ve paid an extraordinarily high price for you, the blood of my Son, but *you* were worth it (1 Corinthians 6:20, Romans 5:8).
- ❖ You are one of my chosen ones. You are part of my royal priesthood and you belong to me (1 Peter 2:9).