



Is Good Self-Esteem Bad?

The word “esteem” originates from a Latin word meaning “estimate.” Self-esteem is simply the value you place on yourself, which results directly from the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs you have about your total self, including your physical looks, abilities, achievements, intelligence, personality, relationships, and character.

Is having good self-esteem bad? Some Christians would say the answer is yes. They would suggest Christians must die to everything having to do with self, because our sufficiency is in Christ alone. True, in our sin state we cannot come before God and claim to be adequate. Having good self-esteem does not mean we feel good about our sin or elevate ourselves to a position of pride before God that comes from spiritual self-sufficiency. It does mean that we see ourselves as God sees us: a unique creation, created in His image, loved enough by Him to send His Son to die to redeem us from our sin state, so we can fellowship with Him forever. We do not have to feel bad about ourselves to be in relationship with God. In fact, His redemption actually elevates us out of a lower place.

Insecurity and inadequacy are rooted in low self-esteem. Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) says that a man is as he thinks he is. If you view yourself as bad, unimportant, worth-less than others, inadequate, and incompetent, you will make different choices than if you see yourself as good, valuable, important, worthy, adequate, and competent. One of the root causes of early teen sexual activity in girls is low self-esteem and continued low self-esteem results in tolerating mistreatment in relationships throughout life. Until a woman sees herself as being worthy of being treated well, she will not set boundaries that require it. People that see themselves as

incompetent in their skills will not have the same level of success as those that see themselves as capable of more and as a result, take risks and push themselves to higher achievements. Without good self-esteem, we are limited in our ability to use our God-given talents and to make wise choices in all areas of our lives.

The following six keys will help you develop and maintain good self-esteem.

Measure Yourself Accurately

Good self-esteem includes having an accurate image of yourself. An accurate image sees itself truthfully. It does not mean being a lover of self where you have an inflated ego, and are arrogant, conceited, proud, haughty, or superior to others. If your self-esteem really is *good*, it will be based on an accurate assessment of who you are in all areas. You will be able to assess your strengths and weaknesses and identify and acknowledge sin, yet continue to pursue excellence.

Romans 12:3 says, “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” (NIV). If you see yourself as being good in an area you are not, your assessment is inaccurate. If distortions about yourself prevent you from seeing your abilities, that is also an inaccurate assessment.

Each of us has inherent and equal worth before God regardless of our differences and relative worth based on the world’s values. Yet, we have a tendency to compare ourselves to others and judge ourselves as “less than” or “better than.” Both are incorrect comparisons. According to Galatians 6:4, it is only when we compare ourselves to ourselves and test our own actions that we can feel good about what we find. God will judge each of us by the talents He gave us. He won’t compare what we did with someone else. We need to stop comparing ourselves to others, too.

Develop a Divine Perspective

The world's standard of beauty is narrowly defined. Only a few are truly "beautiful." Yet, God created each of us uniquely and delights in us. I know God appreciates diversity in His creation when I think of all the creatures at the black bottom of the sea that only God gets to see and enjoy. Begin to see yourself as beautiful, regardless of the world's standards. God says to you, "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Solomon 4:7, NIV). Believe it!

Another common cause of low self-esteem is the inability to let go of past sins and regrets. Many people waste their lives living in the past, and as a result are unable to live their lives today. Even after they are saved and forgiven by God, they continue to hold a stained image of themselves that includes their past sins as part of their current identity. When God forgives us, He sees us as cleansed *and* different, no longer defined by our past. When we accept God's forgiveness, we often forget to change our internal image of ourselves. Let go our your stained images today!

Reject Inaccurate Messages

One of the major causes of low self-esteem is the negative and inaccurate messages we receive from others about ourselves. These distorted messages from our parents, peers, and others cause damage to our self-esteem, because we accept and retain images about ourselves that are not true and judge ourselves to be less valuable as a result. These distorted images hold us back from being who God created us to be, because we do not have an accurate measure of our true abilities and character.

Susan Boyle wowed the world when she stepped on stage on Britain's *Got Talent* in April 2009, defying the expectations of the crowd and judges who focused on her physical appearance and were shocked to hear her stunningly beautiful voice. She didn't let their inaccurate assessments and rejecting reactions stop her from doing what she knew she could do. As a result, she became an instant inspiration to millions around the world, especially to those who had also been misjudged, misunderstood, ridiculed, and rejected.

It is vitally important that we be open to hearing truth from others that may challenge us to see things about ourselves we would rather not see. However, it is equally important that we be able to assess the messenger and the message and reject things that are not truthful.

Accept the Unacceptable

All of us have things about ourselves that we do not like and some things that we absolutely hate. These often include physical attributes. We spend a disproportionate amount of emotion, money, and effort on trying to change things about ourselves that we cannot change. What if you accepted these things? What would you do with the extra time, money, and emotional energy?

I recently met an amazing woman. One side of her face drooped, as a result of nerve damage from a tumor. When she spoke, her mouth twisted sharply downward on the right side. I asked her if it was difficult to accept her disfigurement, especially after her husband left her. She said, "At times, but when I am weak, I ask God to help me get over myself and move on. I cannot waste my time feeling bad about something I can't change." I was in awe of her wisdom and courage.

Control Your Thoughts

Listen to your inner self-talk. You may be surprised to hear how many thoughts toward

yourself are negative and self-defeating. Some of the voices repeat the criticisms of others throughout our lives, especially our parents and other authority figures. Negative self-talk is self-defeating, because it is shaming. Shame-talk is that inner voice that beats you up, puts you down, and tells you that you're bad, not good enough, less than, and unworthy. It doesn't make you want to do better; it convinces you that you cannot.

Analyze your thoughts. Recognize that your thoughts directly influence your feelings about yourself. In turn, your feelings affect the choices you make. Your thoughts matter. They can either build you up or tear you down. Make sure your thoughts include affirmations of God's truth about you, and reject voices that are not speaking truth that builds you up (Romans 12:2).

Set Reasonable Goals

If your expectations for yourself are reasonable and realistic, they work in your favor by propelling you toward workable goals. But when they're unreasonable and unrealistic, you'll find yourself frustrated and feeling bad about yourself. Perfectionists suffer from low self-esteem, because they are never "good enough" for their impossible standards. None of us will ever be perfect. We need to do the best we can and be satisfied. This doesn't mean we don't strive to do better, just that we do not set ourselves up to fail or never allow ourselves to win.

In Conclusion

Is good self-esteem bad? NO! Good self-esteem is good! It means we see ourselves just as God sees each of us--as His unique beautiful creation with a divine purpose, as valuable as anyone else. When we have good self-esteem, we will see ourselves accurately, accept ourselves completely, utilize our God-given abilities, and live our lives confidently. That's all good!!

Published in *The Lookout* October 4, 2009