

GROWING IN SELF-ESTEEM

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These notes are to be used with “Ten Areas of Self-Esteem in the Scriptures.” Growing in self-esteem often requires time and patience. It also requires resources outside ourselves. Here are some biblical guidelines for growing and helping others.

Resources for Growing in Self-Esteem

1. The Truth of God’s Word about Himself. God Himself is our most powerful Resource. As we grow in our heart knowledge of His love, forgiveness, kindness, grace, patience, etc., we build foundation resources for healthy self-esteem.
2. The truth of God’s Word about ourselves. A growing heart knowledge that we are loved, forgiven, accepted (with weaknesses), holy, blameless, etc. is a key resource.
3. Prayer. Confession, petition, thanksgiving, worship, and praise help bring us into right relationship with God and with ourselves.
4. Other persons. God may use others to help us see Him and ourselves realistically, and to help us accept ourselves as He accepts us. They may do this through prayer, teaching, exhorting, encouraging, providing honest feedback, etc.

A Strategy for Overcoming Self-Esteem Problems

You may want to begin working on growing in one specific area. The Brief Self-Esteem Inventory may help you decide on an area of need.

1. Problems with Appearance, Competence, Intelligence, Personality, & Success. Difficul-

ties in these areas often come from accepting cultural values which conflict with God’s values. “...what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). The gap between internalized worldly values and God’s values causes low self-esteem in these five areas. Society has standards in these areas by which we tend to measure ourselves and compare ourselves with others.

To grow in these areas we need to acknowledge our acceptance of false values, give them up to God, and replace them with His values. This process takes much time and effort, but is worth the effort.

2. Problems with Self-forgiveness, Acceptance of Weakness, Self-love, Freedom from Guilt, and Unconditional Worth. Problems in these areas usually have roots in our heart-level perception of God and ourselves. If our intellectual view of God and self is not congruent with our deep heart-level feelings, we will have problems in these areas. An accurate heart view of God and self is necessary to see ourselves as He sees us, and accept ourselves as He accepts us.

Growing in these areas requires that we recognize our heart-level misconceptions of God and self, and replace them with accurate perceptions. This enables us to see ourselves as we truly are, in relationship to Him, and to accept ourselves.

Some Steps for Overcoming Low Self-Esteem

The specific steps you take depends partly on what areas you want to improve. Here are a few steps to use as guidelines:

1. Describe precisely what bothers you. For

example, if you don't accept your weaknesses, list each weakness you have problems accepting.

2. Deal with condemning messages (CMs). Most people repeat inner CMs carried over from childhood, or learned later. These CMs replay when we're under stress, and especially when we fail to live up to our expectations.

a. Identify CMs. They are self-condemning messages we tell ourselves, in "I" or "You" form. For example, "I'm just no good." Or, "You're so dumb." Write each one down. Learn to recognize them immediately and not ignore them.

b. Test each CM by God's Word. See 1 Thessalonians 5:20,21 and 1 John 3:19-21. If you aren't sure if a CM is from God, look in His Word, or check with someone you trust.

c. Reject any CM which is contrary to the Word, in Christ's power. If a CM is not from God it is destructive. It can quench the Spirit, and may be a tool of our Accuser. Bring into captivity every thought to obey Christ.

d. Replace each CM with messages from God. Let His Spirit speak to you through His Word. The God of comfort and encouragement wants to minister to your heart. Memorize and meditate on Scriptures which comfort and encourage rather than condemn. Put them in first person when meditating.

3. Seek healing of old wounds which may cause low self-esteem. If you're aware of any, actively commit them to God and seek His healing. Seek prayer help from others

(James 5:16). If you're aware of resentment, forgive in God's power in order to be free to grow.

4. Praise God for who He is. This gets your mind off self and onto God. It also helps integrate into your heart what you know about Him in your head. Concentrate on attributes which you have difficulty feeling in your heart, e.g., if you have a problem with guilt, praise Him for His forgiving spirit.

5. Thank God for what you have difficulty accepting in yourself. Apply Ephesians 5:20 to yourself. Begin with one or two specific things you haven't accepted but can't do anything about, e.g., the size of your nose. Find ways to remind yourself to thank Him several times a day, even though you don't feel like it.

6. Work on those areas you can do something about. Begin with one or two. Seek His power and other resources, including help from others. For example, if you have a weakness such as fear of speaking in public and this lowers your self-esteem, begin looking for opportunities to speak, to overcome the fear. Ask God to enable you to work it out.

Helping Others Grow

These notes were written to help you grow in your own self-esteem, but you can apply them in helping others also. You will be more effective if you've been able to work through some of your own areas of difficulty. Then you know that the principles work. But you don't have to have a perfect self-esteem in order to help others! You only need to be growing.