

# Self-Esteem

“Look at her! Whether she’s giving a speech, attending a meeting, or even doing her housework, she’s always at ease with herself and others. She has such a contagious and positive disposition, doesn’t she?” “You bet. I wish I would get infected! She sure has a lot of self-esteem!”

What’s the secret to having high self-esteem? Is it important? How can we benefit from it? Let’s shed some light on this highly sought after attribute.

## What is self-esteem?

Cambridge Dictionary defines self-esteem as belief and confidence in one’s ability and value. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines self-esteem as a sense of personal worth and ability that is fundamental to an

“A sense of personal worth and ability that is fundamental to an individual’s identity”

individual’s identity. Meanwhile, the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines self-esteem as having confidence and satisfaction in oneself. Therefore, self-esteem can be described as confidently accepting oneself. It is important to note that self-esteem is also the means by which we evaluate our past experiences, personal growth, psychological development, purpose and meaning of our life, as well as our relations with others.

## Why is self-esteem significant?

Psychologists have identified a number of distinct dimensions of mental health. These include self-acceptance, or self-esteem, characterized by a positive evaluation of oneself and one’s past experiences; personal growth, reflected in one’s sense of continued psychological

growth and development; a sense that one’s life has purpose and meaning; positive relations with others; environmental mastery, the capacity to manage effectively in the surrounding world; and autonomy, a sense of self-determination and the ability to control one’s life. (Microsoft Encarta Reference Library) Self-esteem affects an individual’s health, relationships, work performance, and attitude towards others. It follows then that self-esteem influences the manner (positive or negative and constructive or destructive) in which an individual interacts with others in pursuit of their goals and aspirations.

## How can I improve my self-esteem?

In attempting to improve “self-esteem” and “self-confidence” in a logical manner, a catch-22-like riddle emerges. The thought process goes something like this: Since self-confidence is part and parcel of self-esteem, it follows then that some level of achievement, i.e. works, is needed as a foundation to build self-confidence. But how can a person trust himself when he’s just starting out? He has no experience and no assets on which to build his self-confidence? Put succinctly: I need self-confidence to work and achieve, but I need achievements to produce self-confidence. Sounds like a catch-22, doesn’t it?

The observant reader following this series of articles may have already noticed the primary theme running throughout, namely that we, as Christianly-enabled and church-supported, should explore how to apply the scripture to meet our every day challenges. This time is no different, so let us take a peek under the hood of the self-esteem engine. We will turn on the scripture light to help us look and see clearly.

Let us start with “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10) Note that “we are created in Christ Jesus for good works...that we should walk in them.” Even though we may not have started doing good

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Ephesians 2:10

works yet, i.e. starting out with no experience, having faith that we are created for good works provides the foundation needed to build our confidence. Now hold on to that thought until we get back to it a bit later.

At this juncture we turn our attention to what happened when Asa, king of Judah relied solely on his strength and personal expertise. “And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: “Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.” (2 Chronicles 16:7-9) This reference points to a partnership between man and God. When this covenant is solidly maintained, victory follows as a natural outcome without equivocations. For this partnership to work there are three prerequisites for man: a sincere and whole-hearted desire to

enter into this partnership; reliance on the Lord; and loyalty to the Lord. As a result of this covenant, the Lord shows Himself strong on behalf of man. Through baptism, such a partnership is elevated to the level of a Father - child union. Through man’s union with the Lord the concept of

“self” expands infinitely to include our Lord; while the faith that we are created for good works provides the “confidence” or “esteem” component. Given this new understanding of “self-confidence” or “self-esteem,” the catch-22 riddle has just been solved, and a perfect self-esteem is ready to be lived.

Further examination of the “self-“ portion, without the partnership or Fatherhood of God, reveals an incomplete entity. As William Shakespeare put it in Hamlet “You go not, till I set you up a glass where you may see the inmost part of you.” Along the same vein Henry David Thoreau declared: “Explore thyself, Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve.” Mark Twain put it this way, “When people do not respect us we are sharply offended; yet deep down in his heart no man much respects himself.” Scripture concurs “But one testified in a certain place, saying: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?’” (Hebrews 2:6)

David explains that God’s knowledge of man far exceeds man’s knowledge of himself, and sums it up in Psalm 139:1-6 “O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up...”

Psalm 139:1-2

# SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS

up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such

"Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." (Luke 22:33) We know now how he initially failed to follow through. Another example is found in Genesis 11:4 "And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us

the Father does it all, what's left for me to do?" The latter style, at the opposite end of the spectrum, may get complacent with the notion "if God the Father does it all, I really don't need to do much." Both are extremes. The right balance may be described as: In this union, the son / daughter does his / her best, and God the Father does the rest.

In conclusion, whenever the prefix "self" is mentioned, warning lights should start flashing "warning" and "danger" to draw our attention to the Christian understanding of the meaning of "self." It is by God's grace and mercy, the appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior (2 Timothy 1:10-12), and the Holy Spirit that we are reborn through baptism. As offspring of the Father, we are in eternal union with Him who complements our short falls and weaknesses. Hence, if there is something for us to be proud of it is the cross of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 6:14) This pride, the confidence built on our faith, the love we constantly receive from Him and radiate to others all make for a healthy and sound new "self-esteem" full of wonder and joy.

**"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."**

Genesis 11:4

knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it." For a Christian, the last verse may read "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it by myself."

make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Again the utter failure and confusion that followed is well known.

This is an opportune time to address two diametrically opposed styles of individuals: The "go getters" and the "passives." The former may find it difficult to accept the "Father - child union" concept because of their desire to do it all by themselves or the feeling of "if God

"He who parts and divides the Church of Christ cannot possess the seamless garment of Christ."  
-St. Cyprian

"It is not meager income that constitutes poverty. Rather, insatiable wants constitute poverty. But the good man, being free from such wants, is truly rich."  
-St. Clement

"Christ is the Rock Who granted to His Apostles that they should be called rocks. God has founded His church on this Rock, and it is from this Rock that Peter has been named."  
-St. Jerome

"Enter into the Church and wash away your sins. For here is a hospital and not a court of law. Do not be ashamed again to enter the Church; be ashamed when you sin, but not when you repent."  
-St. John Chrysostom

"Since you get angry with others when they speak evil against you, get angry with yourself when you speak evil against someone else."  
-St. Augustine

"Seek out, with much care and thought, a teacher who will be a safe guide to you in your manner of life; one who knows well how to lead such as are journeys toward God, a teacher who is rich in virtues ... and wise in the Holy Scriptures."  
-St. Basil the Great

"It is not the amount of learning that must be our aim, but the quality of learning. Better to learn two verses with understanding, than a whole page with wandering thoughts."  
-St. John Cassian

"I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, 'What can get through from such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"  
-St. Antony the Great

"In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and, afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire. At first they are choked with smoke and cry, until they obtain what they seek. As it is written, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:24); so we also must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work."  
-Amma Syncletica

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