

Self-Esteem¹



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 100:3; Acts 17:24–28; Romans 12:3; Matthew 22:39; 2 Samuel 9; Luke 15; Ephesians 4:23–32.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He [God] brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

LOW SELF-ESTEEM IS A MODERN PROBLEM. There are often connections between low self-esteem and problems such as drug abuse, depression (deep sadness), and eating disorders. In everyday life, low self-esteem may never get the attention of psychologists.² But it hurts relationships and prevents people from doing well in many areas of life.

Perhaps the main reason people suffer from this problem today, more than ever before, is the media. This is because the media often shows famous people as being larger than life. This leaves many people feeling that they are not good enough.

The Bible teaches us what true self-esteem is. According to psychology,³ self-esteem is how well someone feels about his or her abilities. These feelings are based on what a person thinks of himself or herself, and also on what others think of him or her. The Bible offers at least two additional ideas that help define (explain) self-esteem: who made us (Genesis 1:26, 27) and what God thinks of and gives to each person (John 3:16). When we add these parts, our self-esteem can change.

1. self-esteem—a feeling of having respect for yourself and your abilities.

2. psychologists—scientists who specialize in the study and treatment of the mind and behavior.

3. psychology—the science or study of the mind and behavior.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 20**ORIGINS (BEGINNINGS)
(Genesis 1:26, 27)**

There are two main views about how human life began. These views are very different from each other. One pictures human life as the result of pure accident. In other words, human life was not planned for. We just happened to come to be. This view always has been popular among some people, especially in recent times, when the false theories⁴ of Charles Darwin became popular. He suggested that human life started by accident. These theories have deceived millions of people. And many have come to believe that life is without purpose, or at least only for purposes that people try to make for themselves. For thousands of years, most people thought that they came from God or from gods. But today, many think that they came from the apes.

But the Bible teaches a very different view of our origins.

How different are Genesis 1:26, 27; Psalm 8:5; Psalm 100:3; and Acts 17:24–28 from the view of our beginnings that Darwin suggested? How should each view influence⁵ our own sense of self-worth and self-esteem?

God purposely created us, and He created us in His image (likeness). God also created other wonderful living plants and animals. But in their beauty and perfection they do not reflect (show) the image of their Maker the way humans do. So, humans are placed above all the animals and plants and have been given the power to rule over them.

Atheists⁶ believe that there is no special purpose for our human biology⁷ and psychology. But the Bible teaches us that God chose to share His image with the human family. Clearly, much of that image has been damaged and lost by generations⁸ of sin. But the lost image can be restored,⁹ little by little, by the changing power of the Spirit working in those who are surrendered to Christ.

God created us, and He also bought us back from sin. In fact, Ellen G. White said that Christ would have died for even one person. What does that tell us about our worth, no matter what the world might think of us? Why is it so important to remember our worth in the eyes of God?

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 21**SELF-PERCEPTIONS¹⁰
(Matthew 22:39)**

What we see in ourselves is one

4. theories—ideas that are suggested or presented as possibly true but that are not known or proven to be true.

5. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

6. atheists—people who believe that God does not exist.

7. biology—the processes that occur in a living thing.

8. generations—groups of people born and living during the same time.

9. restored—brought back to an earlier or better condition.

10. self-perceptions—the ideas you have about the kind of person you are.

important part of self-esteem. But it is an incomplete and often faulty picture. Our own thoughts and feelings can lead to wrong judgments of people, including ourselves.

One of the Bible's most serious warnings is against judging other people: "When you judge another person, you are judging yourself" (Romans 2:1, NIV; read also Luke 6:41, 42). It is easy to judge others wrongly, and people often make mistakes when judging others. The same happens with self. There is a great deal of error when we judge ourselves on the basis of ability, looks, character,¹¹ power, and so on. There always are going to be people who are smarter, better looking, and more gifted than you. But, at the same time, there always will be people who will look at you and feel that they are less than you are.



There is an old saying: when you point a finger at someone in judgment, you point three more back at yourself.

What is suggested in Matthew 22:39 about how we should see or judge ourselves?

This verse suggests that there should be some love for oneself. But this is not the main purpose of the verse. There should be a healthy pride in work or

things well done and in the good traits¹² we have. We should expect people to have an attitude (feeling) of self-protection and caring for themselves. The problem comes when someone does not give credit to God, the Creator, for all good things in us.

How are we to understand Romans 12:3 based on what we have studied so far?

There is quite a difference between very low self-esteem and arrogance (swollen self-pride), which Paul warns against. At the same time, Romans 12:4–8 explains that the body of Christ needs each member to make use of his or her individual gifts, which have been given to him or her by grace.¹³ There is nothing wrong with saying that you have gifts, with using those gifts to strengthen Christ's church, or with thanking God for them.

Make a mental list of the good traits, gifts, and abilities that God has given you. How can you use them and, at the same time, remain humble? How can looking daily at the Cross help keep us from being arrogant?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 22

WHAT OTHERS SEE (Galatians 3:28)

In many societies, the worth of a person depends on his or her talents,

11. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; someone's personality.

12. traits—the qualities that make one person or thing different from another.

13. grace—God's free gift of mercy.

gifts, appearance, and so forth. We do look at outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). This is because that is all we can see. Our understanding of self often is influenced by¹⁴ what others think of us. This thinking is based on what they see on the outside. If everyone tells you that you are pretty, you will see yourself as pretty.

But there is much more to each of us than what we think. People who have poor self-esteem need to remember the parts of themselves that are of true value, not what the world values. This is because, so often, what the world values is of no value to God.

What are the things that your society and culture¹⁵ value the most? How important do you think these things are to God?

Most societies put great value on things that they can see. But other traits, such as honesty, kindness, temperance (self-control), or faithfulness to principles (rules) and ideals (standards; ideas of what is right), do not seem to have as much value as those traits that can be seen.

How does background and appearance influence self-esteem? How should a Christian view others, no matter what their background is or how they appear? Read Galatians 3:28.

Prejudice¹⁶ is destructive to self-esteem. As Christians, we should

make a serious effort to uplift and encourage others, no matter what their background is.

In 2 Samuel 9, there is the story of Mephibosheth. He could have been the target of revenge by David. No wonder Mephibosheth showed fear. He fell on his face to the ground and called himself “a dead dog.” He was also crippled. But David returned the family property to Mephibosheth, as well as the servants that belonged to him. David also honored him. Imagine how these gifts brought extra self-worth to Mephibosheth.

The influence that people have on the self-esteem of others is very powerful. We have the ability to influence the self-esteem of others through words, actions, and even how we look at them more than we realize.

How careful or careless are you with the way you influence the self-esteem of others? Think about your closest relationships. How can you help build these people up, instead of tearing them down?



Mephibosheth fell on his face in front of David and called himself “a dead dog.”

14. influenced by—to be affected or changed in an indirect but usually important way.

15. culture—the beliefs, customs, arts, and so on, of a particular society, group, place, or time.

16. prejudice—an unfair feeling of dislike for a person or group because of race, sex, religion, and so on.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 23**WHAT GOD THINKS (Luke 15)**

Read Luke 15. What should this one chapter tell us about our worth to God? How should this influence our own sense of self-esteem? What do these parables¹⁷ tell us about what God thinks of us? Why is this truth so important to know and to remember?

If someone is tempted to feel unworthy, lost, or outcast, he or she should remember that God and His angels care deeply for every member of the human family. The shepherd cared more for the one lost sheep than for the remaining ninety-nine. The woman forgot her other coins and searched carefully until she found the lost one. The father seems to have paid more attention to the demands of the younger son than to his first-born. The shepherd, the woman, and the father all pay special attention to the lost person or thing in the story.



The shepherd cared more for the one lost sheep than for the remaining ninety-nine.

Then, when the lost are found, there is great joy on earth and in heaven. Notice how powerfully these stories show us the love of God for each one of us, no matter what our faults are.

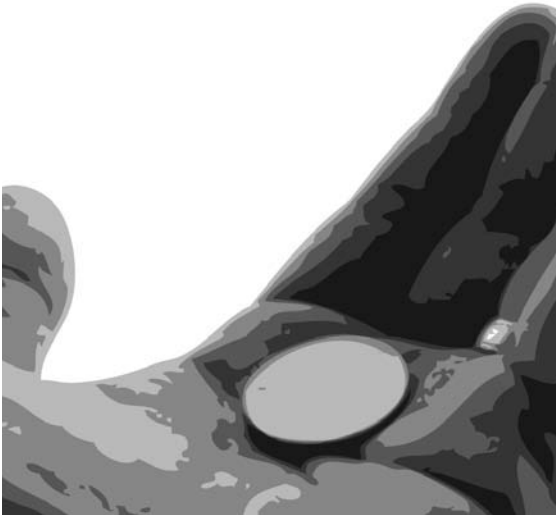
This principle can be used to help people in need. If you can help them feel comfortable and safe, that alone can do them so much good. People need to know that someone cares for them, especially when they are in pain.

Christians have something that can help them more than someone who does not accept or believe in the Lord. God is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to listen to the depressed (deeply sad), stressed, lonely, and anxious (worried) soul. This relationship with God is a good reason to feel special and a good way to gain some relief from low self-esteem.

Of course, the greatest example of our worth in the eyes of God is the Cross. This shows us just how valuable we are to God, no matter what weaknesses and faults we have. The Cross tells us that, no matter what others think of us, we are of unlimited value to the Creator of the universe. We know how quickly people, society, and their values can change. So, how much should the view of others and of society as a whole really matter to us?

How can we help others take the message in Luke 15 and use it for themselves? How can we help others understand that Jesus is talking about them personally?

17. parables—short stories that teach a moral or spiritual lesson.



The woman forgot her other coins and searched carefully until she found the lost one.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 24

A NEW SELF (Ephesians 4:23, 24)

What does Paul mean by “putting on” the new self in Ephesians 4:23, 24? How does this new self act and behave?

People like to try new looks: changing hairstyles, buying new clothes, even getting face-lifts or hair transplants. But these things bring only small changes outside. The basic self remains unchanged.

Paul talks about a new self. He is not talking about changing the way a person looks on the outside. Instead, he talks about attitude (thoughts and feelings) and the mind. Paul says that we are “created to be truly good and holy” (verse 24, NIV).

List the attitudes and behaviors coming out of the new self according to Ephesians 4:25–32.

Paul says that the new self shows successful fruits, such as truthfulness, unity (oneness with God and with others), honesty, wholesome talk, kindness, and forgiveness. Notice, too, that all the traits of the new self are connected with good character and personal relationships. These can be directly connected with self-esteem. The poor behaviors in Ephesians 4 (lying, anger, and bitterness) leave the person with low self-worth. But being kind and merciful to those in need can improve self-esteem. This also can take a person’s focus off of himself or herself and help him or her feel that he or she has done something positive and good.

The Christian community needs people who want to build others up instead of destroying them. Self-worth easily can be ruined with rude (impolite) words of criticism. “God gives every family or every Christian the duty of avoiding negative speech. When people take part in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. By the help of the grace of God, we should quietly drop negative talk or lead them to a more positive conversation.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 337.

Why does helping somebody else improve your own self-esteem? Make a list of small things that you can do for your neighbor, husband or wife, or other family member. When you do them, you may be surprised at how good you feel about yourself.

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 25

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “If God cares for a sparrow . . . how will He care for the purchase of the blood of Christ? One soul is worth more than all the world. For one soul Jesus would have passed through the suffering on the cross that that one might be saved in His kingdom. ‘So don’t [do not] be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows’ (Matthew 10:31, NIV).” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 3, 1892.

“We lose many rich blessings because we neglect to find the Lord with humble hearts. We need to come to Him with a sincere heart and ask Him to show our weaknesses. If we do, He will show us a true picture of ourselves as shown in the mirror of His Word. Then, having seen ourselves as God sees us, let us not go away forgetting what kind of men we are. Let us study carefully our faulty character and ask for grace to make it as good as the example God shows us in the Bible.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Lake Union Herald*, November 3, 1909.

The two paragraphs above give us a better understanding of the balance between low self-esteem and false self-pride. Read Romans 12:2, 3 to better understand how to keep the balance

between low self-worth and false pride.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① The twentieth century was one of the most violent in history. Mass murder happened on a bigger scale than ever before. The Darwinian view of life says that humans came to be by chance alone. How could this view be responsible in some part for the lack of respect for human life? In other words, if human beings are just advanced apes that were formed by accident or chance alone, what value can an individual life have?

② Our study on Tuesday looked at how we judge others and how it can influence the self-worth of a person. We want to support people and help them have a healthy sense of self-worth. But we also need to be careful about feeding someone’s pride so much that it could be harmful to him or her. How can we keep the right balance between supporting people and damaging them with too much praise?

③ Think more deeply about what the cross of Christ teaches us about our individual worth. Think about what happened at the cross, who was on it, and what His death meant. How should the Cross help us better understand what our individual worth really is?