

## **“Improving Our Self-Image”**

How is your self-esteem? How do you see yourself? Are you guilty of comparing yourself to friends, relatives or celebrities? What do you really think about you? Do you long to be taller or shorter? Feel you're not pretty or handsome enough? Are you struggling to lose weight hoping to look like that super super-model you admire? Maybe you're on the other end of the spectrum and want to gain a few pounds.

Unfortunately, in our society physical features are much more important than what we have on the inside, especially our spirituality. For many people there is a constant pressure for perfection -- to meet the physical standards that the media holds in high regards. Looking sexy, thin, constantly being told you need to have this hair color, drive this car and wear these clothes in order to fit in or meet our social standards.

Everybody has some level of self-esteem. We all have thoughts about who we are...good, bad or indifferent. Our self-worth is often based on our physical features, the money we make, our position in life, and college degrees.

Some people think very highly of themselves, others suffer with an inadequate self-image. Then there are those in the middle who give very little thought of themselves; they are more concerned about other people's well-being. Whatever the case, you have some sense of where you fall.

Our self-esteem, self-worth or self-confidence, whichever term you prefer, is often influenced by family, friends, our peers, and sometimes even our superiors in the workplace. Many factors, both good and bad, can have an impact on how you see yourself. Those who are strong-minded refuse to allow other's comments to affect them on a deep level. On the other end of the spectrum are those who constantly battle to get rid of or overcome negative and self-deprecating thoughts.

We all have something about ourselves we would like to change: even the best of us, or the most attractive, or someone we consider having it all together. In our eyes they may seem to have it all, but if we were to probe deep enough we may find that even those we think are well put together have some physical trait, emotional or mental attribute, they wish they could overcome or remove from their lives.

The terms “self-esteem,” “self-worth” or “self-confidence” are not found in the Bible. We are going to look at several scriptures that will define a healthy,

biblical self-worth. Using scripture, we will seek to find a proper balance, where we avoid feelings of superiority and feeling of inadequacy or insignificance. There is a proper, biblical balance where we understand who we are and whose we are and who made us.

### **God knows us: Psalm 139:1-6**

*Psalms:139:1: O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

*Psalms:139:2: Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.*

*Psalms:139:3: Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*

*Psalms:139:4: For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

*Psalms:139:5: Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

*Psalms:139:6: Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*

The scripture text penned by King David (Israel's greatest King) starts off this Psalm saying "Oh Lord Thou has searched me and known me." The Bible does not record King David struggling with body image issues or self-esteem issues as a result of what people thought of him. Recall how David is described in the Bible. His brothers, King Saul and Goliath pointed out his youth and small stature. He is described as being ruddy, yet handsome. He was the youngest among his brothers and, according to scripture, compared to his brothers, he was smaller in height and build. Yet it was David whom God used to slay Goliath, the giant Philistine threatening to annihilate all of Israel. It was David who became the great warrior defeating the enemy nations who wanted to wipe the Israelites off the map.

David did not do these things in his own strength. King David as a young man really had faith in God. His faith in God fueled his confidence to defeat Goliath, to slay wild animals with his bare hands when they attempted to destroy his flock and to defeat many heathen nations who were the enemies of God's people. If David had measured himself or compared himself to his brothers, he may not have become the great warrior King that God designed him to be.

According to Psalm 139:1 God knows everything. He knows all about you and me. In fact there is nothing that God does not know. This can be both good

and bad. There are some things we don't want others to know about us -- our negative thoughts, past sins, mistakes we've made, and the insecurities that plague us from day to day. God is aware of these things. Sometimes we work very hard to keep these things hidden. We do all we can to cover up unfortunate things in our lives.

We can never keep anything from God. He knows every thought, our feelings of failure, when we've been overlooked, if we have feelings of bitterness and jealousy. God knows and he understands us. When others misunderstand our words, or actions; God knows when we mean to do right and it is taken the wrong way.

The good news is that God knows and yet He still loves us. He does not remove us from His family because we are imperfect, but He lovingly waits and works on us to mold us into the person He intends for us to be.

### **God makes no mistakes: Psalm 139:13-18**

*Psalms:139:13: For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.*

*Psalms:139:14: I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

*Psalms:139:15: My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.*

*Psalms:139:16: Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

*Psalms:139:17: How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!* Psalms:139:18: If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.

When God completed His creation in the book of Genesis he looked at all he had done and said it was "good and very good." Before we entered our mother's womb, God had already mapped out our entire life, decided our physicality and equipped us with all the gifts and talents He wanted us to possess.

Consider this: the Bible says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made”...this means we are God’s perfect design. So...if you are teased because you have big ears or because you are taller than the average person or you have large feet, don't worry it...is not a physical flaw or defect. Your height, the size of your hands or feet, the color of your eyes and the shape of your head was a divine design choice. Whenever we bemoan the way we look, or try to look or act like someone else, we are essentially telling God that He is at fault. When have you known the Almighty God to make mistakes?

Learn how to embrace your uniqueness. There is no one else in the world exactly like you. There may be relatives with whom you share some resemblance; you may even have friends who enjoy the same activities you do. Out of the billions of people in the world there is only one you. That is something to give God praise for!

### **It’s all in your mind: Philippians 4:8**

The Bible does not instruct on self-esteem or self-image. God in His Words does instruct in perfecting our self-worth in Christ, that is we are to seek to be more and more like Him every day. He is our perfect example in everything.

It is healthy to desire to look your best, to practice good hygiene habits and to even receive complimentary statements about how well groomed you are. However, it becomes unhealthy when we’re obsessed over our looks, weight, and body image.

We fail God when we allow the negative thoughts and put-downs from others to prevent us from performing God's will. David as a young man could have easily fallen into this trap, by comparing himself to his brothers or focusing on the fact that he was overlooked by Jesse, his father. David’s focus was not on Goliath’s height or his own stature, neither his brother or father. David’s mind was on God. We often think too much about ourselves. Let’s get our minds on God and ask Him to help change the inside. Ask God to help you accept how he has made you and find the unique characteristic that makes you stand out from others.

Think on things that are right, good and true, you may not be the prettiest, the smartest, or the most talented person in your class. But you are exactly the way God intended you to be. That is the only way God can use you (if you are

you), he can't use you if you are trying to be something he never designed you to be.

It's all in our minds! Satan wants us to compare ourselves with others and have a pity party if we don't measure up to someone else's standards of physical attractiveness. Here is a thought, why not compare yourself with Christ, how do you measure up against Him? How well do you measure up to His Word? If you're going to be obsessed over something measuring up to Christ is something worth constantly thinking about.

Christ is our perfect example, He is the one we are to pattern our lives after, not people we see in the media, not the rich and famous. We are to be meek and lowly, humble and holy. That is to be our aim in this life. Those worldly things will not last, they will one day fade away. Paul admonished us to "set your affections on things above not on things on the earth". Give more time to developing a prayer life, to understanding scripture, and to maintaining your relationship with God, than you do to developing six pack abs or learning how to contour make up. Those things have some importance Do you think we spend more time on earthly things than we do on spiritual things that build up our faith?

Remember King David did not compare himself to his brothers, he focused on the right thoughts. What are the right thoughts? Scriptures may not promote body image but it does instruct us on correct thinking. Paul wrote to think on things that are true, honesty, just, pure and lovely...in other words, think on what is true, good and right.

We get into trouble if we measure ourselves against others, or if we try to be like others, or if we wish we were someone else instead of who God made us to be. Going back to King David, he knew he was small, but to him it was no big deal. Goliath even taunted him about his stature. David confronted him in the "...name of the Lord" which was God's strength, not his own.

- Face facts about who you are. Celebrate the good and work to improve the not so good.
- Trust that God has made you exactly the way He wanted you to be.
- Ask your heavenly Father to help you accept how He made you.
- Never compare yourself to others, you will always find something more appealing about them and something less appealing about yourself. This damages your self-esteem and can take your focus off God.

- Focus on what you can change; your emotional or personality traits.
- Seek to become more spiritual minded and less worldly, “we are in the world, but not of the world.” The more we desire God the less we desire of this world.
- Learn how to combat negative thoughts with scripture and prayer. This is how Jesus resisted Satan’s temptations. He used the Word to send Satan packing.
- The majority of our problems start in the mind. Satan wants us to think bad thoughts about ourselves, he wants us to imitate worldly characteristics. He wants us to think more about ourselves than we do about God. When that happens we are heading for disaster.
- We have the Word of God to rely on; we have the Spirit of God to comfort, lead and guide us. We have Jesus Christ who can take our every thought, need and desire...because he knows the feelings of our infirmities.”
- Change your focus, aspire to have more substance in your life. Life is more than about how you look and what you wear. Your life is about who you are as a person and how many lives you impact for the Kingdom of God.

Copyright © 2014 by Patrice Smith. All rights reserved.

Permission granted for the NSSA of the PCAF.