

CHAPTER 22

HOW TO BUILD TRUE SELF-ESTEEM

- I. ONE OF OUR MOST DISCOURAGING AND DEPRESSING PROBLEMS IS LEARNING HOW TO COPE WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM OR A NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE.
- A. This problem isn't limited to a select few.
 - B. It's a universal curse that seems to plague every human being on earth to one degree or another.
 - C. However, some are more adversely affected and deeply shattered by it than others.
 - D. Virtually all of our social conflicts and mis-understandings center around this dreaded problem.
 - E. Since the majority of us here today are probably struggling with low self-esteem, I feel that it's one of the most needed subjects I could cover.
- II. AT THE OUTSET OF THIS STUDY, IT IS VITAL FOR US TO REALIZE THAT GOD NOT ONLY DESIRES WE BUILD THE RIGHT KIND OF SELF-ESTEEM, BUT DOES IN FACT COMMAND US TO.
- A. We are destined to become a ruling king and a glorified son in His family.
 - B. It's inconceivable to think that we could enter His Kingdom strapped and inhibited by feelings of inferiority.
 - C. But the kind of self-esteem He wants us to develop is altogether different from what the world is pursuing.
 - D. As we progress with our discussion, we will clearly see the difference between the world's viewpoint of self-esteem and God's high ideal.
- III. EXACTLY WHAT IS LOW SELF-ESTEEM?
- A. Let's begin by discussing some general overall characteristics.
 - B. Later we'll discuss the causes and cures.
 - C. Here is a list of the most common symptoms:
 - 1. A feeling of inferiority.
 - a. Fearing that one is not measuring up to expected standards of society.
 - b. Perceiving oneself as being a second-rate or second-class citizen.
 - c. Viewing oneself as physically unappealing or unattractive.
 - 2. A feeling of inadequacy.
 - a. An unduly low opinion and faulty evaluation of one's personality, qualities and strengths.
 - b. Viewing oneself as lacking intelligence, innate abilities and skills.
 - 3. Fear of rejection.
 - a. Seeing oneself as beneath others and unworthy of their love, respect and admiration.
 - b. Usually based on a lifetime of sour and bitter experiences such as: being turned down for a date, overlooked for a party, excluded from peer groups.
 - 4. Lack of courage and confidence.
 - a. Afraid to step out and face new challenges.
 - b. The deep insecurity that one may fail and encounter the criticism and disapproval of others.
 - c. Unsure of one's overall ability to win in the game of life.
 - d. Lack of drive and initiative.
 - 5. Social inhibitions and ineptness.
 - a. Weak in communication skills — not sure of what to say and how to conduct oneself in unfamiliar circumstances.
 - b. Not knowing how to meet people, make new friends and build relationships.
 - c. Usually stems from lack of experience.

6. Self-consciousness.
 - a. Painfully aware of one's weaknesses, faults and shortcomings.
 - b. Magnifies his mistakes in his own mind and tends to think that others notice.
 - c. Feels that he is being constantly evaluated and criticized by others.
7. Self-pity.
 - a. Tends to whine and complain about bad breaks and mistreatment from others.
 - b. Generally feels miserable and frustrated with his station in life.
 - c. Tends to display a forlorn, dejected and unhappy expression on the face.
8. Shyness.
 - a. Being so concerned about what others think that one is afraid to converse with them or participate in activities.
 - b. Keeping to oneself and avoiding crowds.
 - c. Being controlled and paralyzed by fear.
9. Guilt and self-hatred.
 - a. Subconsciously admitting to oneself that he's a hypocrite and living a double standard.
 - b. Play acting — pretending to be something that one isn't.
 - c. Allowing one's conscience to be seared, thus squelching his desire to overcome, walk with God and build character.
 - d. A general dislike or contempt for oneself.
10. Abuse of alcohol or the use of other drugs.
 - a. An escape from facing the reality of one's life.
 - b. An artificial means of attaining the ideal state one desires in place of working to attain it.
 - c. An old-fashioned cop-out.
11. Low personal standards.
 - a. Poor grooming and hygiene.
 - b. Unkempt living environment.
 - c. Offensive manners and lack of culture.
 - d. Satisfied with status quo, such as beat-up and dirty old car, soiled furniture, etc.
12. Suicidal tendencies.
 - a. Succumbing to prolonged depression.
 - b. Taking the view that one's life has lost meaning and value.
 - c. Suicide is now the third most common cause of death among American teenagers.
13. A general negative attitude.
 - a. Being consistently down on oneself and life in general.
 - b. Cynical, abusive, sarcastic.
 - c. Pessimistic response to any offered suggestions for self-improvement or solutions to problems.
 - d. An appalling lack of true faith in God.
14. Pride, arrogance and conceit.
 - a. This is a reverse condition of all the above in an attempt to cover up one's feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.
 - b. Usually this individual is quick to judge and criticize others for their mistakes, weaknesses and sins.
 - c. By putting others down, one lifts himself above them.

IV. AS MENTIONED EARLIER, GOD DESIRES THAT WE GROW IN THE PROPER KIND OF SELF-ESTEEM, AND BECOME CONFIDENT, FRUITFUL SERVANTS.

A. Our basic needs and drives.

1. We were created to become like God.

- a. We were fashioned as a clay model or physical prototype, ultimately to be transformed into His spiritual likeness (Gen. 1:26-27).
- b. This process may take an entire lifetime to achieve.
- c. We begin as nothing and proceed through various stages of growth and development until our change is complete.

- d. The Kingdom of God should be our motivation.
 - e. To fall short of this grand purpose leaves us empty and depressed.
 - 2. We were created with an inherent desire to create, build and accomplish.
 - a. Whenever this desire is stifled, we feel frustrated and discouraged.
 - b. This is a major cause of inadequacy and self-condemnation.
 - 3. We were created with a need to experience success and fulfillment or a need to excel.
 - a. Here is another prime factor that contributes to a negative self-image or low self-respect.
 - b. When we have failed to put forth our best efforts, we have not fully experienced the true meaning of success.
 - c. Ex: When God finished each day of creation, He looked at His work and said, "It is good."
 - 4. We were created with a need to grow and develop our full potential.
 - a. When this desire has been neglected or squelched, we are left distressed and discouraged.
 - b. Again, our self-respect plummets.
 - c. The urge to reach out and produce has not been nurtured.
 - 5. We were created with a need for love, approval and acceptance.
 - a. This single point accounts for the most causes involving low self-esteem.
 - b. We need encouragement and positive reinforcement.
 - c. It is a deeply intense need that God engineered into our psyche.
 - 6. We were created with a need to express love and serve others.
 - a. When we fail in this duty, we overlook a vital key that produces genuine happiness and satisfaction.
 - b. Expressing love toward others raises our sense of value and enhances our feelings of self-worth.
 - 7. We were each created uniquely different for a special role in God's plan.
 - a. With this in mind, why should we want to abandon our identity and try to be like someone else?
 - b. When we compare ourselves to others, we question God's wisdom in creating us as we are.
 - c. Thus, we arouse feelings of inferiority and self-doubt.
 - 8. We were created to need God.
 - a. We need His Holy Spirit to give us inner peace and comfort, of knowing that He cares and are accepted of Him.
 - b. We need His guidance, protection and abiding love.
 - c. Without God, we are incomplete and left to our own devices.
 - d. It is only through God that we can attain true self-esteem.
- B. Obviously, we can readily see that to have proper self-regard we must fulfill these basic urges and drives that God placed within us.

V. THE ORIGINAL CAUSE OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM CAN BE TRACED TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

- A. When Adam and Eve sinned by partaking of the forbidden fruit, two frightful and disastrous things happened to them.
 - 1. They cut themselves off from God's presence which resulted in shame, guilt and rejection.
 - a. Their first reaction was to run from God and hide among the trees (Gen. 3:8-10).
 - b. They were mortally afraid.
 - c. They felt dirty, sinful and ashamed, thus forfeiting their self-esteem.
 - d. Had they not sinned, Adam and Eve would have undoubtedly enjoyed a rich, abundant life, having wholesome, healthy feelings about themselves.
 - e. They would have had God's constant love, encouragement and positive reinforcement.
 - 2. Satan entered their lives and they became self-centered, corrupt and rebellious.
 - a. Their inner heart was darkened and defiled.
 - b. Instead of receiving God's Holy Spirit which would have imparted outgoing love and concern, they received Satan's nature which made them carnal and self-seeking.
 - c. This nature was then passed on to their children and all future generations.
(See Ps. 58:3; Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 5:12,15-19.)
 - d. Consequently, the whole human race has lost its ability to show true love and concern for others.

VI. WITH THIS BACKGROUND IN VIEW, LET'S NOW EXAMINE THE SPECIFIC CAUSES OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM.

A. A lack of parental love or negative home environment.

1. IT CAN START AT CONCEPTION.

- a. The baby is unplanned or unwanted.
 - (1) The mother is depressed and unhappy about the pregnancy.
 - (2) Because of her negative attitude, she upsets the chemical balance of the fetus and hinders its development.
- b. Possibly the mother smokes, drinks, uses drugs or has a poor diet.
 - (1) The fetus may develop physical deformities or mental retardation.
 - (2) Its mental or emotional outlook could be impaired for life.
 - (3) Recent studies show that a mother's own mental attitude can be transferred to the fetus, causing it to be nervous and temperamental.

2. IT CAN ORIGINATE DURING INFANCY.

- a. The parents were hoping for a boy, but got a girl, or vice-versa.
- b. The baby is left to itself for long periods of time.
- c. Neglected when it's hungry, wet, frightened or ill.
- d. Thus, the attitude of not being wanted is instilled from the outset.

3. IT IS ROOTED IN CHILDHOOD.

- a. Too much correction and discipline cause the child to believe he can do nothing right.
- b. Lack of involvement, motivation and encouragement — no positive reinforcement.
- c. Lack of recognition for a job well done — initiative is killed.
- d. Ridiculed and put down for making mistakes, particularly in the presence of others.
- e. This child is told that he's a jerk, idiot, creep or klutz.
- f. Is often reminded that he's dumb, stupid and a clumsy oaf.
- g. Parents set unrealistic goals for the child and push it to exasperation.
- h. Failure to identify and develop talents and abilities at a young age.
- i. Overprotective parents rob children of opportunities for growth and development.
- j. Parents who don't know how to make a child feel loved.
- k. When a child is continually called names, put down and made to feel unworthy.
 - (1) This negative reinforcement gets into his psyche.
 - (2) He comes to think and believe these things said about him are true.
 - (3) The pattern is set for life.

B. Childhood experiences outside the home.

- 1. Ridicule and rejection from peers and classmates.
- 2. Harassed because of thick glasses, freckles, accent, overweight or unusual name.
- 3. Intimidated by teachers for being a slow learner.
- 4. Last to be chosen on a team.
- 5. Daily bombardment of negative vibes that the child is inferior and unworthy.

C. The pressures of teenage and adolescence.

- 1. Fear of discovery.
 - a. Poor — lives on other side of the tracks.
 - b. Intolerable home conditions.
 - c. Lack of talents, athletic ability or experience.
- 2. Feels self-conscious because of physical appearance — acne, undeveloped body: skinny, fat, short, tall, etc.
- 3. Strange religious beliefs and practices — Sabbath, Holy Days, can't wear makeup, can't keep Christmas, etc.
- 4. Rejected for not giving in to immoral social pressures — drugs, alcohol, sex, vulgar language, etc.
- 5. Constant lecturing and nagging from parents.

D. Entering young adulthood.

- 1. Cutting the apron strings and starting out on one's own.
- 2. Insecurities arise because Mom and Dad are no longer there to lean on.
- 3. Early job experiences — being turned down, getting laid off or fired, starting out from bottom of ladder.

4. Many sour dating experiences.
5. Romantic involvement — being crushed and heartbroken.
6. Economic pressures — unable to afford a car, buy nice clothes, or enjoy the finer things of life.

VII. THIS BRINGS US TO THE IMMEDIATE PRESENT.

- A. Let's now examine how this insidious tool of Satan — a negative self-image — intrudes into your life.
- B. Other subtle causes:
 1. The direct assault of Satan — he tries to shatter us at every turn.
 2. The glamour of Hollywood and the media.
 - a. Beautiful women, handsome men.
 - b. Expensive clothes, cars, homes.
 - c. Affluence and elegant lifestyle.
 - d. The world projects an image of superiority to which we subconsciously compare ourselves.
 3. Comparing oneself to others.
 4. Playing negative mental tape recordings about your failures, thus reinforcing inferiority.
 5. Failure to grow and produce.
 6. Having an "I can't" attitude when confronted with new challenges.
 7. Fear of people's opinions or what they may say.
 8. Racial discrimination.
 9. Associating with people who are critical and negative.
 10. A series of demoralizing bad breaks.

VIII. HOW A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE REPELS OTHERS AND CREATES SOCIAL BARRIERS.

- A. A negative attitude causes one:
 1. To be timid and shy.
 2. Cold and distant.
 3. Unapproachable — hard to get to know.
 4. To be whiney, irritable and critical.
- B. He transmits these negative signals to others.
 1. They misread his behavior and draw wrong conclusions.
 2. They feel that he is snobbish, vain, proud, unfriendly.
 3. Other people are repelled and avoid social contact with him.
- C. Thus the person with low self-esteem senses the rejection of other people and withdraws deeper into his shell, creating a vicious cycle of defeat and failure.

IX. SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO ACHIEVE TRUE SELF-ESTEEM.

- A. Fourteen steps.
 1. Realize that a negative self-image can keep you out of God's Kingdom.
 - a. Rev. 21:8 — *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*
 - b. Matt. 25:24-26, 28, 30 — *"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: (25) And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. (26) His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: (28) Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. (30) And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*
 - c. Heb. 10:38-39 — *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. (39) But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*
 2. To turn your life around you must radically change your negative way of thinking.
 - a. Come to grips with yourself and realize the urgency of your situation.
 - b. Get fed up and fired up about your present miserable state.
 - c. Luke 13:3,5 — *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (5) I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

- d. To be controlled by fear and negativism means you're on Satan's wavelength and are serving him.
 - e. Start acting like one who's been freed from the shackles of Satan and living for the glory of God.
3. Realize you're worth more to God than the whole.
- a. God sent His Son to die for you.
 - (1) John 3:16 — *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*
 - (2) I Cor. 6:20 — *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*
 - b. Nothing can separate you from God's love.
 - (1) Rom. 8:38, 39 — *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
 - (2) John 10:28, 29 — *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."*
 - c. How awesome and profound that God loves you so much.
 - d. Think of it! He's also going to crown you as a king.
4. Realize that you are an original copy and should never compare yourselves to others.
- a. God explicitly commands that you not do this.
 - (1) II Cor. 10:12 — *"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."*
 - b. You are one of a kind and have a special place of importance in God's plan.
 - (1) I Cor. 12:14-18 — *"For the body is not one member, but many. (15) If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? (16) And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? (17) If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? (18) But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."*
 - c. God is even going to give you a unique name of identity in His coming Kingdom.
 - (1) Rev. 3:12 — *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." (See also Rev. 2:17.)*
 - d. How foolish to abandon your own identity and attempt to be like someone else.
5. Realize that true self-esteem comes from obedience and a right relationship with God.
- a. Here's the vital difference between the vanity of this world and godly self-esteem.
 - (1) The world tries to achieve it without God's help.
 - (2) We achieve it through God's Spirit in us.
 - b. Our power and strength truly come from God.
 - (1) II Cor. 13:5 — *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"*
 - (2) Gal. 2:20 — *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*
 - (3) Phil. 4:13 — *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*
 - (4) Eph. 3:20 — *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."*
 - (5) Isa. 40:29-31 — *"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. (30) Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: (31) But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."*
 - c. Being obedient and doing God's will keeps us in a positive frame of mind and enhances our self-image.

6. To grow in confidence and self-esteem, you must experience success.
 - a. Each achievement produces confidence.
 - b. It spurs you on to greater heights.
 - c. As you experience the triumph and victory of success, you are motivated to try harder.
 - d. Thus, success generates confidence and confidence generates success.
 - e. Have the courage to accept new challenges and opportunities for growth.
 - f. This will require drive and discipline — but the rewards are well worth it.
 - g. Some examples:
 - (1) Join the Spokesman Club.
 - (2) Learn to dance, ski, skate, etc.
 - (3) Try new recipes.
 - (4) Learn to play a musical instrument.
 - h. Search for hidden talents and be willing to try your hand at new things.
 - i. NOTE: Do the thing you fear and your fear will disappear.
7. Set attainable and realistic goals to achieve a positive self-image.
 - a. Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day.
 - b. Nor can you hope to make a total change in your life in a few short weeks.
 - c. You must grow in step-by-step stages — and set small goals you can handle.
 - d. The place to begin is to isolate your major hang-ups and problems.
 - (1) Attack these first.
 - (2) Be honest with yourself — have the courage to seek out the truth.
 - (3) Examples: Fear of meeting people, asking a certain girl for a date, overcoming self-consciousness, depression, etc.
 - e. Work on self-improvement.
 - (1) Appearance: hairstyle, wardrobe, weight, etc.
 - (2) Being a good conversationalist.
 - (3) Physical living environment.
 - (4) Education and improving career.
 - (5) Cultivate a cheerful disposition.
 - f. As you experience success in these areas, your confidence will grow and your self-esteem will heighten.
8. Be patient and endure — some problems take longer to conquer.
 - a. Some habits, fears and phobias are deeply ingrained and will require extreme patience and perseverance to master.
 - b. Resolve never to quit and beseech God for strength.
 - c. Don't be discouraged if you hit snags and roadblocks along the way.
 - d. Keep your goal in mind and determine to stick it out to the bitter end.
9. Make it a practice to seek wise counsel.
 - a. When you encounter seemingly impossible situations, be willing to ask for help.
 - b. Go to God's ministers with your spiritual or emotional problems.
 - c. Go to a close and God-fearing friend who understands you and can put you back on track.
 - d. Don't continue to make excuses for your failures when help is available.
10. Make the pursuit of excellence your motto.
 - a. Remember, you're destined to become a king.
 - b. God doesn't want you to live a mediocre life — but to go for top honors.
 - c. When you give 100 percent effort to all your endeavors and strive to please God, your self-image will markedly improve.
11. Work at building relationships and associate with who will motivate and encourage you.
 - a. Take the initiative and make new friends — don't hold back and wait for them to take the lead.
 - b. Realize the importance of being loyal and true.
 - c. Stand by them when they really need you.
 - d. When down in the dumps and needing encouragement, you need true friends to lean on.

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you." — Dale Carnegie

12. Devote your life to serving mankind and your self-esteem will soar.
 - a. Get your mind off yourself and onto the needs of others.
 - b. The cause of low self-esteem all along has been the result of having your mind on yourself.
 - c. Develop a loving, sharing and giving life-style.
 - d. Practice this principle until it becomes an automatic response in the way you deal with others.
 - e. Make people feel important and help them to grow in self-esteem.
13. Maintain high standards of character and self-respect.
 - a. Don't give in to the pulls of the flesh and compromise your principles.
 - b. Preserve your integrity at all costs.
 - c. In the whole of your life be true and honest to the core.
 - d. Allow no sin or guilt to defile your conscience or taint your feelings of self-worth.
 - e. Always strive to be at peace with yourself, with God and with your fellowman.
14. Be constantly aware of Christ's eminent return and the urgency of redeeming the time.
 - a. The judgment will soon be upon us and we'll have to give account of our lives.
 - b. If we've failed to develop our talents and grow, Christ will take them from us and give our reward to someone else more deserving. (Matt. 25:38)
 - c. He exhorted those in the Philadelphia Church, "...that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).
 - d. Walk worthy of your high calling and make every moment count.

X. As a final remark, let's notice an inspiring description of those who've overcome themselves and attained true self-esteem.

"I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears [low self-esteem]. They looked to Him and were radiant [happy, positive and confident], and their faces were not ashamed [because they had attained high self-esteem]" (Ps. 34:4-5; NKJV).

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