

**Insights No. 09**  
**First Quarter 2011 Adult Sabbath School Lessons**  
**“Self Esteem”**  
**For the week of February 20-26, 2011**  
**(Produced by the Editorial Board of the 1888 Message Study Committee)**

The Bible tells of great men and women who seemed to have an abundance of confidence, and moved forward unflinching in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

What is the secret of this kind of assurance? Where did they get the confidence that is not concerned about what others think? How could they move forward in the face of controversy, ridicule, and even threats? Did it have anything to do with self esteem?

Let us look at what it means to “esteem”. It means to place value, worth and confidence upon the object. It is to hold in high regard. It is to honor that which you hold in your mind as a valued treasure. So then, “self-esteem” is to assume value, honor and confidence in yourself, in your own views, and ideas, to view yourself as worthy compared to anyone else around you. It would lead us to honor self.

To learn where the biblical “greats” got their confidence and success, we must understand the biblical truth about “self-esteem.” This is one of the gospel’s paradoxes. A paradox is a statement or proposition that, on the surface, seems self-contradictory or absurd. One gospel paradox is: “To truly live, you must die.” Correctly understood, this truth is powerful. Galatians 2:20 explains that in order to have a life of happiness and peace and eternal life, we must first “die” to self, and all selfishness. This makes room for the power and peace of Christ to work in us.

The gospel’s paradox regarding self-esteem goes something like this: “In order to understand your value, you must recognize that you are totally unworthy.” When we see that in ourselves there is *nothing* to recommend us to God, we begin to find our true self worth in the value that God places on us. The great men of the Bible stood tall before the rulers of the earth because they understood that their value was not in that by which men measure. It was not in anything which they themselves could do. They were secure in the value God places upon those who trust in Him. Paul put it this way: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:8).

Elijah, one of the greatest of the prophets, knelt humbly before the King of the universe. “The servant watched while Elijah prayed. Six times he returned from the watch, saying, There is nothing, no cloud, no sign of rain. But the prophet did not give up in discouragement. . . . As he searched his heart, he seemed to be less and less, both in his own estimation and in the sight of God. It seemed to him that he was nothing, and that God was everything; and when he reached the point of renouncing self, while he clung to the Saviour as his only strength and righteousness, the answer came....We have a God whose ear is not closed to our petitions; and if we prove His word, He will honor our faith” (Ellen White, *Our High Calling*, page 133).

Many scriptures speak to the question of how we should “esteem” ourselves and others. Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”

In Philippians 2:2-4 we find the following: “Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Then there is Romans 12:3,16. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man

the measure of faith... Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.”

It appears that the Bible writers were inspired to be more concerned about arrogance than about low self esteem as in Galatians 6:3 which says, “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

Paul, who wrote more of the Bible than anyone else, seems to have benefitted from his own counsel for he says in Ephesians 3:8, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” To “esteem” ourselves and others appropriately, it would seem, is to have the mind of Christ!

What, then, is the issue behind that which is called “low-self esteem?” Counselors and pastors find their offices filled with people who are struggling with what is clinically called “low self-esteem”. Depression is on the rise, and eating disorders abound. What is really happening in these situations?

Those who do not see themselves in their total unworthiness, cannot appreciate the great worth that God, from His heart of love, has placed upon them as His own. God did not decide to purchase them as His own because they had proved anything with regard to their goodness or talent. He died for us “while we were yet sinners,” that we might know how much we were valued in spite of our wretchedness.

The real issue is that human nature tries to hang on to the very things we must let go of, in order to find what we are longing for. We all long for love. We long to feel that we are valuable to someone. A person with “low self-esteem” is often struggling to validate the self, and to find others who will then value that “self” as much as they do. Some put themselves down, speak of themselves as being ugly, etc., in hopes that someone will respond in a way which validates them. The scriptures tell us that “no man ever yet hated his own flesh.” Ephesians 5:29. The real problem with low self esteem is the malady of “self love”. It is all about us. It’s all about how bad life is for us.

Do we have needs? Absolutely! But the need is not filled by looking to have self validated. “Self” is the monster in this scenario. This monster that lives within each of us is never satisfied, and because of its ferocious appetite for more, no matter how much it is fed, it always craves more. No amount of compliments or attention can fill the void.

When our attention is turned away from self to the gospel – the good news that is God’s heart of love, we begin to find the solutions we so desperately need. When we realize that God is reaching out to us, as unworthy as we are, and that He loves us even though He knows all about us, we start to realize that we don’t have to prove anything to anyone in order to have value. We are already loved. We have been purchased as God’s own, that we might be sons and daughters of the King of the Universe. If we will allow that fact to sink down into our hearts, we will “love him, because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19. Then our worth, our confidence is in what God thinks of us, the value that He has placed upon those who are unworthy. When we understand the love wherein we have been loved, nothing is too much to give back to the one who has loved us so!

“The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image” (Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, page 65).

--Debbi Puffer