

Healing for Damaged Emotions 3 **Self-Image, Self-Esteem, Self-Worth**

Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Romans 12:3

Have you ever been to the circus or fair where they have those goofy mirrors that give you a distorted view of yourself? Maybe you've been in the mall during Christmas time when they set them up. It is funny to see yourself as extremely tall, or short or fat or skinny, or crooked...well at least it's funny for those who are with you!

Sometimes we have a distorted view of ourselves, and it's not a result of any goofy mirror. It might be that our view of our self has been marred by someone who mistreated us, or some wrong thought that obsesses us, or by some strategic lie of the devil that we sub-consciously believe. It might be that this distorted view of who we are is a result of immaturity or inexperience or sin...or it might be the result of long-standing internal issues that have come to define and unfortunately disable us. The Apostle Paul spoke of how when we are young we see life through a dark or distorted mirror. Today I want to try and help us look at ourselves through three realistic mirrors. Not ones that measure only perfection, but ones that measure us honestly.

There are so many "self" words in the marketplace, that I don't have time to define them all; but I want to consider these three with you today; Self-Image, Self-Esteem, and Self-Worth. I know that in most instances these words are used rather interchangeably...and that is probably, technically correct. But today, I want to try and define them individually, and give meaning to each independently. It is my hope that as we see some nuances of meaning in each, we'll have 3 more stepping stones to help us on our journey to find Healing for Damaged Emotions.

There are three essential components of a healthy self-concept; a sense of **Belonging**; a sense of being **Competent**, and a sense of **Value**. We are going to discover how each of these three are uncovered in the discussion of Self-Image, Self-Esteem, and Self-Worth. So let us begin.

1. SELF – IMAGE: HOW YOU LOOK AT YOURSELF

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We begin with the one that might seem to be the easiest. We all have an image of ourselves that sometimes does and sometimes doesn't match who we actually are. Sometimes when I'm feeling especially full of myself (which happens quite often unfortunately), I will catch a glimpse of myself in a mirror or a window, or a glass door; and wow, I'm brought back to reality quickly! Often the image we have of our self is not in harmony with who we really are. For some reason, I still maintain the image that I'm a 30 year old body-builder football player; when in reality I'm a 54 year old football watching couch potato! See what I mean? And some folks have an image that is much more devastated than carrying around 50 extra pounds. They are carrying around years of inferiority, or memories of ridicule, or haunting thoughts of abuse or neglect, or worse!

Our self-image is most easily defined by answering this question – “What do you believe people think about you?” I know it sounds a bit convoluted, but answering that, partially reveals how we look at ourselves, or what we tend to think, and believe about ourselves. It may or may not be accurate, or healthy, but it a helpful way to determine how we look at our self-image.

As I mentioned when we began, the first essential element necessary for a healthy self-concept is a sense of belonging...and that sense of belonging; is created in us primarily through our family. Our self-image is largely developed or not...through our family.

You can instantly see the implications of this by observing abandoned children who grow up with attachment anxiety. You can see this sometimes, in children who have lived through a divorce. Don't kid yourself, as resilient as children are, and as awesome as it is that families adjust and adapt to being divorced; and remarried; it has an effect on children's self-image, and sometimes that lasts into adulthood. Other issues and factors also last that long.

Now let me be clear. Few of us have been raised in perfect homes; some are better than others; but most parents I know (and I know there are exceptions) are trying to do the best they can to raise their kids. Just remember, their parental homes might not have been so hot either...or their grandparents...all the way back to Adam and Eve! We are humans and we make mistakes, even well-intentioned parents make mistakes. Though some parents are sick and abuse or misuse, or ignore or neglect their children and parental responsibilities...most parents are not the enemy, they are trying to do the best they can. Our self-image is largely created by our families, or within our family systems, because they are empowered by God to help foster that sense of belonging.

2. SELF – ESTEEM: HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF

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Self-esteem and self-worth are OFTEN used interchangeably, but again, I want to try and separate in order to add significance. Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own competence. And that, as you'll remember is the second essential component necessary to build a healthy self-concept: competence.

We all know that parents and family can go along way in helping to develop or destroy a persons feeling of competence. If dad is always reminding us how clumsy we are, or mom always badgers us about how we dress...it will have an effect.

But here is where esteem differs from image: more than the other two, our self-esteem is largely developed and affected by our friends, our peers, and especially our spouses, if we are married. Not entirely, but much of our self-esteem is generated by those we choose to love.

As with each of these, there are highs and lows. Low self-esteem reveals itself quite often in how we look to significant others in our lives to fulfill what we deem lacking within ourselves. High self-esteem often reveals itself in prideful attempts to manipulate and convince others that we are better than we really know we are. The highs and lows may be opposite, but often reveal, similarly.

We all need to be competent in some way. We need to be good at something. It is a parent's primary job, according to Dr. James Dobson, to help foster in their children a sense that they are competent at something. That carries over into our friend relationships. That's why so many dear friends are made sharing mutual interests, such as music, athletics, even God and faith. It is important to remind young people that the choice of their friends often reveals the direction of their future. "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future," is a quote our boys got sick of hearing.

But as adulthood onsets, our friends are replaced with lovers, husbands, wives and significant others; and from these we also need a healthy dose of self-esteem. But, remember that even with their best intentions they are not completely able to fill our 'lack' by affirming our competence. It is to great a burden to place on any relationship; that they become responsible for building or completely nurturing our low self-esteem. Ultimately, we are responsible for what we choose to believe and how we choose to feel about ourselves. This leads us naturally to point three.

3. SELF – WORTH: HOW YOU VALUE YOURSELF

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Our self-worth is most largely affected by God, and how God looks at us. And how we look at God! The value we place on ourselves comes not from our place in this world, not from our status or successes, not from our failures or sins, not from our good looks or other, not even from our self-generated image, family inspired belonging; or other inspired competence...our self-worth comes only from God.

And to try and find it or define it, or redefine it without God, leaves so many people devalued, destroyed, dysfunctional even derelict. Human beings find worth, they find value in God...and God alone.

I know many folks who willfully choose to neither acknowledge nor love God, who have great self-worth...but even at its greatest, it is still lacking...because God is still missing. Only, in and through God can we have healthy self-images, healthy self-esteems, and especially, know any sense of healthy self-worth. To try and create that within ourselves or find it from some other source is adulterous. God made us, God loves us...therefore, God gets to define who we are and the value we have. Period

And you immediately see the problem. Far too many folks; healthy or not; have tried to define themselves by some other standard. They have put pressure on their parents, and blame them when they fail. They look to a spouse or friend to be all that they need, and are disappointed when they fail. So many people have for so long a time scratched and struggled to make sense of the mess of their lives...when right in front of them is this reality: Our self-worth cannot be found in another – it can only be found in God.

So let me offer then, in conclusion, the remedy for a faulty self-concept. If we don't feel we belong, because our family wasn't the best. Or we feel incompetent because our friends forsook us or our spouses disappoint us. Or we feel valueless because we've never found that in God...then what do we do about it? Here is the answer:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2

Let me clearly state for the record; there is no singular spiritual experience that is able to make completely right, a completely wrong self-concept.

But there are spiritual steps that when followed, will enable us to discover healing for our damaged emotions, and wholeness for our life. The first of those steps we discussed two weeks ago: to admit we have a problem, and agree that we want to be healed. The second step is to work on forgiveness. And this is the third: *let God transform you by changing the way you think*. Committing ourselves to God is not just a yielding; it is willfully giving God permission to change how we have thought, and change how we think.

Too many of us for far too long have only seen ourselves in dim, dark, distorted mirrors. We are not the image, or esteem or worth of goofy mirrors; we are children of God! We are not the sum-total of our past screw-ups, we're children of God! We are not the victims of our parental homes, or the by-products of faulty friends, or the waste of rejected lovers; we are God's valued creation, and we are individually loved children of God!

Changing the way we think about ourselves will not be easy, but it's God's job; ours is simply to give God permission. Will you do that now? Let us pray.

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- a sense of being **Competent**,
- and a sense of **Value**.

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“What do you believe people think about you?”

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