

# As You Are



## *Building Healthy Self-Esteem*

*by Shannon Warden*

“I’m too fat.” “I’m too skinny.”  
“I wish I was smarter.”  
“People look at her with respect.” “He has his life together.” “Why didn’t God make me more like you?”

Do any of these comments sound familiar? You may relate even if your personal thoughts are slightly different. Whatever the words we use, the feelings behind the words represent how we view ourselves, or our self-esteem, which is evident in most everything we do and say. Despite its impact on our lives, we don’t typically talk about or try to improve our self-esteem. As a result, millions of people with low self-esteem go through life denying their self-worth and allowing self-defeating thoughts to rule their relationships, work, and faith.

The good news for anyone who struggles with low self-esteem is that you can change your attitude and “put on a new self” as Paul urges in Ephesians 4:22-24. You can begin to see yourself as God’s wonderful creation (Psalm 139:13-14) and accept yourself *as you are* because God accepts you *as you are*.

These encouraging words may only fill low self-esteem tanks for a short while. After all, years of negative thinking are not easily undone in one simple thought or kind word. Typically, people believe that seeing themselves differently is easier said than done. We say, “I’ve tried. It was too hard, so I gave up.” Indeed, changing your self-image is challenging, but it is not impossible! You can believe this confidently because God promises that all things are possible through His strength (Philippians 4:13).

Accepting the challenge of changing the way you see yourself first requires you to realize that building long-lasting, healthy self-esteem is an ongoing process that sometimes involves overcoming deeply embedded thought patterns and, often, painful circumstances. This worthwhile journey begins with following Jesus’ example of accepting you *as you are*. He knows our weaknesses and loves us in spite of them. In fact, we read in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10: “...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul then says of himself, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my

weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me..."

The next step in your journey is committing time and effort to recognizing and replacing negative thoughts with truths. For example, instead of thinking "I can't get anything right," try telling yourself, "I'm not sure how this will go, but I'm going to be open-minded." This is not merely "positive" thinking; it is "realistic" thinking. You are letting go of the lie that you "never" get anything right and choosing to believe the more accurate perception that you are worthwhile and capable of success. Of course, you need to aim for attainable goals rather than perfection, or else you set yourself up for failure.

Changing your thoughts may sound reasonable, but you may wonder, "is it biblical to value myself?" Many people believe that it is a sin to love themselves, and it is if you love yourself above God or others. The Bible clearly says "...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3).

However, the Bible also says that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12: 31). To love our neighbor, we are to love ourselves as Christ loves us.

Just as we seek to convey Christ's love to others, we are to pursue a balance between high and low self-esteem. The balance of these two extremes is humility, a desirable characteristic that reminds us of how valuable we are because God made us and how useless we are apart from Him. High self-esteem, or an inflated sense of self, is the same as pride. Low self-esteem is rooted in humiliation, and this, like pride, is opposite of what God wants for us. As humans, we all fluctuate between these extremes from time to time in life, but our ideal goal is to maintain a balance by adopting humility.

One other point of clarity should be between *accepting* and *excusing* weaknesses. Acknowledging that we are weak and incapable of perfection is part of letting go of unrealistic standards of performance. This helps build healthy self-esteem and is an

appropriate type of "acceptance." However, it is wrong to say "God loves me just the way I am" and use this as a license to sin. This is a weak excuse, not acceptance of weakness.

As stated earlier, building self-esteem is an ongoing process. Like your car's gas tank, you'll occasionally run low on motivation and need to "refuel." When you do, consider the following suggestions:

- Remind yourself of Biblical truths. Fill up on prayer and Bible study.
- Evaluate the truth behind any negative self-talk; commit to replacing it with positive thoughts.
- Remember, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).
- Pay attention to others' healthy self-esteem. You may be encouraged by their humility.
- Accept the fact that Christians struggle with self-esteem issues the same as non-Christians.
- "Cast all your anxiety on Him (Jesus) because He cares for you" (I Peter 5:7).

- Put to use the talents God has given you so that you may gain confidence in yourself and become more aware of God's grace in your life.

For additional study, read "See Yourself As God Sees You," by Josh McDowell (1999), or "Search for Significance," by Robert McGee (1998).

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