

# HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

## LESSON 1 - INTRODUCTION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD AS CREATOR

Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-IMAGE

A positive outlook and self-Image are regarded as one of the most important components of life by virtually every field of human endeavor and thought. The following statements were made by noteworthy people from different walks of life that have evaluated its importance. These are people who:

#### Overcame Physical Challenges

"Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the face." - Helen Keller

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." - Helen Keller

#### Politically Inspired People

"Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude." —Thomas Jefferson

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." - Eleanor Roosevelt

#### Spiritually guided People

"Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy." - Norman Vincent Peale

"You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection" - Buddha

"Why should we worry about what others think of us, do we have more confidence in their opinions than we do our own?" - Brigham Young

"There is nothing noble about being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self." - Hindu Proverb

#### Financially Guided People

"Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are." - Malcolm S. Forbes

"How you handle or mishandle your money tells us who you are and, more important, it tells YOU who you are. Your priorities, passions, goals, and fears are shown

clearly in the flow of your money. Your value system, or lack of one causes money to flow around you, passed you, or to you. When money is in your possession, what you do with it screams loudly who you are." Dave Ramsey

#### Wrote About Life

"A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval." - Mark Twain

"The worst loneliness is not to be comfortable with yourself". - Mark Twain

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

#### Study The Mind

"An individual's self-concept is the core of his personality. It affects every aspect of human behavior: the ability to learn, the capacity to grow and change. A strong, positive self-image is the best possible preparation for success in life." - Dr. Joyce Brothers

#### Achieved Tremendous Fame

"I think everybody's weird. We should all celebrate our individuality and not be embarrassed or ashamed of it." - Johnny Depp

"Wanting to be someone else is a waste of the person you are." - Marilyn Monroe

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNIZING GOD AS "CREATOR" TO SELF-IMAGE

Our understanding of self can be achieved through three different sources, although most people only utilize the first two.

- 1) Our own self valuation.
- 2) The way others value us.
- 3) The way God values us.

The best and most honest evaluation of our self is that which comes from God. His expert knowledge of our self stems from two key aspects of God.

#### **Read Jeremiah 1:5-8**

**What objections does Jeremiah raise to God when God calls him as a prophet?**

**Why is God confident that Jeremiah will succeed when Jeremiah is not confident?**

#### **Read Psalm 139:13-17**

**What did God know about us when he made us?**

**What did God know about the challenges we would face in life as he made us?**

**What does that fact tell you about your abilities to face the challenges of your life?**

God made us. This is a concept that our world generally rejects today. Evolution, driven by the survival of the fittest, is the way people are taught to think about their origins.

Under an evolutionary belief system it is not a given that we are equipped to face the challenges that our particular life lays before us. Under an evolutionary belief of our origins it is presumed that the battle between an individual and the world will frequently result in the individual losing. In other words, some people simply don't *"Have what it takes!"* Some people are *"Born Losers!"*

This opinion of our self can be taught to us by others, and also is confirmed by our own life experience. Mistakes and failures abound in our lives. If we are surrounded by people who constantly put us down, and then witness ourselves failing at what we do, or not measuring up to the people that surround us, it is easy to convince ourselves that our birth was some kind of dreadful mistake. When we were made, some important stuff that we need for survival in this world was left out. This is why it is so important to ground our lives in God's word, and constantly remind ourselves that God is our maker, and God doesn't make mistakes.

It is not only important that we remember that God created us, but we must also remember that he still knows us intimately. God knows both our strengths, and our weaknesses. God knows these things not as a distant and aloof person, looking down on humanity from afar. God knows us on an intimate and personal level.

#### **Read Jeremiah 17:10; 1 Sam. 16:7; John 2:24-25**

**How does God's knowledge of us and our experiences differ from the knowledge that other people have about us?**

#### **Read Hebrews 2:11-18, 4:14-16**

**How does the fact that God became man, in the person of Jesus, impact our belief that God indeed knows and understands us?**

### **SUMMARY POINT**

It is undeniable that self-image is a critical element in our life. The question is, how do you define your image?

As sinners we can neither trust our own self-evaluation, nor can we always trust the evaluation of others. The definition of our self must be rooted in the one who not only made us, but valued us so much that He gave his only Son to redeem us.

This God knows us intimately. He knows us by virtue of making us, by virtue of knowing all things past and present, and by virtue of taking our humanity into himself, living and dying in this world, in the person of Jesus Christ. God knows you better than you know yourself. This is why we must use Scripture as the foundation of our Self-Image.

**HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE**  
**BIBLICALLY SPEAKING**  
**LESSON 2 - CELEBRATE THE WAYS YOU ARE DIFFERENT**  
**Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014**

---

**GOD MAKES US DIFFERENT  
BUT WE SERVE ONE PURPOSE**

If you always wished you could be a blond, STOP IT! If you were born a brunette, you will spend eternity as a brunette. Better start getting used to it.

When God redeemed us through Jesus Christ, his purpose was not to make us into something we are not, but to restore us to what we truly are. God redeems our entire person, body, mind, and soul. In heaven, we will be cleansed of sin, and I suspect the marks of sin in the world (disease, deformity, decline, etc.) will be removed from our person as well. Jesus ate, drank, and even carried the marks of his crucifixion after the resurrection. In other words, Jesus was still Jesus: Body, mind, and spirit! The resurrection didn't change Jesus into something he never was. While he still hid some of his full glory even after the resurrection, He did not lose his identity after the resurrection.

We will still be who we are in the resurrection. So, if there is something you don't like about the way God made you, TOUGH! YOU ARE STUCK WITH WHO YOU ARE FOR ALL ETERNITY! Start celebrating the ways you are different from other people.

One of the most basic ways that God makes us different is that from the beginning we were made male or female. This was an intentional act on God's part with a specific purpose, as Scripture explains.

**Read Ephesians 5:21-33**

**How are men and women different in their created roles?**

**What is the one purpose for which men and women use their different roles?**

God made man and woman different, but to serve one purpose. You don't choose who you are, how you are made, or the purpose for which you are made. God chooses these things for you.

**Read Romans 9:21-22**

**Why is it wrong for us to complain about the way we are?**

One of the primary delusions involved in the first sin was the idea that man and woman could become something they were not. Satan's temptation was that Adam and Eve could (Gen 3:5) "*be like God, knowing good and evil.*" The problem with that is that God did not

make man and woman capable of dealing with such knowledge. Such knowledge would destroy them rather than improving their life, as Satan promised.

God intentionally made you who you are with a purpose. God made us male, and female, and also built into us countless other distinctions right down to our fingerprints. In all creation there is no one exactly like you. To each person God gives different gifts. However, while we are different, God's intent is that we all serve one purpose.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-7**

**What differences do we have?**

**What things do we share?**

**What is the one purpose we have?**

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:8-11**

**Who determines what gifts we possess?**

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

**What parts of the body should receive the greatest amount of attention?**

**Why does God want those parts of the body to receive greater attention?**

**How would self-interest (constantly asking what is best for me?) interfere with a right understanding of who you are?**

Part of building a great biblical self-image is focusing on God's purpose for your life, which is centered in service to others. The dominant question when this is part of your "self-understanding" is not "What am I good at," but "How can I best serve others." This creates a dramatic change in our approach to life, and the kinds of questions we ask in seeking our place in life.

**Consider two people. Both are retired, have spouses who have died, but are healthy and able to get around. One person is very lonely and spends most of their time watching T.V., a little woodworking, shopping, or going for walks.**

The other is very busy volunteering at church and the hospital, mows lawn for an even older neighbor, and wishes they had more time to spend alone or to visit family.

What kind of questions do you think the lonely person asks of God?

How do the two see their lives differently?

Who do you think better understands what gifts and talents they have and why?

When the use of our gifts is placed in the context of our biblical purpose in life, we are more likely to understand and appreciate the gifts we do have, and worry less about what those gifts are and their worth to others. This doesn't mean you should try to understand what you are good or bad at. What it does mean is that as you discover your gifts and talents, you shouldn't worry about you find. It all has been designed in one way or another to serve God's merciful and loving purposes.

Maybe you are the only child in a family of twelve musically gifted people who is tone deaf and completely lacking in a sense of rhythm. Many children would feel worthless and incomplete in such a situation. It is not as though we have failed. God made us different, and once we recognize how God has made us we can use our unique gifts to serve others as God intended. Perhaps this musically deficient child is a great organizer and can form the family into a singing group and book a world wide tour. God chose the gifts we have, our task is to take those gifts and serve him by serving the community in which God has placed us.

## GOD WANTS US TO USE OUR STRENGTHS

When we properly understand Scripture's doctrine of "vocation" (our "station" or "place" in life), the development of our self-image is far different than an image developed by worldly standards.

Our world is focused on "becoming" something. From early on we ask children, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" People struggle with finding their "purpose in life," as if their purpose is defined by a particular career path, set of skills, or level of public recognition. Many people are developmentally paralyzed because they can't figure out what they want to do with their lives. Scripture isn't concerned with what you might become? Scripture focuses on what you are, and how you use what you are in service to God?

Read Romans 12:3-10

Paul lists many gifts: Teachers, Contributors, Acts of Mercy, etc. What modern careers might people choose with these gifts?

What different personalities might people with these gifts have?

No matter what gift we have, what are we trying to accomplish with that gift?

Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, coauthors of *Strengths Based Leadership*, together with Gallup researchers, have discovered that many managers, leaders, and educators ignore strengths in favor of fixing weaknesses. In other words, people tend to focus on turning you into something you are not.

Most people spend their time and energy trying to address weaknesses in themselves and others. In so doing we minimize or ignore completely our strengths.

Rath and Conchie found that when people did not feel they were using their strengths in their job, productivity fell dramatically. They also found that successful leaders were very adept, in every field, at identifying what people did well, and changing their position or responsibilities to maximize the use of their strengths, and minimize or eliminate use of their weaknesses.

Perhaps one of the most interesting discoveries of Rath and Conchie is that there is no rigid formula of characteristics or skills shared by great leaders, with but one exception. Great leaders always have a good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, maximize the use of their strengths, and seek help from others in areas of their weaknesses. This a leadership lesson God impressed upon Moses.

Read Exodus 4:1-17

Why does Moses believe is incapable of leading Israel?

Does God have to change Moses skills in order to make him a great leader?

## SUMMARY POINT

Discovering our strengths and weaknesses obviously involves experimentation and trying different things. How can you know what you are good at if you've never tried something?

Nevertheless, many people have a depressed image of themselves because they are trying to be something they are not, and spend their energy overcoming weaknesses, instead of cultivating their strengths. God wants us to look at what we are, celebrate it, and then use what we are to serve him and others.

**HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE**  
**BIBLICALLY SPEAKING**  
**LESSON 3 - BE CONTENT IN YOUR PLACE**  
**Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014**

---

**THE IMPORTANCE OF  
IDENTIFYING YOUR PLACE**

In our last lesson we focused on using and celebrating our gifts, rather than focusing on our weaknesses. This lesson focuses more intently on serving in our "Vocation."

As noted in our lesson, "Vocation" or our "Place in life" is not about our occupations. It is more about roles we play as a parent, child, spouse, employee, manager, student, teacher, etc. To each place God has given certain tasks through which we find joy in serving him.

The best place to find joy and peace and serving God is in where you are. However, most of the world is not focused on service to God. Power and control, rather than love and service, is what many people are seeking in their relationships with others. People are constantly stepping out of their place and into yours, or trying to force you into a place that does not belong to you. In accomplishing this, guilt is a powerful tool of choice.

**Consider the Following Scenario**

**As a parent you notice that your male child enjoys rough and tumble play, and is stronger and quicker than his peers. You come from a musically gifted family, but have not stressed music with this child. Every time your parents come over they bring up the subject of piano lessons. You finally sign up your child for lessons, and spend two years fighting with him every time he practices, or goes to lessons. You've considered giving up, and even brought up the subject with grandma and grandpa, who promptly lecture you on the importance of music in a child's life, and how you will forever regret not sticking with the lessons.**

**Who is out of place in the previous scenario?**

**What are needs/emotions behind the grandparents in their actions? The parent?**

Self image is greatly affected by not recognizing our place. While God can forgive any sin we commit, the job of both defining and paying for sins belongs to Christ alone.

We regularly assume guilt that does not belong to us either through allowing others to redefine sin, or allowing others to make us feel guilty for the sin of someone else. When you assume guilt that does not rightly belong to you, it is difficult to experience the joy of Christ's forgiveness. How can Christ forgive you for a sin that is not yours? When you try to change a situation you are

not called upon to govern, you will probably experience frustration and failure. Even if you succeed, you will likely foster resentment from the people you manipulated.

**Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

**What arguments might a slave offer to Paul for striving for freedom?**

**What might Paul tell a slave about the opportunities to serve Christ as a slave?**

**Read 1 Peter 2:13-25; 3:1-2**

**How does serving in our place affect our witness to Christ, even when it is difficult?**

A good work is defined by God as doing what he would have you do in your place. Serving in our place is part of our witness to him.

**Consider the Following Scenario**

**Joe and his sister Julie don't get along. Their mother, after the passing of their father, chose to live with Julie, and is still of sound mind.**

**Joe is upset with the way his sister treats her mom. Julie is very controlling and quick tempered. When Joe talks to his mother she frequently complains about Julie. Joe has invited his mother to come live with him, and she steadfastly declines. Joe has become angry with both his mother and sister. When he hears about things going on he calls his sister and discusses how she is mistreating mom. He also encourages his mom to move out. She won't! Right now, his sister won't talk to him, and he asks you what he should do?**

**How is Joe out place?**

**In what ways is the mother manipulating Joe into an improper place?**

**What should Joe do next?**

Martin Luther appealed particularly to the place God has given you, in condemning **gossip**. He writes in his **explanation of the Large Catechism on the eighth commandment**.

*For there is a great difference between these two things, judging sin and knowing sin. You may indeed know it, but you are not to judge it. I can indeed see and hear that my neighbor sins, but I have no command to report it to others. Now, if I rush in, judging and passing sentence, I fall into a sin which is greater than his. But if you know it, do nothing else than turn your ears into a grave and cover it, until you are appointed to be judge and to punish by virtue of your office.*

*Those, then, are called slanderers who are not content with knowing a thing, **but proceed to assume jurisdiction**, and when they know a slight offense of another, carry it into every corner, and are delighted and tickled that they can stir up another's displeasure [baseness], as swine roll themselves in the dirt and root in it with the snout. This is nothing else than meddling with the judgment and office of God, and pronouncing sentence and punishment with the most severe verdict.*

In the previous scenario Joe could make the offer to his mother to come live with him, but his place was not to chastize his sister. That role properly belonged first to his mother according to Scripture.

**Read Matthew 18:15-17**

**How was Joe's mother improperly handling complaints against Joe's sister?**

**When, if ever, could Joe talk to his sister about her behavior?**

Joe was assuming that his hearsay and one sided knowledge of his sister's behavior gave him the authority to sit in judgment over her. His mother's gossip encouraged this behavior. Her actions were sinful gossip because they involved no desire to act in a way to change or improve the situation. **Both Joe and his mother owe his sister an apology for acting out of their place. If his mother wants to improve the situation, she must first privately discuss things with her daughter, and only after that invite Joe, or perhaps for this situation, another third party, to help mediate.**

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING THE PLACE OF GUILT

Part of the struggle of life is the fact that we can not always avoid being "out of place." Others with authority over us may frequently put us in positions that are not suited to our skills and gifts. Circumstances can easily arise in life where we are called upon to assume a place that normally doesn't belong to us.

In the workplace a frequently referenced concept is known as the "Peter Principle." The principle is named after Laurence J. Peter who co-authored with Raymond Hull a book entitled "*The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong*" in 1969.

In management people are often promoted based on their performance in their current role, rather than on abilities relevant to the intended role. You stop being promoted when you become lousy at what you do. In short, "*managers rise to the level of their incompetence.*"

While this principle is fairly well known, it is often ignored. A diligent, detail oriented worker may not possess good people skills. Nonetheless, when you are honored with a promotion to "*Management level*," those people skills are what you need most. Suddenly, however, you go from a relatively content worker to anxiety filled worker.

Maybe it was your fault for taking the job, or maybe the job was thrust upon you with no alternative other than the unemployment line. Nonetheless, you are "Out of place." This is not where your gifts lie.

Many people in these situations merely kick themselves at the end of the day and label themselves a failure. When this emotion is turned inward it results in depression. When this emotion is turned outward, it turns into anger against others. In this circumstance, however, the real issue is not guilt or failure. The real issue is how you can best serve others in your place.

Remember from our last lesson, "*Great leaders always have a good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, maximize the use of their strengths, and seek help from others in areas of their weaknesses.*" In this case you might need to take some classes to learn better management skills, you might need to talk with your boss to find a better place to use your native skills. You might also find ways of talking with those you manage and seek their help. You might even consider finding other employment. In doing all these things, however, the issue should not be about guilt or failure, but by a desire to serve the best with the gifts you have.

Particularly in family and social relationships, guilt is often used as a tool to push people in places they do not properly belong. Discuss the following:

**If you were really my friend, you wouldn't tell my parents that I'm doing drugs?**

### SUMMARY POINT

It is easy in this world to become "out of place." The world will often use guilt to coerce into place we should not be. We need to resist this kind of temptation, but when we do forget our place, we need to confess our sin and experience the wonderful forgiveness God offers.

Sometimes we are forced out of place by guilt, but by circumstances. For instance, to keep a job and feed a family we need to use gifts that are not native us. We feel out of place, but guilt and fear of failure should not be what drives us. We need to recognize for ourselves, and inform others we are out of place, and seek their help and support. This is not a sign of weakness, but a essential quality of strong leadership.

**HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE**  
**BIBLICALLY SPEAKING**  
**LESSON 4 - GOD LOVES TO USE OUR WEAKNESSES**  
**Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014**

---

**DON'T FEAR  
YOUR WEAKNESSES**

In lesson 2 we focused on using and celebrating our gifts, rather than focusing on our weaknesses. This does not mean that we ignore or deny what our weaknesses are. To the contrary, studies show that great leaders are acutely aware of both their strengths and weaknesses. While great leaders focus on their strengths, rather than ignoring their weaknesses, they find ways to manage and even utilize them.

God doesn't want us to fear our weaknesses. In fact, he tells us that he can use them.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

**What kind of people does God choose to use as witnesses to himself in the world?**

**Why would God prefer to use what is weak in the world's eyes?**

**Weaknesses Draw People Together**

People who confess their weaknesses and seek others to help them develop close bonds of mutual support. Perhaps one of the most common places we see this is in marriage.

As we noted in an earlier lesson, one of the most fundamental differences God created is that he made us male and female. This difference was intentional, and is designed to reflect the relationship of God to his people.

**When you consider most people who get married, do they tend to marry people closely matched to them in temperament (ie. Outgoing people marry outgoing people) and interests, or people who are different from them in temperament and interests?**

God created us for community, not isolation. God did not create us to be self-sufficient, but rather to need others. God created us to trust and rely on him for our needs. God created man and woman differently to reflect that relationship in the bonds of marriage.

**Weaknesses Give Others The  
Opportunity to Experience the Joy Of Giving**

You see a child hanging from a window in a burning building, afraid to let go. You are confident you can catch him without serious injury. You are that child's only hope for life. You convince the child to let go, cushion is fall, and save his life. How do you feel at that moment?

I'm sure everyone of us would feel great joy in knowing we saved that child's life, even if no one saw us. God made us to find joy in serving and helping others.

Our weaknesses are opportunities for others to use their gifts and share their love. This brings joy and a sense of purpose to the lives of others which would not exist if we hid our weaknesses and shunned the help of others in time of need. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone was self-sufficient and did not need anyone else.

**Weaknesses Enable Us to Understand  
and Help Those Who Share Our Weakness**

Although we read from Hebrews in a previous lesson, the example of Christ bears repeating.

**Read Hebrews 2:11-18**

**Why is Jesus able to help those who are being tempted?**

**Read 1 Cor 15:9-11; 1 Tim 1:15-16**

**Paul's persecution of the church was a horrible and intentional sin. How did Paul use that weak period of his life to advantage in his new life?**

We've probably all had the experience of trying to help someone, only to have our help refused because that person didn't think we truly understood them, or had any real life experience dealing with their particular problem. When in this predicament, people will often share a similar life experience from their past. Sometimes it is a part of their past kept hidden, a sin or failure that we are ashamed of. However, it is now a necessary tool in order to open the heart of someone to our help and assistance.

Christ shared in our weaknesses in order to open our hearts to his help and assistance. In using the cross as an object of focus in our worship we are actually celebrating weakness. God, the creator of heaven and earth, has been brought down to earth and killed at the hands of man. What could possibly appear to be weaker than that? To all appearances, the temptation the devil offered to Adam and Eve had come true. Man had now exalted himself over God!

What seems like the greatest moment of God's weakness we celebrate as the moment of God's greatest victory. However, it was not a victory so much for him. The cross is God's victory in his battle for us. A victory won at great cost, yet willingly paid by God because of his love for others and desire to serve us. The magnificent ability of God to serve and love his creation is demonstrated in how weak he is willing to make himself for us! Thus, as Paul writes, his "*power is made perfect in weakness.*"

The fear of letting our weaknesses be known is recognized by Psychologists as very damaging to our self image. Over-achievers in life often self-destruct at the

height of careers, fame, or achievement, not because they focused on their strengths, but because they have lived in mortal fear of weakness. Most people understand how abuse and criticism can damage the self-image of children, but few people recognize that extreme praise is just as dangerous.

In 1978, Pauline Clance and psychologist Suzanne Imes published a study entitled *"The Impostor Phenomenon Among High Achieving Women."* In this study Clance and Imes found that women experiencing the "Impostor Phenomenon" came from two distinct backgrounds. One group of women had a sibling who was designated the "intelligent" member of the family, while they had been told they were the "sensitive" or "socially adept" one. The implication from the family was that this person could never compete with the other sibling no matter what they accomplished. The second group of women had a very different family dynamic.

In the second group the family conveys to the girl that she is superior in every way – intellect, personality, appearance, and talents. There is nothing that she cannot do if she wants to, and she can do it with ease. In the family members' eyes she is perfect. The child, however, discovers through experience that she can't do any and everything. She becomes personally aware of her weaknesses and limitations, but feels obligated to fulfill family expectations. Internally she is incredibly stressed, but like an actor portrays herself as always competent and in control. She feels incredibly alone because no one understands her anxieties, yet she feels compelled to hide them because she believes she would disappoint everyone if she revealed who she really is.

Over the course time, even though this person makes extraordinary achievements, they reach a breaking point. Often these people would rather die than reveal themselves, and often attempt suicide as the only means of escape. In other instances they suddenly begin to indulge in bizarre behavior (for them). They totally back away from responsibilities and relationships. Everyone is mystified by what happened.

Whether dealing with unrealistic praise or unfair criticism, the Christian has a different starting and ending point in their understanding of self.

### **ACKNOWLEDGING WEAKNESS HELPS US FIND OUR TRUE STRENGTH**

**Read Romans 3:10-20 and Isaiah 64:6**

**What does God say to those who think they can find satisfaction and peace through what they achieve?**

**Read Romans 7:14-25**

**What does Paul know about the good he tries to do?**

As Christians, the starting point of our self-image is a recognition of our ultimate weakness. We are trapped in sin. We are doomed to eternal death and hell and there is nothing we can do about that. If all people acknowledged this biblical truth there would be no perfectionists in our midst. The "Impostor Phenomenon" would no longer exist.

While this is the truth of our lives, most people will not acknowledge it, because without faith in the Gospel, it leads to a state of total and absolute despair. You not only stop trying to excel in everything. You stop trying at all. If the understanding of our "self-image" is limited to God's condemnation (found in his law), we have no worth, value, or future. We are useless, and might as well be dead. The Christian, acknowledges this truth of the law, but through Gospel values their life in a new way.

**Read 1 Peter 1:18-21; 1 Cor 6:19-20**

**What is our worth or value to God?**

**Read Isaiah 64:6-9**

**What value does Israel see in themselves?**

**What is the sources of Israel's hope?**

A lump of clay has no intrinsic value on its own, and is incapable of making itself valuable. Yet, in the hands of a skilled potter a lump clay can become something of extraordinary value and beauty.

Apart from the Gospel the world constructs a self-image only by looking at themselves or relying on input from other sinners. There is ample ugliness in all of us to merit God's complete and utter condemnation and destruction. From the Law's point of view, we are merely (Ge 3:19) *"dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Christians acknowledge the truth of who we are. The world want to hide this truth, but it is self-evident in spite of our lies and ultimately undeniable. Thanks be to God, however, that our true worth is not established by what we are. Our true worth is found in what God makes of us, and what he is willing to sacrifice for us. We may not be more than lumps of clay, but he is a great potter who loves to work with clay.

### **SUMMARY POINT**

Weakness includes not only our lack of gifts in some area, but our sins and our failings. The world fears revealing weakness to others. When we act on these fears not only can the world use them to control and manipulate us, it can also leave us feeling alone with no means of escaping our fears.

The Gospel enables to us to acknowledge our weaknesses, and even use them in service to God. They do not define our worth or value. God defines that!



**HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE**  
**BIBLICALLY SPEAKING**  
**LESSON 5 - LET FAITH AND LOVE GUIDE YOUR DECISIONS**  
**Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014**

---

**AVOID SIN BY**  
**UNDERSTANDING ITS TRUE NATURE**

Even within Christianity most people do not understand the true definition of sin. It's hard to avoid what you don't understand, and you won't find joy in serving God when you are constantly doing what he hates. As a beginning point in explaining sin consider the following scenario.

**John has a brother who suffers from drug and alcohol addiction. He drifts from job to job, relationship to relationship, and has frequent financial difficulties. John, on the other hand is sober, has a stable family, and is financially comfortable, but not rich. Frequently, John's brother asks him for money. Many times John has refused to help his brother, but when things get really desperate, John usually comes through. Every time he gives his brother money, despite the gratitude expressed by his brother, John feels depressed.**

**Why doesn't John feel joy in helping out his brother?**

**Why does John feel compelled to help his brother?**

**What is the primary emotion that drives John's actions?**

Psychologists and counselors have a common term for people like John. John is called an "Enabler." John doesn't like how he helps his brother, but he does it anyway. John helps him because he feels he "Must" help him. His action isn't rooted in love for his brother. The action is actually rooted in guilt. Even though John does love his brother, his act arises from a sense of obligation, rather than love.

We all have experienced someone who has "guilted" us into a certain behavior. When this occurs, no matter how much someone may say they appreciated what we did, there is not much joy we feel as a result. There is a specific biblical reason for the absence of joy.

**Read Romans 14:23 and Hebrews 11:6**

**What is Paul's definition of sin in Romans?**

**What is necessary for an act to please God?**

**Read Galatians 3:12 and Romans 6:14**

**What is the relationship between law and faith?**

**When we do something only because we would feel guilty if we didn't, are we acting under the law or under faith?**

**In the previous scenario, why does John feel no joy in what he did?**

Most people conceive of the first sin as the action of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The real beginning of sin was not their action, but their belief that God had lied to them as Satan had described. The fall took place the moment Adam and Eve no longer trusted in God. Their actions were an outward symbol of the sin of abandoning faith.

In essence, sin is the lack of faith in God. The actions which result are merely the evidence, or symptoms, that sin exists in us. Theologically speaking we distinguish the two concepts by talking about Original Sin versus Actual Sins.

**Read 1 John 4:15-19**

**Are fear and love Compatible?**

**What is the reason for a Christian expressing love to someone else?**

**Is an action rooted in fear, guilt, worry, or a mere sense of obligation, a loving action?**

**Are actions rooted in fear, guilt, or worry, acts of faith, when they are in compliance with the ten commandments or other laws of Scripture?**

The word "repent" is not oriented toward action. A literal translation of the Greek word for repent is "change your mind." The attitudinal aspect of "repent" is particularly brought out by Jesus' words in Mark 1:12:

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Ultimately sin is not rooted in what we do but in how we think. The breaking of God's commands is merely an outward manifestation, a symptom, of a problem with the human heart. Therefore, as Romans 14:23 expressly says, "anything that does not proceed from faith is sin."

Many times we are not happy with what we are doing, which doesn't promote a healthy self-image, because we are acting out of fear, doubt, worry, or guilt. Unfortunately, acting in this way is our natural inclination, and the world loves to exploit this inclination at every opportunity.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICES WITH THE GOSPEL IN MIND

Thinking with the Gospel is not a natural process, as is normally illustrated by the answer to two questions?

**Can you, in some way, describe yourself as being perfect?**

**Why should Christians not steal?**

If you answered the first question with no, you are in sync with the first answer all non-Christians, and 90% of Christians answer the question. If you answered the second question with something like, "*It is wrong*" or "*It breaks one of God's commands*" or "*It hurts other people*", you are in sync with the way all non-Christians, and 95% of Christians, answer the second question. If a non-Christian is answering such questions with the same answers you are giving,

**What role did faith play in your thinking when you answered the question?**

**Read Acts 22:16; Hebrews 10:14; 1 John 1:7**

**Are you "perfect" in "Some way?"**

**Read Matthew 6:25-33; Hebrews 13:5-6**

**What "promise" of God would keep a Christian from stealing?**

Hopefully, after reading Scripture, your answers have changed. We are perfect in some way: Through Christ. Christians don't steal, because they trust in God to provide. These are "Faith" answers to questions asked earlier. While you may have recognized, even memorized, the Bible passages quoted above, they weren't part of your thought process in responding to the questions.

**What fraction of your life is actually being motivated through faith (Gospel) based thinking?**

**As noted earlier, how does Scripture describe an action which does not arise from faith?**

In the secular world there are essentially two recognized processes that govern thought. Logic and emotion: Our brains are physically constructed in such a way that emotional thinking uses different parts of the brain than our logical thinking. Emotional thinking is also quicker, by about 1/2 second, than logical thinking. Thus the expression that people "Act, before they think!"

Our emotional memory is stored or accessed in a completely different way than our conscious and logical memory systems. For example, individuals with a damaged portion of the brain called the hippocampus are unable to store new long term memories. They can recall memories from before the damage, but if you meet them one day and have a long conversation, and say hello again on the next day, they can not consciously remember meeting you. However, suppose they are severely frightened when walking into a room one day. The next day they will become tense and anxious when approaching that room, but will be unable to explain the reason for their anxiety.

We recognize the tension between these two ways of thinking when making difficult choices. Emotionally speaking, disciplining a child is difficult. Logically we know it is important at the proper time and in the proper manner. However, emotions and logic may fight with each other leading us to poor decisions.

Someone who grew up in an abusive home environment may either be reluctant to discipline when it is logically required, or may harshly and excessively discipline. Neither are good for the child, and neither leave us feeling good about ourselves.

Psychologists spend a great deal of time helping people to recognize and distinguish emotional and logical thinking. For most decisions, they teach people how to over rule emotional thinking with logical thinking. Christians recognize a third level of thinking which needs to over rule both. As you make choices, think about Christ, his love, his promises and his gifts. What has God given or promised which relates to this situation? Such thoughts may change what you do, and you will have more joy in your actions, because you are acting with faith.

### SUMMARY POINT

Life is not about doing the right thing according to God's commands. Life is God's gift which only continues when it is received through faith and lived by faith. Faith results in a life consistent with God's law, but not from fear or guilt.

Actions which precede from faith are actions which produce joy in our hearts, rather than regrets or doubts. They are not actions that leave us feeling trapped or compelled. They are actions that flow from our freedom in Christ to love others. The more you can rejoice in what you do, the better you will feel about yourself.

# HOW TO BUILD A GREAT SELF-IMAGE

## BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

### LESSON 6 - TALK TO YOURSELF THE WAY GOD WOULD TALK TO YOU

Bible Study by Rev. Daniel Krueger © September, 2014

#### YOU NEED TO SPEAK LAW AND GOSPEL TO YOURSELF

**When you arise in the morning and look at yourself in a mirror, what do you say to yourself?**

**Have you ever said things to yourself that you would never say to your children (for example, you are fat, you are ugly, you are stupid, you are a failure at everything)?**

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev 19:18) is regarded as a cornerstone of God’s Law. Jesus calls it the second great commandment, the first being to love God (Mt 22:39). Paul says it sums up or fulfills all of God’s law (Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14). James refers to it as the “royal” law (Jm 2:8). Many people have observed that inherent in the ability to love others, is the requirement to love the person that you are. You must love yourself!

If you had a clearly depressed and sad child before you, who suffered from low self-esteem, and began to yell at that child calling them stupid, ugly, fat, no good, etc., most people would easily recognize this as a terrible sin: an act devoid of any love and care for that child. Most people immediately recognize that such actions are useless in helping such a child to change their life.

What most people fail to recognize, is that when we address such comments to ourselves, we are usually committing the same sin, and failing to use God’s Word in the way he wants us to use it.

God’s word is essentially divided into two teachings or doctrines: **Law, and Gospel**. Law is that word which God speaks to people unaware of, or living in denial of, their sin. Law is God’s word of commands and condemnation to unrepentant sinners. Gospel is that word which God speaks to people who have been beaten down by the world, the broken heart fully aware of their sin. The Gospel contains the gifts and promises of God which bring hope to the hopeless and forgiveness to the convicted heart.

We need both of these words because, until the day we die, both Satan and Christ live within the body of the Christian. Paul, in particular brings this out when he speaks about his inner struggles.

**Read Romans 7:14-25**

**How many hearts or minds does Paul have, and what are they?**

**To which heart or mind do you think God’s Law speaks (His commands and condemnations)?**

**To which heart or mind do you think the Gospel speaks (His gifts, promises, and forgiveness)?**

**When Paul hates some sin he has committed, and wants to change his life and serve God, which of God’s two words (Law or Gospel) do you think he would speak to himself?**

**When you hate something about yourself, and wish you could change, what word should you speak to yourself?**

If there is something you really want to change in yourself, you won’t change it through words of Law and condemnation. God’s Law is diagnostic, not motivational. It points out sin, it describes what is wrong with us and condemns us for it. However, if you already know something is wrong with you and want you change it, more self-condemnation won’t get you there. Yet, the very thing we don’t need to hear, is not only what we keep on repeating to ourselves, but also seek from others.

In a fascinating experiment a number of college students were given what they thought was a personality profile questionnaire, but its actual function was to identify students who were suffering from mild to severe depression and students who were not depressed.<sup>1</sup>

After a week the students were called in and given the results of their “personality profile.” The results were actually three bogus personality evaluations: one positive, one neutral, and one negative. Everyone received the same three evaluations.

After reading each evaluation the students were told they could meet with one of the evaluators and discuss their profile. In overwhelming numbers, those who had been identified as depressed wanted to meet with the negative evaluator. Those who had been identified as not depressed wanted to meet with the positive evaluator. The experiment provides a fascinating example of what psychologists call “*mood congruent behavior*.”

Logic would say that if you are in a bad mood you should choose behaviors and activities designed to improve your mood. Unfortunately, human behavior tends to run contrary to logic.

---

<sup>1</sup>Swann, W. B., Wenzlaff, R. M., & Tafarodi, R. W. (1992). “Depression and the search for negative evaluations: More evidence of the role of self-verification strivings” (Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 101(2), 314-317)

Many experiments have verified the old adage, "Misery loves company." When we feel beaten down, guilty, and like a complete failure, we tend to say things to ourselves that perpetuate that state of mind. But it doesn't stop there. We listen to music, choose activities, and surround ourselves with people who will help us remain in that state of mind. Even when given clear evidence of successes in our lives and reasons to give praise to God, we will deny or minimize the truth of that good in us, and the reality of His blessings.

### **GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THE GOOD HE DOES IN YOU AND THROUGH YOU**

Scripturally we know that we are not worthy of God's grace or blessing. We are born in sin and, until the day we die, sin will live in us. Are ywe worthy of praise? The Law's answer is "Never." But in Christ we have another word. Our own unworthiness does not disqualify the good things God does in us and through us despite our sinfulness, and God wants us to recognize the good he has done in us and praise him for it.

While any praise we receive should always be forwarded to God, to simply disqualify or discount praise offered to us, is actually to disqualify and diminish the grace of God at work in our lives. Rather than discounting that work, God encourages us to give thanks for his grace and tell about his goodness to others.

**Read 1 Thess 5:18; Col 3:17; and Eph 5:19-20**

**When should we be thankful to God?**

**Read Jeremiah 9:23-24; Gal 6:14; 1 Cor 1:27-31**

**What should Christians boast about?**

#### **Consider the Following Scenario**

You are going to a special party and fussing over what to wear. You haven't bought a new dress in years because don't like the way you look. Your husband insisted that you go out and buy a new dress, even though money is a little tight. As you get to the party several people tell you how beautiful you look in the dress. As your husband stands next you your standard response is, "Yeah, it hides the fat!"

**Why do you think the husband insisted that his wife buy a new dress?**

**Why does the wife respond to praise in this way?**

**How will the wife's response affect her husband?**

**How could the praise be accepted in a way that brings glory to God without being arrogant?**

The only thing that was ever pure in this world after the fall into sin was Jesus Christ. After the fall, every word, thought and action of mankind is always tainted by sin in some way.

If someone compliments you and you think that there may be some ulterior motive at play, you may be right. If you experience some positive reward in your life, you can always think of some reason why you are not fully worthy of what you have received. If you find someone who loves you, their love won't be perfect and you won't be fully worthy of that love. This is our reality as sinners, but it is not the reality God would have us dwell upon.

When we encounter the positive, God would have us give thanks to him for it. Be thankful for the grace we don't deserve. Rejoice in the grace of God which brings blessings to us even through less than pure and less than perfect means. Yes, we don't deserve it, but this points out even more beautifully the wonder of God's grace to us. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

**Read Philippians 4:4-13**

**How often does Paul want us to rejoice?**

**Where does Paul want us to focus our thoughts?**

**What should be included in our prayers (v. 6)?**

Verse 6 in the above Scripture reading can be read in two ways. One way is that when we pray, along with our requests, we should find something to be thankful for. Reading it this way, the items of request and the items of thanksgiving could be totally unrelated. The more likely way of reading verse 6, given the way Paul addresses his adversities in the rest of Philippians, is to find a reason to rejoice about you're the needs you bring to God. Note how Paul does this in the verses below.

**Read separately Philippians 1:9-14 . . . 15-18 . . . 19-26**

**In each of the verse selections what might be a request Paul is making to God in prayers?**

**In each of the verse selections what might be a thanksgiving Paul is including in his prayers?**

### **SUMMARY POINT**

When God looks at you he does so through Christ and the words of Law and Gospel. When we are entrapped and content in sin we need God's word to us in Law. However, when we desire to change the words God wants us to speak to ourselves are Gospel: Good News. He wants us to focus our thoughts and words on his blessings and gifts.