

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Vice of Self-Esteem

Letters sometimes come to me from people who are “working on” their self-esteem. Usually this means they are doing their best to feel good about themselves. It is an exercise in futility.

Several years ago (if I remember correctly) tests were given to American and Korean students. The Koreans scored far higher academically than the Americans, but when asked to grade their self-esteem were bewildered by the question. The American students on the other hand, well-versed from kindergarten, gave themselves high marks in self-esteem but did poorly academically. We might say they “felt good” about “doing bad.”

Jesus warns us not to seek the approval of men. Must we rise in the world, be “upwardly mobile,” aim at fulfillment, self-satisfaction, distinction? Remember the word in 1 John 2:17—“The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear, but the man who is following God’s will is part of the Permanent and cannot die” (J.B. Phillips).

Amy Carmichael, when offered a royal reward for her service in India, graciously declined. She could not bear the thought of being honored in ways which her Lord Jesus avoided. If one truly wants to be His disciple he must first *give up his right to himself* (a total abandonment), *take up the Cross* (which must mean, sooner or later and in many forms, suffering), and finally *follow*—a daily obedience.

Gerald Vann speaks of “the disease of self-culture.” To have peace one must forget himself. To forget himself one must walk in truth. To walk in truth one must love God and his neighbor. When self-esteem is high, self-knowledge is very small.

Oswald Chambers wrote, “If we ever get a glimpse of what we are in the sight of God we will never say, ‘Oh, I am so unworthy,’ because we shall know we are, beyond the possibility of stating it.”

Self-esteem leads to rash judgments of others, as in the case of the Pharisee who “stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like

this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’” Jesus made it clear that the man who was justified before God was the one who had acknowledged himself a sinner. (Lord, have mercy upon us!)

“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Cor 10:12, NIV).

In the process of trying to convince ourselves that we are worthy, we may notice that some people whom we thought unworthy appear now actually to be better than we. This unsettling observation tempts us then to investigate further. The Tempter will gladly cooperate, impressing on our minds others’ small failings which we are happy to magnify. Thus we justify ourselves and build our self-esteem. We begin, like the publican, to thank God we are not like those others. But when were we given the office of judge? An examination of our own hearts before God will show us more and more plainly how much work we have to do in ourselves. Little time will be left to pay much attention to the defects of others.

While I disparage the exercise of “building one’s self-esteem” I indulge in it every time I imagine myself free from the defects I perceive in someone else. I am, in effect, thanking God that I am not like him or her. “O wretched [woman] that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

We have an adversary called the Devil. He’s a malicious serpent, bent on destroying us, and he has quite a bag of tricks, beginning of course in the Garden of Eden when he convinced Eve that God meant to deprive her of the one thing she was determined to have. He whispered a delectable thought: *Hath God said?* thus persuading the woman that obedience was not required. She could have what she chose, and be the better for it. Thus the ruinous and all-pervasive sin of pride was born.

“To preserve thyself from this danger, choose for thy battle-field the safe and level ground of a true and deep conviction of thy own nothingness,” wrote Lorenzo Scupoli. Think about the time before we were born.

Throughout all that abyss of eternity we were nothing and could have done nothing whatever to bring ourselves into existence. Consider next that we received our being solely because God willed it and sustains us every moment of our lives. Of ourselves we are nothing. “What good or meritorious deed could thy nature perform by itself if deprived of divine assistance?”

J.I. Packer, in *Rediscovering Holiness*, says, “Sin is an ... allergic reaction to God’s law, an irrational anti-God syndrome that drives us to exalt ourselves and steels our hearts against devotion and obedience to our Maker.”

And another word from C.S. Lewis:

“The more we get what we call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take over, the more truly ourselves we become. In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to ‘be myself’ without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: Most of what I call ‘me’ can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

“But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away ‘blindly’ so to speak. Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about, you are not going to Him at all. The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your body—in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in” (from *Beyond Personality*).

Can’t Locate a Hard-to-Find Book?

www.Bibliofind.com—can find any book in the world, I am told (sounds apocryphal!). Gives price, condition, shipping, etc.

A Heart at Leisure From Itself

Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me
And the changes that will surely come I do not fear to see.

But I ask Thee for a present mind intent on pleasing
Thee.

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love, through constant
watching wise

To meet the glad with joyful smiles, and to wipe the
weeping eyes;

And a *heart at leisure from itself* to soothe and sympathize.

I ask thee for the daily strength to none who ask
denied,

And a mind to blend with outward life while keeping
at Thy side,

Content to fill a little space if Thou be glorified.

And if some things I do not ask in my cup of blessing
be,

I would have my spirit filled the more with grateful
love to Thee—

And careful less to serve Thee *much* than to please
Thee perfectly.

In service which Thy love appoints there are no bonds
for me

For my inmost soul is taught the *truth* that makes Thy
children free;

And a life of self-renouncing love is a life of liberty.

Anna L. Waring, born 1820
(italics, E.E.)

A Husband’s Transformed Marriage

From a radio listener: “I have been struggling with behavior patterns that were destroying my wife and our marriage. All of the things that my wife had been saying to me for two years finally came alive when I heard your message. It seems that knowledge of how to be a

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godly husband has moved from my head to my heart. For the first time I know what love is and what it means to love. I understand that sacrifice is required—not giving of your excess but sharing of yourself. I thank you for your ministry. The Lord is leading me along this process. I still have a long way to go to heal the hurt I have caused my wife and to our marriage, but I can praise the Lord as I see His healing hand at work day by day.”

A Wife’s Transformed Marriage

In a Q & A period following a seminar someone asked, “What does a person do when they feel they have married the wrong person? I have made a wrong choice, caused great pain to my spouse, family, and myself. Where does one go from here?”

I received a letter from a woman who had heard my answer: “First of all, you don’t go anywhere. You trust God for your marriage. He may turn it into something beautiful.” This, she said, was exactly what *she* needed to hear. “I had resolved to give up on my difficult marriage and just leave. I had not trusted God in spite of what I felt about my choice. I was wrong. From that day forward I became fully committed and put the idea of leaving absolutely out of my mind. Such a tremendous relief! I have learned to trust God to turn my marriage into something wonderful. The week that followed was strained, but I played the tape from the conference over and over again. Things were going to change, and change they did! After I shared this experience with my husband, things became even better! I have also applied the principle of not being my husband’s moral custodian and, as you said, this is a blessing to both of us!”

Prayer

Searcher of hearts, Thou knowest us better than we know ourselves, and seest the sins which our sinfulness hides from us. Yet even our own conscience beareth witness against us, that we often slumber on our appointed watch; that we walk not always lovingly with each other, and humbly with Thee; and we withhold that entire sacrifice of ourselves to Thy perfect will, without which we are not crucified with Christ, or sharers in His redemption. O look upon our contri-

tion, and lift up our weakness, and let the dayspring yet arise within our hearts, and bring us healing, strength, and joy. Day by day may we grow in faith, in self-denial, in charity, in heavenly-mindedness. And then, mingle us at last with the mighty host of Thy redeemed for evermore—Amen.

James Martineau, born 1805

Letter From a Mother

“We come against many bumps in the road and I believe the unshakable faith that has been many years of a process has brought me to the point my family is at now.

“I’m sitting by my sweet little Ivana who just turned six. She is on her first full day of a 48-week regimen of chemo drugs. Just a short scenario that has brought us to this point: she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in November, 1998. It was so hard to receive this news from my husband who had taken her to have the CAT scan in the morning... This is when that unshakable faith steps in. It has been a whirlwind ever since, but each day God has been our strength, along with prayers of family and friends. We no longer have our footprints showing in the sand, God is carrying us. His graciousness to our family through brain surgery, radiation, and chemo with many weeks ahead of us, has been a wonderful time to give Him thanks for all His blessings.

“A friend wondered if we might be angry at God. My husband and I talked about this and we both agreed this did not apply. Maybe frustration because of all the office visits and everyday radiation for six weeks. But anger? No. God does all things well. Psalm twenty-three has always been my comfort since I was a little girl. It was the first passage I memorized. It has been a promise all these years that God is always our Gentle Shepherd. Only God can give the peace that passes understanding. My own strength is empty. I have given my life to God. He gladly took over to work out all His purposes and plans.”

Is America Great?

The following is attributed to the French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, who came to America in the 1800s to discover her secret strength:

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forest, and it was not there.

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there.

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there.

"I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless constitution, and it was not there.

"Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

"America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

(What is our reply?)

A Lovely Day

I woke to a deep-throated foghorn in the early dark—a sound so full of nostalgia, adventure and mystery. No doubt it was only a great tanker somewhere out there, but I loved the battering rain that followed, the booming breakers and shuddering, slashing wind. My little study is a cozy haven, isolated and quiet, even when the sea is roaring. The lines have certainly fallen unto me in pleasant places (see Psalm 16:6). I have a "goodly heritage," for which I am unutterably thankful.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule September–November 1999

September 18 Nashua, N.H., Grace Fellowship, Sandy Berube, (603)883-8273, ext. 18.

September 25 Park Street Church, Boston, Mass., women's brunch, Elizabeth Shively, (617)523-3383 or 628-7241.

October 2 Jonesboro, Ga., First Baptist Church, 1st Ladies Brunch, Jane Barnard, (770)460-8802.

October 8 or 9 Bangor, Maine, Good News Radio, Michael Dalton, (207)947-2751.

October 16 Omaha, Neb., Omnipotence of Love Conference, 1-800-361-0210.

October 21-23 Mackinac Island, Mich., Win-Some Women retreat, P.O. Box 503, Petoskey, MI 49770.

November 6 Dallas, Tex., Dallas Theological Seminary Wives in Ministry, Debra Chisholm, (972)222-1780.

November 11 Thousand Oaks, Calif. Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, Simi Valley Calvary Chapel, Craig Brewer, (805)527-0199.

Lost a Pregnancy?

Gwen Kik will be glad to send a Bible study on this subject if you send \$2 to her at 114 Ayr Parkway, Madisonville KY 42431; phone 270/825-1299. Any additional gift will go directly to Door of Hope Pregnancy Care Center.

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