

Get Out Of Your Own Way!

1. Warm-up Question: Sunday's sermon tackled the problem of low self-esteem. That's a heavy subject. So before we dig into our personal struggles with self-esteem, let's start on a high note. What's something you really like about yourself?
2. David said, "I don't always feel so good about myself. I can have low self-esteem that I've struggled with all my life. I have this inner pathological critic that can sometimes badger me to the point where I wish I could hunt it down." Most of us can relate in one way or another.
 - a. Is self-esteem something you've wrestled with? If so, where do you think that struggle with self-esteem comes from?
 - b. Proverbs 15:4 says, "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit." The words we speak to ourselves matter immensely. What is something your inner critic often says to you that drags you down?
 - c. Our scripture reading for Sunday provides a great foundation for growing our self-esteem. Read Psalm 139, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
3. Studies indicate that we each have about 60,000 thoughts per day! Psalm 139 tells us that God knows each and every one of our thoughts intimately and completely. As verse 6 says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!" God knows us even better than ourselves. And God dares to go with us into the dark places, wherever we go, even when our thoughts drag us down to hell (vs. 6). With all that in mind, Romans 12:2 challenges us to dare to partner with God to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind." On Sunday, David offered several practical tools we can employ as we partner with God in the renewal of our mind.
4. **Tool #1 – Defusing.** We often "fuse" with our thoughts, meaning we assume that just because we think something, it must be real. Defusing means recognizing that thoughts are just thoughts and may or may not have a valid basis. So, instead of saying, "I am _____" [insert a negative thought], we instead need to learn to say, "I am having a thought that I am _____ [insert a negative thought]. Have someone in your group volunteer to complete the forgoing sentence both ways. Does rephrasing the negative thought help? If so, how?
5. **Tool #2 – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).** CBT encourages us to break down a specific problem we're having using an ABC format: A) something happens; B) you have thoughts that assign meaning to what happened; and C) those thoughts determine your emotional response to what happened. The key in this equation is Step B. By examining and consciously changing Step B (our thoughts about an event), we can change our emotional response.
 - a. Tell us about a time in your life when something happened that triggered really negative feelings about yourself and left you feeling very down about yourself,

but then you stepped back and chose to consciously reinterpret how you should feel about what happened.

- b. Some people might say, “What really matters is not what happens in life, but how we choose to interpret what happens.” Do you agree or disagree – and why?
6. **Tool #3 – Assertive Communication.** This means being honest in stating our needs, wants, viewpoints, and feelings, but doing so calmly, rather than being harsh or overly dramatic.
 - a. Would you say that you are an assertive communicator? Explain your answer.
 - b. Why is it so hard for us to be assertive communicators?
7. **Tool #4 – Self-Compassion.** When someone else messes up, we often naturally respond with sympathy and compassion. Self-compassion means showing ourselves that same grace. If we witness someone being verbally abused, we feel deep compassion for them. But we seldom extend the same sympathy to ourselves when our inner critic verbally abuses us. If there is someone in your group who is good at showing self-compassion, have them tell about a time they messed up and then describe what it looked like for them to respond to themselves with self-compassion.
8. **Tool #5 – Divine Support.** A major 2017 research study by the University of Texas and several other universities concluded that belief in an interactive, loving God who is an engaged and influential force in everyday life is strongly statistically correlated with high self-esteem.
 - a. Why? Do you have any theories as to why these two are so strongly correlated?
 - b. Dr. Genn Schiraldi suggests that self-esteem begins with the conviction that we are worthy because we are unconditionally loved by an adoring God. Viewed this way, the fifth tool (Divine Support) may be the most important of all. Unless we open ourselves to God’s love, all the other practical tools we’ve discussed may be for naught. I John 4:19 says, “We love because God first loved us.” In other words, we can’t love ourselves until we first open ourselves to God’s love. Psalm 139:13-14 tells us that, “It was you, God, who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” The Hebrew word translated “fearfully” means “with great reverence, heart-felt interest and respect.” That means you are a work of art created by God and adored by God for who you are. In your heart of hearts, do you really believe that? Why or why not?
 - c. Picture God looking down at you and admiringly describing you to an angel in heaven. What are some of the things you can imagine God saying about you to the angel? Share some of those things with the group.

This week, when you’re tempted to feel bad about yourself, keep reminding yourself how God sees you: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” Psalm 139:14.

Psalm 139, selected verses

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,

O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,

and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Hell, you are there.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and night wraps itself around me,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well.

¹⁹ O that you would kill the wicked, O God,

and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting.