

in search of
CHRISTIAN
CONFIDENCE



**John
Baughn**

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CHRISTIAN
CONFIDENCE

by
John Baughn

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Theme Verse

“Though the fig tree shall not blossom, and fruit is not on the vines;
the labor of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food.
The flock is cut off from the fold, and no herd *is* in the stalls;
yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
Jehovah the Lord *is* my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds’ *feet*, and
He will make me to walk on my high places.”

Habakkuk 3:17-19

NEED A CONFIDENCE BOOST?

Do you feel down once in a while? That's okay. Just don't stay down there. Usually the reason a person feels down is because his or her confidence has been shaken.

Even though you may not realize it right now, there are many reasons to feel good about yourself. What you are about to discover, if you are like most people, is that you are probably looking in all the wrong places to boost your confidence. Pop psychology and feel-good self-help advice are temporary. What you need is something that will carry your confidence regardless of what life tosses in your path.

What you need is something that will carry your confidence regardless of what life tosses in your path.

Many people today are looking to boost their confidence by boosting their self-esteem. After all, that's what our great American culture has been promoting for years. From Oprah to our schools to youth sports organizations and elsewhere, good self-esteem is promoted as a key value for well-adjusted people. But our real personal value, and therefore our confidence, can only be determined by someone or something greater than us.

People measure personal value in many ways. Some measure it in cash. The value of a corporate CEO or a first round draft pick in the NBA or NFL draft is measured into the millions of dollars. Their value is based upon what each brings to the investors of their respective businesses or sports teams. These values are determined by the market place, and most of us can't hit jump shots with time running out (especially when a super-human six foot nine inch athlete is in our face). Nor do most of us typically have opportunities to run GM or Microsoft. But even those blessed people don't always find complete personal satisfaction in the job that they do. Most successful people are doing what they do in order to do what they really want, and even then it's not always what they expect it to be in terms of satisfaction. Solomon found that all the wisdom and riches of the world have fleeting value and are vanities.

Solomon found that all the riches of the world have fleeting value and are vanities.

“13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all which is done under the heavens. It is a sad task God has given to the sons of men to be humbled by it. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” (KJV)

Ecc 1:13, 14

The apostle Paul spoke to the church at Ephesus about the mystery of Christ. In chapter three of His letter, he said:
“8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace is given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” (Ephesians 3:8-12)

Note that in verse 12 Paul speaks about “boldness and confidence.” Every person today would like some sense of boldness and some level of confidence in his or her life. But where can we find such levels of boldness and confidence?

The purpose of this class is to help you find out what God has determined about you. What is your real value, and how is it measured? What criteria are used by God to determine your real value, and what is required of you to meet such criteria? And most of all, how do we acquire this confidence that Paul talks about in a modern world where the things that we value seem to be changing?

Are you looking in the wrong places? Are you seeking confidence in yourself, or are you willing to seek something bigger and better that will give you the real confidence you need? Even if you feel good about yourself right now, how long will your good feeling last? When someone comes along tomorrow and hurts those feelings will you still feel good about who and what you are? Or will they shake your confidence? Will that hurt have short-term feelings, or will it have lasting feelings?

*... are you willing to seek
something bigger and better that
will give you the real
confidence you need?*

Come join us on this adventure and quest to find a confidence that will make you unshakable and strong in the face of the challenges of life. Come see what God has in store for you.

Part 1

LOOKING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Theme Verse

“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

LOOKING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

It is much easier to find our way through places that are immediately familiar to us than to chart our way through unfamiliar territory. It is easier to find lost keys in your own home than to look for those same keys if they have been lost in some unfamiliar woods. Similarly, when trying to figure out what we need in this life to build up ourselves emotionally, it is easy to look in familiar places. We will often seek to lift ourselves up by looking at ourselves and our personal experiences by remembering what makes us happy. Or, we may look for the help of other people to lift us up.

When we look at ourselves, some of us think that as long as other people get along with us and like us we must be pretty good people. Or perhaps we may feel good about ourselves because we think that we are better today than we were in the past. We think that we are growing and improving over time. When these things make us feel good about ourselves, we rate our personal value and confidence very high. However, that good feeling can go away just as quickly as it came. Such feelings are usually temporary.

A second place wherein we may look to feel good about ourselves is in other people. In such cases, we tend to measure our strength and confidence by how well we compare to the strengths and weaknesses of others. In some cases we feel good about ourselves because the tribulations of other people may seem worse than our own challenges. Or worse yet, we may try to elevate our feelings about ourselves by lowering our opinions about others.

In the short term we feel good inside as the result of these personal observations. By comparing ourselves to ourselves or by comparing ourselves to others, we seem to have a certain “gut” feeling about our own value. We think pretty highly of ourselves when we compare well. But we also run the risk of not comparing very well at all.

We must also realize the danger that pride brings into these types of comparisons. Pride is when we simply think too highly of ourselves. That pride can come from two places: how highly we think of ourselves; and secondly, how well we might imagine ourselves to be in comparison to those who are “lowlier” than we are.

In this section, we will study the pitfalls of comparing ourselves to ourselves, comparing ourselves to others, the deception of feelings, and the pride of life.

Personal Questions

1. What topics of conversation do you find it easy to talk about with others?
2. What is it about these particular topics that make it easy for you?
3. Do you find it easy to talk about yourself? If so, what makes it easy? If not, why is it difficult?
4. Do you find it easy to complain about things? About what do you complain?
5. Do you find it easy to criticize other people? About what things might you criticize other people? What are your “pet peeves” about other people?
6. Do you find yourself more often criticizing other people or edifying other people? For what reasons?
7. Do you find yourself criticizing yourself for something that you did or said? What makes us criticize ourselves?
8. Do you seek out other people’s opinions? Whose opinions do you respect, and for what reasons do you seek out their opinion?
9. What is your reaction when someone is critical of you or mocks you? Why do you react that way?

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OURSELVES: SELF-ESTEEM

“But they, measuring themselves by themselves,
and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise”

2 Corinthians 10:12b

From the youngest in our society to the oldest, we are constantly bombarded with this thing called “self-esteem.” Let’s look at what the users and measurers of this concept say about it themselves.

The term “self-esteem” was first coined by American philosopher and psychologist William James in 1890. It is one of the oldest concepts in psychology. James used it to refer to how a person mentally perceives him or herself as opposed to how a person may be physically perceived. In other words, it has to do with how one internally feels about him or herself and has little to do with any external factors.

... “self-esteem” has become the third most used theme in psychological literature . . . over 25,000 articles, chapters, and books reference the topic.

According to Wikipedia, “self-esteem” has become the third most used theme in psychological literature. As of 2003, over 25,000 articles, chapters, and books reference the topic. It has been determined in all of this literature that the term has basically three major definitions, with each having created its own research, findings, and applications.

1. Again according to Wikipedia, “The original definition presents self-esteem as a ratio found by dividing one’s successes in areas of life of importance to a given individual by the failures in them or one’s ‘success / pretensions.” By this idea, how stable can one’s self-esteem be when potential challenges or failures can occur in one’s life every day?
2. Maurice Rosenberg, a social-learning theorist, defined self-esteem in 1960 as “a stable sense of personal worth or worthiness, measured by self-reporting tests.” One has to wonder how healthy this idea can be when an egomaniac or narcissistic personality could consider himself to be healthy because he feels good about himself.
3. And consider Nathaniel Branden who in 1969 said that self-esteem is “the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness.” This may come closer to a valid idea of competence or worth, but how is competence determined, and what defines happiness? How does one find this type of competence, and what makes anyone worthy of happiness? A chronic thief may consider himself worthy of happiness if he is really good at what he does.

Ultimately what we can determine is that self-esteem is the pursuit of some type of self-worth measured by how we feel about ourselves.

The world and all of its psychologists would tell us that our self-esteem or personal value is in fact defined by how we feel about ourselves. Though we all like to feel good, the **reason** that we feel good may make all the difference to a person's long-term mental and spiritual stability.

While self-esteem is not in harmony with the scriptural concepts of humility and meekness, which we'll talk about later, there are scriptural concepts that do address how we should view our personal value. But, unfortunately, in an effort to combat this distorted use of self-esteem, we may have lost sight of how one's personal value should be measured.

Though we all like to feel good, the reason that we feel good may make all the difference to a person's long-term mental stability.

With our emphasis on "humility" and "meekness" we may not have emphasized enough of the scriptural and holy concept of "confidence." We, in fact, should be people that feel good in that we have a special "source" of confidence that gives us that feeling. When we clearly understand the true value that God has assigned to us, it will manifest in us a confidence that the world cannot possibly understand until they too can come to this same truth.

In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul makes an inference to this God-given confidence when he says:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Maybe it is because the world has not known the confidence of which Paul speaks that it has had to find some other source of confidence: a false confidence and a false good feeling that lies in this idea of self-esteem. Thus, our culture has been teaching us to compare ourselves to ourselves just as Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 10:1.

Consider the articles on the following pages regarding the research about self-esteem programs:

U.S. Teens Brimming With Self-Esteem

By E.J. Mundell

HealthDay Reporter: Wed Nov 12, 5:02 pm ET

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 12 (HealthDay News) — Today’s American high school students are far likelier than those in the 1970s to believe they’ll make outstanding spouses, parents, and workers, new research shows.

They’re also much more likely to claim they are “A” students with high IQs — even though other research shows that today’s students do less homework than their counterparts did in the 1970s.

The findings, published in the November issue of *Psychological Science*, support the idea that the “self-esteem” movement popular among today’s parents and teachers may have gone too far, the study’s co-author said.

“What this shows is that confidence has crossed over into overconfidence,” said Jean Twenge, an associate professor of psychology at San Diego State University.

She believes that decades of relentless, uncritical boosterism by parents and school systems may be producing a generation of kids with expectations that are out of sync with the challenges of the real world.

“High school students’ responses have crossed over into a really unrealistic realm, with three-fourths of them expecting performance that’s effectively in the top 20 percent,” Twenge said.

For the study, she and co-researcher W. Keith Campbell, of the University of Georgia, pored over data from the Monitoring the Future study, a large national survey of thousands of U.S. high school students conducted periodically over the past three decades.

The researchers compared the answers kids gave in 1975 and 2006 to 13 questions centered on students’ “self-views.” These questions solicited students’ opinions on such things as how smart they thought they were, or how likely they were to be successful as adults.

“When we look at the responses of the students in the ’70s, they are certainly confident that they are going to perform well, but their responses are more modest, a little more realistic” than teens in 2006, Twenge said.

For example, in 1975, less than 37 percent of teens thought they’d be “very good” spouses, compared to more than 56 percent of those surveyed in 2006. Likewise, the number of students who thought they’d become “very good” parents rose from less than 36 percent in 1975 to more than 54 percent in 2006. And almost two-thirds of teens in 2006 thought they’d be exemplary workers, compared to about half of those polled in 1975.

As for self-reported academic achievement, twice as many students in 2006 than in 1976 said they earned an “A” average in high school — 15.6 percent vs. 7.7 percent, the report found.

Compared to their counterparts from the '70s, today's youth also tended to rate themselves as more intelligent and were more likely to say they were "completely satisfied" with themselves.

There was one exception – measures of "self-competency" (i.e., agreeing with statements such as, "I am able to do things as well as most other people") did not rise between 1976 and 2006. According to Twenge, that may mean that young people continue to feel great self-worth even as they remain unsure of their competence in specific tasks.

Twenge stressed that youthful confidence isn't necessarily bad. "Young people have always had some degree of starry-eyed optimism, and that's probably a good thing," she said. "And setting goals for yourself is a good thing. It's just when those goals are wildly unrealistic, then that can cause trouble for everyone."

For example, young people entering the workforce may score well in job interviews if they exude self-confidence, she said, but that can quickly sour if a new employer doesn't provide them with the perks or promotions they feel they deserve. "They don't set the right goals for themselves, because they are overconfident – and that's when it blows up in their face," Twenge said.

The blame for all this may lie with well-intentioned adults, she suggested.

"These kids didn't raise themselves, they got these ideas from somewhere," Twenge said. With Mom and Dad handing out endless praise, kids today readily believe they are somehow superior, she said. And teachers aren't blameless, either: According to Twenge, research shows that high school teachers now give out an "A" grade more easily than their counterparts did in the 1970s, even though today's high school students report doing less homework than students from that era.

Not everyone interpreted the new findings in the same way, however. Jennifer Crocker is a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and a longtime researcher in self-esteem. She said that by selecting data from 1975 and 2006, Twenge and Campbell have only presented two moments in time and have not shown evidence of any decades-long trend.

And based on available academic data, today's young Americans might be right to be more self-confident, Crocker argued.

"The fact is that we are all getting smarter – IQ is going up quite dramatically over this same period of time," Crocker noted. "Students may believe that they are getting trained better than they used to, that they are learning skills that they didn't use to have. So, maybe their predictions aren't unreasonable."

But Twenge, who is the author of a book on young people's self-views called *Generation Me*, isn't convinced. In fact, she believes that today's parents may be sending another crop of young Americans down the same path.

"I have a 2-year-old daughter," she said. "I see the parenting of kids around her age, and I haven't seen this changing. Look around – about a fourth of the clothing available to her says 'Little Princess' on it."

High Self-Esteem Debunked Study Finds Social Ills Aren't Caused By Insecurities By Erica Goode, *New York Times*

Low self-esteem is to blame for a host of social ills, including poor academic performance, marital discord, violent crime, and drug abuse.

Or so goes the gospel, as written over the past several decades by social scientists, writers of self-help books, and the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, a panel created in 1986 by the California Legislature to conduct a three-year study of the topic.

Recently, however, some psychologists have begun debunking the notion that a poor self-image is the malady behind most of society's complaints – and that bolstering self-esteem its cure.

“D” students, it turns out, think as highly of themselves as valedictorians think of themselves, and serial rapists are no more likely to ooze with insecurities than doctors or bank managers.

At the same time, high self-esteem, studies show, offers no immunity against bad behavior. Research by Brad Bushman of Iowa State University and Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University find that some people with high self-regard are actually more likely to lash out aggressively when criticized than those with low-self esteem. The list of groups – neo-Nazis, street toughs, school bullies – who combine preening self-satisfaction with violence belies the power of one to ameliorate the other.

“I think we had a great deal of optimism that high self-esteem would cause all sorts of positive consequences, and that if we raised self-esteem people would do better in life,” Baumeister said. “Mostly, the data have not borne that out.”

In an extensive review of studies, for example, Nicholas Emler, a social psychologist at the London School of Economics, found no clear link between low self-esteem and delinquency, violence against others, teenage smoking, drug use, or racism, though a poor self-image was one of several factors contributing to self-destructive behaviors like suicide, eating disorders, and teenage pregnancy.

High self-esteem, on the other hand, was positively correlated with racist attitudes, drunken driving, and other risky behaviors, Emler found in his 2001 review. Though academic success or failure had some effect on self-esteem, students with high self-esteem were likely to explain away their failures with excuses, while those with low self-esteem discounted their successes as flukes.

Not that feeling good about ones self is entirely without benefit. People with high self-esteem are happier and show more initiative than those with low self-regard, Baumeister noted.

But when it comes to whether people use that initiative for good or for ill, or whether they succeed or fail in many different areas of life, research indicates that psychological factors other than self-esteem are far more important.

For example, in the studies Bushman and Baumeister carried out on aggression, they found that it was narcissism, self-love, that includes a conviction of one's superiority, rather than a positive self-image per se that led people to retaliate aggressively when their self-esteem was threatened.

In one study, each subject was asked to write an essay that was then criticized by a partner, really a confederate of the researchers. Then the subjects were given a chance to get back at their partners by pushing a button and blasting them with a high-decibel noise. People who scored high on scales of self-esteem were in general no more likely to take advantage of the opportunity than those with low self-esteem. But those who also scored high on narcissism turned up the volume and leaned on the button.

In another study, the researchers gave tests of self-esteem and narcissism to 63 men serving prison sentences for rape, murder, assault, or armed robbery in Massachusetts and California.

They compared the prisoners' scores with those found in other studies for groups of men the same age, including Vietnam veterans, college students, dentists, recreational dart throwers, and problem drinkers. The violent offenders, Bushman said, did not differ from the other men in self-esteem. But they scored much higher than the other men on narcissism. (A third group of prisoners, in Minnesota, showed no significant differences in either self-esteem or in narcissism, an anomalous result the researchers hope to explain through further research.)

Many experts believe that such findings offer a persuasive rebuttal to the claims of the so-called self-esteem movement. But the accretion of evidence has done little to dampen the enthusiasm of therapists, child-rearing experts, and school administrators. Many secondary schools include self-esteem building in their curriculums. Self-help books offer strategies, like hypnosis and dieting, for increasing self-confidence and self-worth.

J.D. Hawkins, president of the National Association for Self-Esteem in Normal, Ill., said that despite the new research his group held that a positive self-image was important and that self-esteem building exercises were effective.

"For 37 years I've worked with kids, and I've proved that those kinds of things work," Hawkins said. But he added that any conception of self-esteem had to include taking responsibility for one's actions and contributing to society.

"If you are not personally and socially responsible, then your self-worth is built on a false reality and, therefore, it's not healthy," Hawkins said.

A preoccupation with self-esteem may be inevitable in a society where self-worth is often defined by a diploma from Harvard, a Size 4 dress, or a mansion in the Hamptons.

Jennifer Crocker, a psychologist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, argues that the frantic pursuit of self-worth through external trappings exacts a social and personal toll. "The pursuit of self-esteem has short-term benefits but long-term costs," she has written, "ultimately diverting people from fulfilling their fundamental human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy and leading to poor self-regulation and mental and physical health."

In a series of studies, the most recent appearing in the current *Journal of Social Issues*, Crocker finds that people who pin their self-esteem on academic performance, good looks, the approval of bosses, friends, or family members, or other societally sanctioned yardsticks are at higher risk for a variety of problems, including academic difficulties, relationship conflicts, aggression, and increased use of drugs or alcohol.

In a study of 642 college freshmen, Crocker found that most students scored high on a commonly used measure of self-esteem. But those who based their views of themselves on things like academic competence, outdoing others in competition, physical appearance, or other people's approval were more likely to have difficulties several months later.

The freshmen who based their self-regard heavily on academic performance, for example, reported more stress and more conflicts with professors and teaching assistants than did their peers. They spent more time studying than other students but did no better in their classes.

The freshmen who were invested in appearing attractive, on the other hand, reported more aggressiveness, anger, and hostility than others, more alcohol and drug use, and more symptoms of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia, Crocker found. They also became more depressed as the year wore on.

The externally driven students were slightly more likely than others to have low self-esteem, but the correlation was small, Crocker said.

"In analysis after analysis, external contingencies of self-worth, such as appearance, were associated with more problems of all types during their freshman year," Crocker wrote of the college students in the journal article.

In contrast, students who judged themselves by more internal measures like virtue or religious faith seemed to fare better. They were less likely to show anger and aggression and more restrained in their use of alcohol and drugs.

But Crocker said it was possible that even these freshmen found their pursuit of self-esteem problematic. On a checklist of "daily hassles," for example, they were more likely to note feelings of loneliness, suggesting, she said, that their devotion to moral strictures was experienced as off-putting by others.

An obsession with external markers of self-worth, Crocker believes, leads to self-absorption. As an example, she cited a study, carried out with a graduate student, Lora Park, in which college freshmen who based their self-esteem on academic achievement were given a test and then either told that they had failed or given no feedback. They were then asked to talk to a partner about a personal problem the partner was having.

Afterward, the freshmen who failed the test rated themselves as “preoccupied” during their discussion with their partner. Their partners, in turn, reported that they did not like the freshmen very much and would not want to share personal problems with them again.

The correction for such an exclusive focus on the self cannot be found in self-esteem classes that encourage children to believe that they are special and that their personal success and happiness are paramount, Crocker and other experts argue.

“Not everything is about ‘me,’ “ she said. “There are sometimes bigger things that we should be concerned about.”

Yet more old-fashioned strategies for making one’s way in the world, like learning self-control, resisting temptation, or persisting in the face of failure, have received little study, in part because the attention to self-esteem has been so pervasive.

“My bottom line is that self-esteem isn’t really worth the effort,” Baumeister said. “Self-control is much more powerful.”

—November 3, 2002

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OURSELVES

Questions

1. What is one of the oldest concepts in modern psychology?
2. How did William James define it?
3. How prominent is this concept in psychological literature?
4. There are three primary definitions of “self-esteem” in psychology. How did Nathaniel Branden define it in 1969?
5. Ultimately, what is self-esteem in pursuit of, and what is used as the primary measurement?
6. Is it okay to feel good about ourselves? What may make the greatest long-term difference as to how we feel about ourselves?
7. What two terms do we rightly emphasize when it comes to our appropriate attitudes about ourselves?
8. As we look at the idea of personal value, does the Bible address it? What scriptural and holy term does the Bible use to help measure our personal worth and strength?
9. In looking further into the concept of self-esteem, does the research support the emphasis of this concept in better preparing our youth for success? What does the research really say?