

"Self-worth and Integrity"
 Psalms 17, 26, 41, 139, Proverbs 11, 28
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The outline for what I want to share with you was actually printed in the lesson this week. First, "Self-worth is God's gift to us." That's Psalm 139. And second, "Integrity is our gift to God." That's psalms 17, 26, 41 and chapters 11 and 28 of Proverbs.

Self-worth . . . self-esteem . . . what you think about yourself . . . however you want to phrase it, is very high for some individuals and terribly low for others. Consider these words of Bruce Larson from his book *Ask Me to Dance*:

"You ever feel like a frog? Frogs feel slow, low, ugly, puffy, drooped, and pooped. I know. One told me. The frog feeling comes when you want to be bright but feel dumb, when you want to share but are selfish, when you want to be thankful but feel resentment, when you want to be great but are small, when you want to care but are indifferent. Yes, at one time or another each of us has found himself on a lily pad, floating down the great river of life. Frightened and disgusted, we're too froggish to budge. (Sounds like Paul in Romans 7:15, doesn't it? "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.") Larson continues:

"Once upon a time there was a frog, only he wasn't really a frog, he was a prince who looked and felt like a frog. The wicked witch had cast a spell on him and only the kiss of a beautiful princess could save him. But since when do cute chicks kiss frogs? So, there he sat, an unkissed prince in frog form. One day a beautiful princess gathered him up and gave him a big smack! Zap!! There he was, a frog turned handsome prince and they lived happily after. So, what's the task of the Christian? Kissing frogs, of course!" And why can we do that? Because "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Each one of us is a prince or a princess in the kingdom of God. You are a child of the King of Kings! We have been elevated in Christ to a point where our self-esteem should be boundless. We have the solid truth of God's love, not only to bolster ourselves with, but also to encourage others with. But you and I both know that truth isn't always the feeling we have inside.

If I were to draw a caricature that would symbolize the millions of adults with low self-esteem, I see a bowed, weary traveler. Over his shoulder would be the end of a mile-long chain to which is attached tons of scrap iron, old tires, and garbage of all types. Each piece of junk is inscribed with the details of some humiliation—a failure—an embarrassment—a rejection from the past. He could let go of the chain and free himself from the heavy load which immobilizes and exhausts him, especially if he is a Christian, but he is somehow convinced that it must be dragged throughout life. Paralyzed by its weight, he plods onward, digging a rut behind him as he goes. Freedom is lost because he just won't turn it loose.

Much of how we feel about ourselves comes from our environment and growing up years. Through the years we learn to wear any number of masks to cover up the real us. For some, we give the impression that we're secure, that all is sunny and unruffled within as well as without; or that "confidence is my name and coolness is my game," or that the water is calm and I am in command; and that I need no one.

Beneath dwells the real us in confusion, in fear, in aloneness. But we hide that. We don't want anybody to know it. We panic at the thought of our weakness and fear being exposed. We shun vulnerability. Meanwhile what we're really seeking is acceptance . . . the assurance that we really are somebody, that someone knows our name. We really do matter. The people in our society may never give us that . . . but God does. Especially in Psalm 139.

There is only one YOU. Think about that. Your face and features, your voice, your style, your background, your characteristics, your abilities, your smile, your walk, your handshake, your manner of expression, your viewpoint . . . everything about you is found in only one individual since time first

began . . . YOU! The mold God made for you, as in the case of every other human being, was broken, never to be used again once you entered the flow of mankind. You are unique. In our overly populated, identity-crisis era, it's easy to forget this. Individuality is played down. We're asked to conform to a "system." Group opinion is considered superior to personal conviction and everywhere we're encouraged to blend into the mold of the masses. Advertising would have us believe that rich, thin and beautiful is the only way to be.

Psalm 139 answers several questions.

Vs. 1-6 "How well does God know me?" Up and down, in and out, before words are even spoken . . . God knows.

Vs. 7-12 "How close is God to me?" Again, Up and down, far and near, He is everywhere. Always and ever close.

Vs. 13-18 "How carefully had God made me?" Your eyes saw my unformed body (from the sperm and egg stage), you knit me together in my mother's womb so that each person has to recognize that "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Human life is awesome. And our days have already been determined even before we are born.

Vs. 19-22 Reminds us of how much God protects us.

And 139:23-24 Connects our soul to the Living God – "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We long for the Creator.

New Testament Scriptures confirm what God thinks of us: Because of His love He sent His Son to redeem us (John 3:16). In Matthew 6:26-30 Jesus said we are of great worth . . . more than the sparrows. Romans 8:19 tells us we're being conformed into the image of Jesus. In Ephesians 2:10 we are His workmanship and according to Philippians 1:6 God's not through with us until we are in His very presence.

It is Satan's lie to believe that self-worth is based on your performance plus other people's opinions of you. If the whole world decided you were worthless, it would not change your true value because, as a Christian, your value is tied to God Himself. Your value was established by what Jesus did in purchasing your salvation by His blood at the cross. We must rest in the fact that God made us, loves us, knows everything about us and is constantly with us. The person who rejects himself is really rejecting God who made him the way he is.

I read about the Taft family who evidently were very good at pushing their children to find a specialty of which to be proud. And you know we can do a lot in helping our children have good self-esteem. Well, when Martha Taft was in elementary school in Cincinnati, she was asked to introduce herself. She said, "My name is Martha Bowers Taft. My great-grandfather was President of the United States. My grandfather was United States senator. My daddy is ambassador to Ireland. And I am a Brownie."

So maybe tomorrow when you get up you can think about how fearfully and wonderfully God made you. God gave us body, soul and spirit. So, in the morning stretch (for the body), smile (for the soul), and say "God loves me" (for the spirit). Then put on your crown and go about your day . . . maybe even kiss a frog or two.

The second part of our lesson this week dealt with integrity – Psalms 17, 26, 41, and Proverbs 11, and 28. First let me share what I saw in these Scriptures:

Psalm 17 was written by David. In verse 3 he says, "Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin."

Jonathan Edwards, an old Puritan preacher had several personal resolutions. Among them he wrote: "Resolved: First, that every man should do right. Resolved: Second, I will do right whether anyone else on earth does or does not. Third, resolved: never to do anything which I would be afraid

to do if it were the last hour of my life." Never underestimate the power of one. You can take a stand for integrity.

Well, David had been tracked down and says he's surrounded and prays that the Lord will rise up and confront the enemy and rescue him. Nevertheless, even if he dies now, he declares "in righteousness, I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness." When we see the Lord Jesus face to face there will be no, "Why did you let me die like that? Why didn't you intervene and save me?" Seeing our Savior face to face will be total and full satisfaction. The old has passed away, the new has come. That is the integrity of God. All He has promised will come to pass just as He said.

Again, in Psalm 26 David is pleading for deliverance from his enemies citing his integrity of "continually walking in your truth." He loved the house of God for God's glory dwelt there in the Old Testament temple of David's day. When he was there, he says in verse 12, "My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord." Being in the presence of God, whether it's as we assemble together or meet with Him privately, refreshes us anew to the commitment of being people of integrity.

Psalm 41 is a third psalm by David about integrity: David is lying ill yet he trusts God for healing. His enemies are saying, "When will he die?" They're spreading rumors that he has a vile disease and will never get up from that sickbed. Even his close friend turned against him. But David rests in this fact, that "I know you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not overcome me. In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever." He knows it's God who is keeping the enemies from taking advantage of his weakened condition and that nothing is going to separate him from God's love.

What is integrity . . . ours and God's? **Integrity is simply doing what you said you would do. Keeping your promise.**

The first of the 16 times "integrity" is used in the Bible, it is used describing a non-believer, a pagan king Abimelech, king of Gerar, who with clear conscience took Sarah to be his wife after Abraham lied and said she was his sister. When God brought disaster on Abimelech's household, he confronted Abraham. "Why did you do this to me?" There are three little lessons from that story we should consider: 1) integrity can be a life and death issue, 2) unbelievers can and often do exhibit great integrity, and 3) need it be said that even God's servants have feet of clay and sometimes do fall painfully short in the area of integrity.

Solomon, too, had some thoughts on integrity. Look at the people with integrity in Proverbs chapters 11 and 28.

- 11:1 those having accurate weights in business dealings – that's being fair to all
- 11:10 the righteous prosper – honest employment with prosperity blesses others.
- 11:11 through the upright a city is exalted – community involvement and civic pride
- 11:13 a trustworthy man keeps a secret – self-control and discernment
- 11:14 many advisers make victory sure – cooperation and mutual support
- 11:16 a kindhearted woman gains respect – don't you respect gracious people?
- 11:24 a man gives freely, yet gains even more – generosity
- 11:30 he who wins souls is wise – a right perspective on life, having eternal values
- 28:2 a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order – a law-abiding citizen
- 28:13 he who confesses (sins) and renounces them finds mercy – one who will admit mistakes and take the consequences.
- 28:19 he who works his land will have abundant food – a solid work ethic
- 28:25 he who trusts in the Lord will prosper – reliance on God not on self
- 28:26 he who walks in wisdom is kept safe – thinking before acting, praying before doing anything.

Sometimes the best way to describe integrity is to show the lack of it. Proverbs 11 and 28 gives us several examples of that:

11:1 The Lord abhors dishonest scales – cheating in business

11:9 With the mouth the godless destroys his neighbor – gossip, lying.

11:22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion – I like that one, you can be dressed impeccably, be gorgeous to look at, but the way you behave really reveals what you are. My mother died when I was 10 and her most ardent wish was that my sister and I would grow up to be "a lady." I think we've lost a lot of that motivation for young women today.

11:26 People curse the man who hoards grain – misers are miserable people to be around.

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked man flees though no one pursues – a guilty conscience.

28:3 A ruler who oppresses the poor – whatever it takes for me to get ahead.

28:5 Evil men do not understand justice – talk yourself out, pay your way out, avoid at all costs deserved punishment.

28:7 A companion of gluttons disgraces his father – eat, drink and be merry regardless of your family's reputation or concerns for your well-being.

28:8 Increasing wealth by exorbitant interest – what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine.

28:10 Leading the upright along an evil path – compromise, just this once, I won't tell, no one will know, everybody does it.

28:19 One who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty – get rich schemes, if only I had this, I'd be happy; the grass is greener over there.

28:21 A man will do wrong for a piece of bread – especially if that "bread" is of the green folding kind.

28:25 A greedy man stirs up dissension – someone wants what someone else has . . . that's trouble.

28:27 Mentions he who closes his eyes to the poor – selfishness.

Not a pretty picture.

Christians are forgiven, not perfect. But we should be people of integrity. People with integrity have nothing to hide or fear. They have the humility of a servant and are faithful in little things . . . Are you when no one is looking? Do you 1) pay your bills 2) respect your boss 3) watch your mouth 4) value your co-workers and friends 5) know your limits 6) do your best?

Integrity isn't just about image. Politicians, and many others, will show themselves with family or going to church to create images of wholesomeness and integrity. But eventually, if it's a sham, it's exposed.

Holding to your integrity isn't always the easy path. Sometimes it makes waves. I know that from personal experience in years past.

My husband, Chuck, had a wonderful reputation in his area of sales. He was honest with customers, and wouldn't sell them a part if it wasn't going to meet their needs and would tell the customer where he could get the right part. He was realistic about delivery schedules and forecasts and had a genuine concern for service to the customer. He's carried around this little reminder in his wallet for years. It's something to think about, so I'll share it with you:

When you get what you want in your struggle for self

and the world makes you king for a day,

Just go to the mirror and look at yourself

and see what that man has to say.

For it isn't your parents or children or wife

whose judgment upon you must pass.
 The fellow whose burden counts most in your life
 is the one staring back in the glass.

Some people may think you're a straight-shooting chum
 and call you a wonderful guy.
 But the man in the glass says you're a bum
 if you can't look him straight in the eye.
 He's developed to please, never mind all the rest
 or he's with you clear up to the end.
 And you passed your most difficult and dangerous test
 if the man in the glass is your friend.
 You may fool the whole world on the pathway of life
 and get pats on your back as you pass.
 But your final reward will be heartaches and tears
 if you cheated the man in the glass.

Integrity can look in the mirror and like what it sees.

When Ted Williams was forty years old and closing out his career with the Boston Red Sox, he was suffering from a pinched nerve in his neck. "The thing was so bad," he later explained, "that I could hardly turn my head to look at the pitcher." . . . For the first time in his career he batted under .300, hitting just .254 with ten home runs. He was the highest salaried player in sports that year, making \$125,000. The next year the Red Sox sent him the same contract.

"When I got it, I sent it back with a note. I told them I wouldn't sign it until they gave me the full pay cut allowed. I think it was twenty-five percent. My feeling was that I was always treated fairly by the Red Sox when it came to contracts.

"I never had any problem with them about money. Now they were offering me a contract I didn't deserve. And I only wanted what I deserved."

. . . Williams cut his own salary by \$31,250!

Josiah Holland wrote this:

The world needs men (and we might add women)
 Who cannot be bought, whose word is their bond;
 Who put character above wealth;
 Who possess opinions and a will;
 Who are larger than their vocations;
 Who do not hesitate to take chances.
 The world needs men who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;
 Who will be as honest in small things as in great things;
 Who will make no compromise with wrong;
 Whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires.
 The world needs men who will not say they do it because everybody else does it;
 Who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;
 Who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning;

Who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular.

The world needs men who say 'no' with emphasis, though all the rest of the world says 'yes.'

I'd like to close with a few brief thoughts:

- 1) Be encouraging . . . Everyone you know needs to be reminded of their importance, tell them today how important they are to you in your life and especially to God.
- 2) Be alert . . . The enemy is always on the prowl to see if he can discredit Christians who have and show integrity. It's a victory for him every time a Christian with a visible ministry falls.
- 3) Be discerning . . . The pressures and needs we all have are enormous in every walk of life – even the little every day events of our lives can become a challenge to our integrity.
- 4) Be careful . . . The temptation to overreact (blow our cool) – give in to please someone against our better judgment – to compromise our principles is great.
- 5) Be strong . . . The time for resolve is now before the test – Resolved: I will do right whether anyone else does or does not.

We are God's people; we are People of the Word . . . Let's make sure we are also people of integrity.

Let's pray: Through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are privileged to call you Father. You created us, blessed us, instructed us, and called us to be your children. Our prayer is that we honor you with our lives by being people of integrity and wear the mantle of self-worth that you have given us proudly. Help us to grow in serving you and in serving others. We thank You and praise You our magnificent God and Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Please stand for the Doxology.