

CROSSING ATTITUDES

Study Guide

Lesson Four – Self-esteem or Esteeming God

Linda Pringle

At some point in our life, all of us have looked in the mirror shaking our head saying, “Wow! I’m a weird kid.” Some of us do that every day! We all feel inadequate in multiple areas of life. It could be our body image, our intelligence, our financial position, our talents, or our social skills. As we compare ourselves to others, we believe the lie that we just don’t meet the standard. We are flawed.

Subtle lies can come into play when we focus on self as compared to others. One lie could be, “God allowed this flaw in me because He doesn’t favor me as much as He does others. He must be displeased with me.” Another lie could be, “The only way my life will be complete is to fix this flaw.” Still, another lie, “God can’t use me because of this flaw. People won’t like or respect me.” When these lies become entrenched in our attitudes, we can get caught in a vicious cycle of fear, determination to fix the flaw, failure to “meet the standard”, and then more fear.

For some, the result is withdrawing from those who make them feel inferior and gravitating to those who affirm their self-worth. Seeking constant approval from others becomes a goal that backfires because, after a while, it suffocates relationships. The person seeking approval becomes hurt or irritated when the people in their life don’t give them the positive attention they crave. No one likes to walk on eggshells and people will begin avoiding that person. Seeking the praise of others is a frustrating endeavor.

The world’s answer to feeling inadequate is to raise our self-esteem. The world says that we should find areas in our life in which we can be successful so we can learn self-confidence. For example, we’ve all been taught that we need to boost children’s self-esteem in order for them to be a confident adult. The Bible teaches that we should encourage our children and each other in Christ (Col. 3:21, 1 Thess. 2:11). However, as we will see in this lesson, the Bible does not teach the concept of boosting self-esteem or self-worth.

- 1) Read Romans 12:3-8. How should we think about ourselves according to this passage? How do these verses encourage teamwork?

- 2) Friendly competition in sports and other games can be fun. The apostle Paul used athletes running for the prize to illustrate Christian discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24). Sports can teach teamwork, physical skill, and humility. However, any type of competition can lead to jealousy, selfish ambition, and arrogance. Read James 3:14-18. Where does bitter jealousy and selfish ambition come from? What is the result? Conversely, what is the result of wisdom from above?

Note: One of the main areas of self-esteem that women secretly compete over is body image. There is no sin in looking cute or being healthy. The sin comes in when we start comparing our image with others. Jealousy over how other women look and selfish ambition to improve our image are “earthly, natural, and demonic” (James 3:15). Food, dieting, and exercise can become an idol that women chase when there is a self-centered, prideful motive attached. When a woman develops habitual eating or dieting sins, there is usually fear and anxiety around the attitude of food and weight.

- 3) Read Proverbs 23:20-21. What two sins are addressed? What will happen to those who develop these habits?

Note: Gluttony is a lust of the flesh. We become gluttonous when we turn to food to sooth emotions on a regular basis rather than turning to God. This is more than the occasional "I want chocolate!" It is a self-centered preoccupation with food to satisfy, with very little thought of trusting God. Food, like alcohol, becomes a way to dull emotional pain. Both overeating and alcohol cause drowsiness that temporarily helps us forget our problems. These sins cause our faith to be in the "drug" rather than in God.

- 4) Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13. Verse 12 says, "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*" For fun, let's play with the verse to bring it to life. Think of your favorite junk food and write it in on all four blanks.

_____ is (are) lawful for me, but _____ may not be profitable.

_____ is (are) lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by _____.

From verse 13, who is the body for?

- 5) Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Who really owns your body? What should be our response?

- 6) What was Jesus accused of in Matthew 11:18-19?

Note: The end of verse 19 means, "The wisdom of the courses of action of both men was proved (justified) by the results."¹

- 7) Jesus enjoyed food and didn't deny himself. Some women have fear of eating anything that they deem is unhealthy, sometimes to the point of throwing up "bad" food. Read 1 Timothy 4:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How are we to receive God's blessing of food?
- 8) Some people counter eating with excessive exercise. If they eat too much one day, fear grips them and they run to the gym. A healthy lifestyle can glorify God if done with the right motives of honoring Him and loving others. Selfish, prideful ambition (usually littered with fear) is never pleasing to God. Read 1 Timothy 4:8-9. What is better than bodily exercise?

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Note: If you were to literally thank God for every potato chip, M&M, cookie, or spoonful of ice cream you put into your mouth, you would be more aware of what you are eating. We can thank God for a yummy brownie and enjoy every bite. However, if we eat half the pan of brownies, we are self-indulgent. If eating, dieting, or excessive exercise have become sinful habits for you, begin to confess these sins on a daily basis before Jesus. The more thankful you are for God's blessings, the more He will show you when you are overeating (or starving yourself) and the more He will free you from the tyranny of body image. He loves you so much that He died to set you free! That freedom begins with humility before His love.

9) John 4:31-38 follows the story of Jesus sharing truth with the Samaritan woman at the well (verses 7-30). The woman's response to the Lord was so full of excitement that she left her water pot and ran to tell the town's people. I can imagine that when Jesus responded to the disciples, He was pumped up with joy because of the woman and other Samaritan's belief! Rather than food, what was Jesus' focus? Are you excited to have the same focus in your life as Jesus did? (*I guarantee that if you are, it will help you get your eyes off sinful eating habits and your self-image!*)

10) Read Philippians 2:3-8. Instead of trying to boost our self-esteem, what should our attitude towards ourselves be? Remember that this attitude is not to "be a good Christian." This attitude comes from our love for God and our compassion for others as we lay down our self-focus and minister to them.

11) Even if the world sees us as "flawed," we are loved by God and useful to His service – just the way we are! All of us are flawed with sin and yet God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is good. Meditate on the following verses this week. What comfort do they bring to you?

Psalms 139:13-18

Zephaniah 3:17

Proverbs 31:30

Psychology Myths: "People's problems are generally related to low self-esteem, so in order to help people we need to raise their self-esteem." "You can't love others until you love yourself." How does what we've learned in this lesson refute these myths?