

## Getting to the Root of the Esteem Issue

A poor sense of self-esteem is at the root of many issues. The need to boost one's self-esteem is so pervasive that whether we are aware of it or not, whether we admit to it readily or not, we are constantly driven by this need in our daily pursuit. Yet many are discouraged and hurt in the process. It proves more elusive than we would care to admit.

This pursuit started from since we were little and clueless. We satisfied the nagging question of 'How important am I?' by depending on how others regarded us. Our sense of self-esteem became based on how well people made us feel important. When we were spoken well of (Approval and Affirmation) and included in groups (Attention and Acceptance), our sense of self-esteem went up. Clueless, we saw nothing wrong with this unreliable way of rating ourselves. In school we discovered that how clever (Abilities), how nice-looking we were (Appearance) and who we made friends with (Association) would affect our esteem. As adults, what car or house we own (Assets), the positions and influence we wield (Authority, Accolades, Achievements) affect how people rate us and therefore how we rate ourselves. So we continued on our misguided pursuit of equating the attainment of these externals with our esteem. The more we have them, the greater our sense of esteem, the better we would feel about ourselves. That



was our belief. However this is not as plain as we had perceived it to be, judging from the casualties of this pursuit.

The story of Michael Phelps, the decorated Olympian Swimmer, is a case in point. At the height of Phelps' success, the esteem of others did not make him feel better about himself as we and even he himself would have expected. In 2014, Phelps resorted to self-harm and drinking. The goal of his pursuit had remained elusive.

The pursuit of self-esteem will remain elusive because, truth be told, we are gravely mistaken for as long as our esteem depends on the externals. We are barking up the wrong tree if we think that when we are held in high-esteem, we have 'arrived'. That all will be well. It is taking this wrong course that leads to a lot of issues.

How did we end up being so misguided? As clueless little beings, we had the idea of esteem, confidence and worth all mixed up. Not knowing that we were already born inherently worthy and important, we went looking for ways to rate ourselves. We depended on

equally clueless beings outside of ourselves for the answer. We ended up concluding about our esteem and our self-worth based on others' opinions of us. For instance, when we had parents who were incapable of positive parenting, we wrongly felt a sense of worthlessness.

How then do we extricate ourselves from the confusion and false beliefs? Some untangling is required. 'Esteem', in this context, is the rating of man. When we receive esteem from man, confidence in us is built up. Parents who affirm their children produce confident children. Confidence in turn earns us esteem. Their children's confidence in conducting themselves at school will increase others' esteem of them. Confidence and esteem of man are not bad things. But making them the goals of our life's pursuit and confusing them for something else called 'self-worth' is the problem. Man's esteem of us fluctuates with circumstances. When we are judged by others as having 'made it', our esteem goes up. When we lose it, it plunges. So does our confidence which is closely tied to 'esteem'. Is it any wonder then that the pursuit of esteem and confidence result in casualties? We are either crushed by shame of not attaining it or if we reach the height of it, the fear of losing them can prove too much to bear, as is probably in the case of Phelps.

'Worth', however, is something we are born with. It cannot be lost. Worth is not dependent on externals. It is inherent. We are born worthy.

Our parents may have brought about our existence through their physical union. What they could do for us stopped there. They could in no way form us. A force beyond them knitted us together in our mother's womb. Our parents, themselves, needed this same force to come into being. If we acknowledge that there is a Creator, He will be that force. This Creator cannot and does not create anything that is worthless.

We are created with inherent worth because each of us was designed unique and for a special purpose. A watch is created for a purpose that is different from a chair. Each watch or each chair is unique even if it is made for the same purpose. Since these objects are man-created, their worth is determined by their creators who put a price on them. However the Creator who created us with a special design and purpose in mind does not rank us. There is no order of value or worth. We learn this from

nature, His other creations.

In the fruit kingdom, a longan is not inherently of less worth than the mango, a universally loved fruit. It is not of less worth than the pineapple, the versatile one, or even the durian, the king of fruits. It is man that places a price on each of these fruits but inherently, each is designed unique. Each is enjoyed for what it is. Each has a special place in the Fruit Kingdom.

## Connect-Point

Now that the difference between 'Esteem', 'Confidence' and 'Worth' is clarified, then what? A paradigm shift has to be made, at least in our self-perception. A shift in the way we perceive ourselves will invariably bring about a shift in the way we perceive the outside world.

The underlying assumption we had of ourselves as 'worthless' until we earn the esteem of others has to be thrown out of the window. Along with this goes the need to boost our sense of esteem by depending on others' opinions of us.

This paradigm shift involves abandoning the old pursuit and charting a new course. This new course is about discovering the Creator's design and purpose in us and finding our 'special place'. It is about finding out how we are wired. It is about self-acceptance. We may never have the talents of the person we envy simply because we are wired differently for a different purpose. How do we work towards the discovery? The confluence of the 'Ps'-- our personality make-up, our passion, our pre-disposition even our past are clues to help us.



With this change of course, we will view and approach the externals (Attention, Approval, Authority, Acceptance, Assets, etc) in a different light. They take on new meaning. When previously we were motivated in the pursuit of these things by a need to prove to ourselves and others, to augment our sense of esteem, we now do so for the right reasons. Pursuing of the 'Aces' do not become ends in themselves. They become a means to help us towards being the best that we are designed to be.

For instance, if we do not get a promotion we feel we deserve, we may have felt crushed by the assault on our self-esteem in the past. With the paradigm shift, we may still be disappointed but we will feel a greater resolve to improve in our abilities, not for the promotion but out of a responsibility towards becoming the person we are purposed to be.

In the light of understanding our self-worth, the need for others' esteem of us becomes irrelevant. We become liberated from fear of failure, criticisms, disappointments or shame. These old symptoms are fruits of the tree rooted in a poor sense of self-esteem and in false beliefs about ourselves. They naturally disappear once we uproot, destroy and tear this tree down. With the paradigm shift, we replant a new tree - a tree which is rooted in new, accurate and healthy beliefs. In due course, we will get to enjoy its fruits - a sense of peace and purpose.

### Contact Us

For more information on Bethesda CARE Counselling Service, please visit <http://www.bcare.org.sg>

To contact us: Please call 6340 4161 or email [admin@bcare.org.sg](mailto:admin@bcare.org.sg)