

Self-esteem: self-respect, self-love, and recognition of the worth and purpose of your existence. It begins with the realization that you are somebody and your existence does make a difference.

One of the most difficult tasks in life is the process of learning to love who you are. When you are a teenager, there seem to be so many things you don't like about yourself: your body, your awkwardness in relationships, your emotions, your self-consciousness, and your unpredictability. As if that's not bad enough, you have teachers, parents, and other authority figures who seem to only accentuate the negative! The teenage years are also years which seem to divide you between people and tempt you to be critical of self and others.

Why is it that when you are a teenager, and really throughout your whole life, it is so difficult to love yourself? Part of the difficulty involves the pain of learning who you really are! It's difficult to learn who you are when you are trying to fit into this group of friends, attract a certain boy or girl, or be cool. Another difficulty involves falling into the trap of letting others form your identity and letting them make you into a replica of them. Finally, it is hard to figure out who you are when all you seem to hear from others and yourself is what you aren't.

Jesus and Self-Esteem

One thing that is absolutely important to know is that, unless you really love yourself (your limitations, weaknesses, failures, and successes), you will never be able to love another, including Jesus. Remember, Jesus is within you, and if you don't love what is inside you, then you are not experiencing and loving Jesus fully. You can never know *exactly* who

you are, but you can love what you do know if you work at it and pray.

So many experiences in life seem to offer you only instability, especially in forming your self-identity. Many of you come from divorced homes, which has made feeling good about who you are a little more difficult. Jesus can help you love who you are and offer you needed stability. Jesus struggled to learn who he was just as you do. Jesus grew in understanding of himself gradually, just like you are gradually learning about yourself. Jesus had authority figures and peers doubting him, challenging him, and questioning his worth. Jesus was unsure of his future and was at times angry with others for not listening to him or distorting his words. Jesus struggled with understanding his humanness and Godness, just as you struggle with coping with the lovable and unlovable aspects of yourself.

Jesus has a special love for people who have trouble loving who they are. If Jesus simply loved those who loved themselves, what would that say about him? Jesus understands the special needs and feelings of those who lack self-love due to verbal abuse, physical abuse, addictions, failures, false perceptions, perfectionism, poverty, fears, self-doubt, and other limitations placed on self. Jesus offers unconditional love and, through belief in him, a tremendous strength will overcome those negatives and help you turn them into positives. Sometimes Jesus is working when you are led to professionals who can help you overcome physical obstacles that are in the way to your journey to self-love. Jesus is working through the person who builds you up and makes you feel like somebody. There is nothing about us that Jesus doesn't know, and he is still around. Sometimes when you have been hurt, left, or made to feel inadequate, it's impossible to imagine putting your trust in anyone ever again, but knowing that Jesus knows it all and

has stayed can offer you great stability and faith. When you look at the life of Jesus, you see he has experienced what you think only you have experienced. It is necessary to look briefly at how these experiences can help us gain a better understanding of Jesus' ability to identify with us in self-esteem issues.

- **Verbal Abuse** — People mocked Jesus and laughed at his claim to be someone special. He was insulted and treated like a nobody.
- **Physical Abuse** — People hit him, spit upon him, made him drag a heavy cross and then crucified him.
- **Failures** — Jesus worked so hard at bringing God's message to people and offering them God's unconditional love, but sometimes he questioned his own ability to be what God wanted of him.
- **False Perceptions** — People labeled him contrary to his actions and beliefs; they *made* him meet their needs rather than *allow* him to meet their needs.
- **Perfectionism** — Even though Jesus did not sin, I imagine he struggled at being his best, which, at times, may have added great pain, difficulty, and challenge to his life.
- **Poverty** — Jesus was stripped of almost everything a person could be, but he was still rich. Jesus experienced physical, emotional, and spiritual poverty. He experienced the depth of

poverty when he gave his life for those who believed and didn't believe.

- **Fear** — Jesus must have been scared at times while his understanding of his role in the world was gradually developing. Jesus possessed the strength to conquer fear and live a life of unselfish love.
- **Self-Doubt** — At the point of the crucifixion, Jesus asks, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus realized that his death would offer new life to all who follow. Jesus is not conquered by self-doubt but reaches out to those who in weakness need to tap into his strength to gain the personal strength to go on.

Who else could possibly offer the understanding, love, and reassurance that Jesus can to those who need help loving who they are? Jesus knows, loves, and respects you and wants to help you reach your potential and utilize your gifts, but you must let him in your heart. You must trust he will not hurt or abandon you. You must know that he is within you and in the midst of all that is going on inside of you. You must listen to him saying, "Be who you are." If you put your own experiences in the categories above, along with those of Jesus, you really see how Jesus is the key to self-love and self-acceptance. The best way to relate to a person is out of their experience, and that is how Jesus wants you to relate to him!