

RECAPTURING THE IMAGE OF GOD

By Chaille Brindley

Can you think of anyone that you would rather be than you? If you're like most people, you could quickly think of somebody who has a skill, relationship, position or thing that you would like to have. Honestly, you may be able to think of somebody that you would rather be instead of yourself. This is common because we are always attracted to what we don't have or who we wish we could be.

From the beginning of mankind's story in the Bible, the challenge has been to overcome our urge for the one thing we lack even if it is forbidden fruit.

Most people can look in the mirror and find several things they wish they could change. Since we live in our bodies and know our souls so well, we tend to notice every single defect. This becomes magnified for the person with low self esteem. We tend to see the positives aspects as accidents that could vanish in an instant while the negatives are forever tattooed on our foreheads.

It is quite interesting that of all the things we know about Jesus, none of the Gospel authors told us what He looked like. We know what he did. We know that His relationship with the Father defined Him not even His own passion. The only thing that Scripture tells us about the Messiah is that He was scarred beyond recognition. Isaiah wrote, "But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man" (Isaiah 52:14 NLT).

When Jesus returned from the cross, people recognized Him for His scars. Today, unidentified persons are matched the same way by trying to look for any unique marks. Are we sometimes known by our scars in life because that is part of what makes us unique?

In a culture that has become obsessed with appearance, it is highly unlikely that anybody would notice Jesus if He walked the earth today. It would take a few miracles or challenging words to make people take notice. Why is it that so much of our self esteem and personal identity is wrapped up in how we look? Is that bad? Why or why not? These are important questions that deserve more than just a quick response.

Stop for a moment and go to a mirror. Look at your image and ask yourself what bothers you about you? Excluding sins, what are things you would like to change about who you are?

Okay, that's not a mild suggestion. It's a strong command. You won't get anything out of the experience through this meditation if you don't participate. Go to the mirror. I'll be waiting for you when you finish. Take your time. Consider all the things that you would like to change. You might want to make a brief mental list.

Go! Mirror! Reflect!

Now ☺

Welcome back! Stop and consider the top 3-5 things that you discovered while looking in the mirror. This could be either something about your physical person, skills, passion or personality. Write those in the space below.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Now, you need to forget about the things in the above list. More than that, you need to give those areas over to God. This is especially true if you can't change something on your list. For example, I wish that I was at least 5-10. I am only 5-4 in real life. There is no real easy way to change my height. And without divine intervention, it is impossible to add six inches.

You will find this as an exercise that doesn't work if you only do it once. You may have to give those areas over to God on a daily basis. While this action may look different for different people, it most certainly does not include acceptance of a negative and wallowing in depression as a result. Instead, it calls for us to see the positive in whatever design God has created for our lives.

Even if the thing we don't like about ourselves is something we can change, for example our weight, the five areas listed above should not become our focus. If it does, we will simply trade one pit for a different one. I will cover this more later. Trust me – our problems go much deeper than how we look or that one skill we wish we had.

Consider the following question. Please take some time to answer it in the space provided.

Insight Question:

If you were a character in a book how would the author describe you so that the reader would get a good understanding of who you are and what makes you unique?

Mirror, mirror on the wall. Why am I not the fairest one of all? Our physical appearance is a major factor in how we tend to feel about ourselves although there are many aspects of this that are beyond our control.

The Bible is clear that our real value cannot be measured by what is on the outside. But why do we struggle to believe this reality?

Some would blame our culture. But this reality is nothing new. Going all the way back to our earliest written records, people have valued physical beauty. The ideal of what is beauty has changed. The importance remains the same.

Think about how much money is spent in the United States on how we look. American teens spent \$179 billion on goods in 2006. On average, U.S. teenagers spend 30-34% of their income each year on clothes. Last year, teens spent nearly \$61 billion on clothes. While there is nothing wrong with clothes (I recommend wearing them), our obsession with clothing shows how much we are still trying to cover up the nakedness of our identities by labels and the latest fashions. American Eagle, the largest teen boutique retailer, sold \$2.7 billion worth of merchandise last year. It reported a gross profit of 48%.

Teen Spending (In Billions)

1997: \$122
1998: \$141
1999: \$153
2000: \$155
2001: \$172
2002: \$170
2003: \$175
2004: \$169
2005: \$158
2006: \$179

Source: Teen Research Unlimited

There are a wide variety of clothes. It seems like each style has a persona that goes along with it. There are the preps, the skaters, the Nascar rednecks, the Goths, the indie rocker wannabes, worthless couch bum, the gangsta thugs, the granola hippies, the surfer/beechnuts, the sporty jocks, the punk rocker complete with faux-hawk. You get the picture. This begs to ask the question. Do the clothes define the person? Or do people dress a certain way to express themselves? And if they are expressing their individuality, why do they do the same things that everyone else does?

Consider the following question. Please take some time to answer it in the space provided.

Insight Question:

How did you decide who you are?

Let's unpack why our self image can be such a big deal and so hard to correct.

“Research has shown that we tend to act in harmony with our mental self-portrait. If we don't like the kind of person we are, we think no one else likes us either.”

- Josh McDowell from *His Image...My Image*

- People with a poor self image are slaves to the opinions of others. They are not free to be themselves.
- People with a poor self image tend to expect the worst, which can lead to negative outcomes. (Self fulfilling prophecy)
- Your self image is a lens that affects how you look at yourself and the world.
- People with a negative self image tend to filter out positive messages and only absorb the bad ones. Failures become big deals because they validate negative feelings.
- A poor self image can keep people looking inward and outward in negative ways, which can lead to depression and selfishness.

Now that we know some about the problem and challenges, we are ready to look for some roads to recovery. The best place is to start with God since He is our designer and creator.

What does the Bible say about our self image and value?

God loves you more than the best parent does a treasured child.

1 John 3:1 (NIV)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

You were created in God's image and bear the mark of a grand design.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Psalms 139:13-14 (NLT)

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

God has crowned man with honor and glory. Thus, you have value and worth because God says so. He sacrificed His Son to save you.

Psalms 8:4-5 (NIV)

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

- Since God is our Creator, only He can give an accurate estimation of our worth and value. Only He can ultimately answer our longings for acceptance and love.
- Christianity speaks in a unique way to our desire to be loved and affirmed.

What is a healthy self image?

Here's a good explanation...

A healthy self image is seeing yourself as God sees you – no more and no less.”

– Josh McDowell

“We can see neither our own dignity nor the defects which spoil the beauty of our soul, unless we look at ourselves in the peaceful sea of God's being in which we are imaged.”

– Catherine of Siena

“If you had only self-knowledge, you would experience confusion of mind; and if you had only knowledge of God, you would fall into presumption. The one therefore needs to be seasoned by the other, so that together they become one and the same thing.”

– Catherine of Siena

Insight Question:

How does this definition differ from what most people in the world would say?

Jesus Is My Self Image

Our identity, even our life, is found in Jesus not anything we do.

Colossians 3:1-4 (NLT)

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

You can never reach the ideal you on your own. With God's power, we are perfected and transformed to the people that we know we should be.

John 1:12-13 (NLT)

But to all who believed him (Jesus) and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is not self esteem. It is realizing God's image in us.

As mentioned earlier, our real problem is not one of the five things we want to change. It can be real easy to focus on good things to fix instead of the reality that our value comes from God not anything about us.

Consider this post taken from the Web...

So I revealed to him that his problem was low self-esteem, and he, like all people with low self-esteem, readily agreed to that assessment. Then I chastised him for thinking that he needs a self-esteem! I told him that he should not be esteeming himself at all. That is Jesus' job! I said it is none of your business to evaluate another man's slaves, especially if that man is Jesus, and even if the slave is you! The fact that you have a self-esteem at all is proof that you are judging Jesus' slave; in this case, yourself. Leave the esteeming to Jesus.

“The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become.”

– C.S. Lewis from Mere Christianity

“Having a healthy self image is not the ultimate goal. Knowing Jesus in all His fullness is.”

– Josh McDowell

“There are Christians that would argue that to have a positive self-esteem is to be proud. This is not so according to the Scriptures. A person with low self-esteem says, ‘There is no good in me.’ A person who is proud says, ‘There is no bad in me.’ The person with a theologically based positive self-esteem says, ‘The good in me is because God loves me, gifts me, and values me just as I am.’”

– Craig W. Ellison and Nicole L. Baker

What do you think is Satan's full-time job?

If you think the answer is finding out ways to tempt us, you are missing the real battlefield. Demonic forces spend most of the time trying to put things into our heads or keep things out. Much of their efforts revolve around our self concept and reality of God. But we must be careful what we think and believe about ourselves. False concepts can become our reality if we believe them. We must never forget that Scripture refers to Satan as the accuser of the Christian. Satan was the one who accused Job to God. He does the same thing to us.

- Satan is a liar. He spends most of his effort accusing us to God, us to others and us to ourselves.
- Some voices we should tune out and not listen to no matter how loud they get.

- All of us have formulated a mental image of ourselves based on the feelings of our parents.
- When we try to find validation in ourselves or others, we are looking in the wrong place.
- God can redeem any negative thought that you have believed about yourself. But you have to let go and let Him reveal His truth to you.
- You must get real with God for Him to make the true you come through.

Insight Question:

Have you been shadow boxing a lie? What negative statement about you have you mistakenly believed and let define your present self image and worldview?

Do any of the following words define your sense of personal identity?

Stupid			Unlovable		Talent Less
	Alone	Loser	Slacker		
Ugly					Fake
	Dull	Clumsy			
Fat			Failure	Invisible	
	Unwanted				
	Weird		Worthless	Ordinary	

Two Challenges...

- Give negative thoughts over to God and let God's Word define you. Use the above Scripture verses to fight against negative thoughts when they come throughout the week.
- Demonstrate that you are moving on from negative self thoughts by stomping on the lie behind it. Write a word or short phrase on the bottom of your shoe as reminder that you don't accept the lie. Walk off the thought as a physical act to show what God is doing on the inside.