



Reflection:

August 2022

“Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine”. The creator who ‘designed and created’ us has individually called us by name. The Lord who is thoroughly aware of our strengths and weaknesses has declared us as His own. Despite having read this verse and heard this preached to us innumerable times, aren’t there instances when doubt and fear creep into our minds? And aren’t there moments when the phrase “fear not,” which occurs 365 times in the Bible, seems insufficient to calm us or restore our confidence? This can often be attributed to our negative self-image or low self-esteem.

It is noteworthy that God mysteriously hand-picked people who thought lowly of themselves for his work. Moses requested that God choose someone else for his mission (Ex 4:10-13) and Jeremiah initially countered God’s call (Jer 1:6) claiming his weaknesses; yet both became remarkable instruments for God’s purposes. Have we ever wondered, how our self-image sometimes makes us focus on our inabilities rather than rely on our strengths and on what God seems confident He can accomplish through us?

Self-esteem is the overall opinion one has on the self and the value placed on oneself as an individual. Early life experiences often have a significant bearing on the development of self-esteem. Neglect, lack of praise or warmth, constant criticism, setting extremely high standards and abuse can all impact young minds with far-reaching consequences. What we often fail to comprehend is that self-esteem is only an opinion and not a factual measure like our height or weight. It could very well be biased, inaccurate or wrong. Nevertheless, if a negative self-esteem is strongly established, it influences all the dimensions of a person’s life. Not only can it make a person unhappy, but it can also contribute to many psychological disorders.

Some people seemingly have an over-inflated self-esteem. What may not be immediately evident is that such people often have hurt and fragile egos deep down and their boastfulness is often an attempt to conceal their insecurities. The good news is that since self-esteem is an evolved opinion, it can be changed. A key psychological strategy to enhance self-esteem is to recollect and express gratitude for one’s strengths. What greater strength can a Christian rely on, than that gained from a deep God encounter and a knowledge of the strengths He has blessed us with? The Bible is replete with examples of personalities who could be dismissed as insignificant and yet did amazing things for God’s purposes! David, a mere shepherd boy and Daniel, a young lad, performed unimaginable deeds through their reliance on God. Even Christ’s story was first spread by fishermen and tax collectors, the lowliest professions in those times.

Imagine what Peter might have felt about himself after having denied Jesus. Yet the way Jesus looked at Peter did not change. John 21 is a heart-touching instance of Jesus reaching out to Peter and helping him see himself, not through the eyes of his failures and mistakes, but through the eyes of His God. Rather than listen to the inner voices of self-pity and unworthiness that must have tormented him, Peter learns to look at himself through the word of God that breathed a fresh spirit and life into his soul.

Eve fell because she listened to the wrong voice. Peter rose from the ashes of his failure because he chose to listen to the voice of truth. In every heart, the voice of truth and the voice of untruth are constantly speaking. We have a choice. If we listen to the negative voices that try to steal, kill, and destroy the worth God gave us through the Cross, we will live defeated lives. But if we consciously choose to listen to the voice of God that constantly whispers our worth and our status in His eyes, we will live with great hope and joy. St. Irenaeus once said, ‘The glory of God is man fully alive’. God has redeemed us, made us His own and called us to live fully alive, in the light of His victory on our behalf. Can we always declare that blessed truth to ourselves? Our self-esteem will begin to grow as the truth of who we are to God permeates our inner being. This awareness can heal all our psychological wounds, and even if scars and memories of the past remain, they will not hinder us from becoming who the Lord has truly called us to be.

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