

SESSION 1.6 – The Respected Self

Objectives:

- To stress the importance of participants to respect themselves
- To discuss the issues connected with a proper understanding of self-respect
- To understanding the characteristics of a self-respecting person
- To make the participants aware of the hidden danger of disrespectfulness in our eagerness to help and serve others

Introduction:

As humans, all of us want to be respected for who we really are. But sometimes, we are our own worst enemies. We may find it hard to accept certain things about ourselves and this may result in a loss of self-respect. A loss of self-respect often also results in the loss of self-dignity, esteem and worth. We may find it very difficult to function to the best of our ability. And yet, on the other hand, doesn't indulging in respecting self amount to a preoccupation with self and leads to pride which is against the Christian norm of humility? Are we not told to respect others? And yet sometimes the very things we do to help others regain their self-respect actually robs them of their dignity. How do we handle such delicate matters?

A Definition of Respect

Respect is believing and behaving as if human beings have the ability to deal with difficult information, consequences, circumstances, or choices.

Respect versus Esteem

Respect is an active attitude toward yourself and others when esteem is a feeling that doesn't involve action as much as just thinking and feeling. In other words, respect is active and esteem is passive.

Respect reflects an attitude of humility couple with courage. It is related to humility because it accepts the possibility that I might need to approach relationships with a belief that I can do or accept the difficult when it is necessary, which requires courage. This may include the possibilities that I am wrong or that a negative idea I have about myself may actually be true. Many people who lay claim to self-esteem may choose to ignore unpleasant information about themselves. This can lead to pride and refusing to accept the difficult task of correcting problems. To deal with unpleasantness, one must confront it.

Respect can exist independent of the positive and negative. We can respect others that we do not feel like respecting. If I can respect people who have done, thought, or felt things that are not respectable, then I do so with the humility that comes with the understanding that I have been in the same condition. I accept that I am in no position to judge. Esteem, on the other hand, is often given as a matter of class difference or other unearned or undeserved criteria.

Respect

- Active
- Humility with courage
- Based on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Esteem

- Passive
- Potential source of pride
- Based mainly on judgments which may or may not be accurate.

What is self respect?

What is the price we pay for self-respect? Some people feel robbed of self-respect, while others have even killed to overcome feelings of inferiority. Psychologists insist that respecting others is impossible until we learn to respect ourselves. They believe that individuals, lacking in self-respect, are mistakenly too focused on helping others and not taking care of their own needs. Are self-respect and self-esteem the same? An individual with a healthy self-respect "likes" themselves -- even when encountering the inevitable failures in life. To esteem something is to "hold in high regard." Self-respect and self-esteem are quite different. Self-esteem balances precariously upon a comparison with someone who's always "a little better." When we esteem someone or something, we face serious trouble if we do not measure up to those standards. Our esteem may ebb and flow, whereas a healthy self-respect (liking ourselves) is always grounded in what we are (and are not) -- not in what we can or cannot accomplish. How can we affect our self-respect? It is human nature to focus on ourselves. From childhood, we have those basic desires -- to be loved, to receive approval, to GET things. Children quickly become unhappy when things are not focused on them -- what they didn't get, who hasn't noticed them, who has infringed on their rights, who didn't give them respect. Self-respect is affected by how we react to someone complimenting us. The more times we give little regard to a compliment, the more secure our self-respect becomes. Suppose someone compliments our ability to play a musical instrument or to use a pair of scissors. Should the success or failure of either skill affect our self-respect? Naturally, we accept compliments graciously, with appreciation for their sincerity. Our self-respect is affected when we accept compliments selfishly, with application to our identity.

How can we protect our self-respect? The first step is changing our focus from a selfish GET mentality to a selfless GIVE mentality (Philippians 2:3-4). There is nothing admirable about feeding our own egos. Admiration or devotion to ourselves and our accomplishments is a form of idol worship. An idol is anything placed between you and God (Ephesians 5:5). Even the apostle Paul did not judge his own motives or rely on accolades from others (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). The following questions may arise: *"Does that mean I shouldn't treat myself well at all? Am I showing humility if I treat myself badly?"* You are held in high regard by God (Ephesians 1:4-5). Yes, you should take care of your physical and emotional well-being, but in the context that you are respecting the body that God has given you. When you show self-respect, it should be within the context of the God who designed you and has great plans for you. The choices you make in how you live show respect for the final product you will present to Him (Galatians 6:4-5).

The Christian vision of human nature and human personality is that each person is made by God to have a conversation with God. God is all the time trying to communicate with each one; his creative word is at the root of everyone's personality. So when I look at another human being, I'm looking at someone God is taking seriously; I'm looking at someone God is talking to (even if they themselves don't want to hear him). And the reverence with which I have to approach them is a bit like the hesitation I ought to feel about interrupting someone in the middle of a conversation with somebody else. In other words, I think that real respect begins when I recognise that everyone – and for that matter every bit of our universe – has a relationship with God that's quite independent of their relationship with me, or with any system of earthly dignity or power. And if God speaks and listens to each one, each person has the right to claim a listening ear from the rest of us.

This means that the questions of respect from others and of self-respect are connected in a very special way. When I approach someone else with reverence, I am expressing my recognition that they are being addressed by God. And so part of what I hope is that the way I engage with them prompts them to see themselves in a new way, to listen to themselves and thus also to the God who is communicating with them in their depths. Thus it is actually a failure of respect when we convey to someone that we give them our respect simply because they are full of extraordinary possibilities, because they can achieve anything they choose. It is in fact one of the real problems of our age that the absolutely correct wish to affirm people's potential and to encourage them to take responsibility for what they can become is often confused with a sentimental way of talking about 'pursuing your dreams' and so on, which does little to help anyone identify both their gifts and their limits. The language of the popular musical and the aspirational guff of the self-help book don't contribute much to a responsible and realistic kind of respect.

If our reverence for each other is based on this sort of vision, it means that we approach each other keenly aware of a dimension of mysteriousness in each other. I don't know what God is saying in the secret places of someone else's soul; my role isn't to tell them but to help them have space to listen. And the same holds for me as a person too: I learn to look at myself and listen to myself, conscious of a mysteriousness, a something to be uncovered in myself. Self-respect in this context means coming to recognise that I am more complex, exciting and unfamiliar than I could have thought.

Self-respect is bound up with seeing ourselves truthfully – not seeing ourselves as heroes and geniuses, but seeing ourselves as the recipients of an extraordinary outpouring of attention and confidence and, above all, love that is happening long before we could suppose we had given any reason for it to happen. It is this that helps us face our failures, it is this that prompts us to look for ways of exercising our proper responsibility. And it is as we learn this that we become trustworthy people. Others can trust us to respect them and to treat them well, because they can see that we are aware of our own humanity, with all its pitfalls and frailties.

Self-Respecting People

1. Think about how their behavior effects the people around them

Self-respecting people realize that they don't live in a vacuum; their behavior affects others. They think about what they do and ask themselves, "How will my doing _____ affect the people I care about/my coworkers/others I come in contact with?" They weigh the consequences carefully before acting.

2. Consider what they say before blurting out hurtful words

When self-respecting people engage in disagreements with others, they act diplomatically. Yes, they experience anger just like the rest of us, but they choose their responses instead of allowing a knee-jerk reaction to determine what happens next. They realize that hurtful words won't help their partner understand what is wrong and will harm the relationship.

3. Understand the Golden Rule: Do unto others as they need to be done unto

This ties into understanding that their behavior impacts others. They realize that just because they would like something done a certain way, that others may not agree. They take the time to learn how others need to be treated, rather than just using a "one size fits all" approach.

4. Seek first to understand, then to be understood (Stephen Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People)

Self-respecting people understand the value of active listening. They know that if people feel understood, then they are more likely to be willing to listen to another person's point of view. Self-respecting people do not try to push their views on others to be understood first. They are willing to work to earn the other person's respect and trust.

5. Take responsibility for their behavior

This means they are willing to admit when they are wrong. They feel comfortable with themselves and don't feel threatened if they make a mistake. Their ego isn't tied up in always needing to be right. This also means that the self-respecting person lets others be responsible for their behavior, letting go of the need to control them or change them.

6. Let go of the need to hold grudges

Self-respecting people realize that when they hold a grudge, they keep themselves locked into anger and resentment. They know they will keep growing as a person when they allow others to be responsible for their behavior instead of holding a grudge to try to make others change.

Showing Respect for Others

- Honesty with compassion
- Boundaries with consequences

- Support without rescue
- Respects agency and allows self-government
- Service with permission
- Honesty with Compassion

Honesty with Compassion

While being sensitive to how difficult information might be received, when we withhold vital information solely because we don't believe the other person can handle it, it shows our lack of respect for the other person.

Jesus demonstrated this in his encounter with the woman at the well. Note how he preceded calling attention to her faults with the hope of redemption. (John 4:14,16-18).

Boundaries with Consequences

We all have the right and the responsibility to define our space. You can decide and communicate how you want to be treated by others and what behavior you will tolerate in others. Though you can't control others, you can choose in what ways you will walk away from disrespect.

The Lord showed this with our first parents: Genesis 2:16-17.

Support without Rescue

When someone you care about struggles with problems and you desire to be of support, ask yourself, "Who is it about?" A respectful person can handle being present and supportive while you struggle. A disrespectful person wants to rescue you from your struggle for selfish reasons. When we want to rescue others from their difficulties, we should look at our own motives.

Motives or Attributes of Rescuers

- Uncomfortable with chaos and choices.
- Desire to be the hero of the situation.
- Anxious for praise and credit.
- Does the talking or leading.
- Focused on self.

Attributes of Supporters

- Willing to let you discover your own answers.
- Has confidence in you.
- Honored to be present with you. Sees you as the hero.
- Follows your lead and listens.
- Focused on you.

People who have a tendency to be rescuers are more self-focused than they seem on the outside. Wanting to rescue is not as unselfish as it seems.

They are this way based on a variety of motives. For many, the chaos of your situation makes them uncomfortable so they seek to restore their own feelings of comfort by rescuing you from your situation or feelings. They do

this sometimes by minimizing your feelings, not directly but in the way they deal with your feelings. They might do this through trying to explain to you why your feelings aren't accurate to the real situation. Using this method usually doesn't involve them actually knowing the real situation. They'll speculate and try to get you to see things in a way that leaves you wondering if your feelings are justified and even doubting whether your perception of what is happening to you is real. Causing self-doubt is disrespectful. It's important to note that they may be right about the situation. Even if they are right, it is irrelevant and disrespectful. The better approach, the approach that supporters take, is to encourage you to talk about the situation and respect you that as you talk things over, you have the ability to discover the truth. The supporter doesn't assume he knows the situation, that he isn't even in, better than you, who **are** in it, knows.

Another motive of rescuers is the desire to be perceived to be the hero. An enduring image in our post-European culture is that of the knight in shining armor rescuing the damsel in distress. Rescuers want to be perceived just like that: strong, capable, skilled, and unfortunately, superior. A rescuer will blaze into your situation and give you the benefit of their dubious experience with the hope in mind that you'll lavish lots of public praise upon them for how they were there for you in trying times. Wanting to be thanked is a poor motive for helping another. It's nice to be thanked, but when you don't get the kind of thanks you think you deserve, what was your motive for helping in the first place? Rather than being a knight in shining armor, a supportive and respectful person has confidence in you to be able to deal with your own problems. They see their task as being to be with you, strengthening you, while you do your own work of dealing with your own problems.

A supportive person sees you as the hero and is honored to be present with you. Such a person feels more like thanking you for the honor than receiving your thanks for something that you did. A rescuer wants praise and credit born out of their own lack of respect for themselves.

Have you ever had a person sit you down and tell you everything he or she plans to do to help you? How did you feel? Maybe you felt relieved because you weren't sure what to do and hoped that someone would come and take charge. Maybe you felt uncomfortable with it but weren't sure why. Maybe you were disappointed because the litany of proposed solutions betray a complete lack of understanding of what you are experiencing. Maybe it felt downright disrespectful to be so lacking in listening skills. A supportive person listens and only helps in ways you request.

In the scriptures, we see how this worked. Notice that Heavenly Father did not rescue the Savior from the work He needed to do for us, but did send a supporter: Luke 22:42-43

Respects Agency and Allows Self-Government

It would also do well to ask ourselves when encountering friends in trouble, "Whose problem is it anyway?" As with a lot of communication that includes respect, it may seem a little callous to say that another's troubles are not our own. Yet, it is true that we can't take away another's decision. A respectful person has his say and then allows others to decide their own actions without trying any kind of control.

At this point, you may be objecting to this line of thinking. You might be thinking that this is contrary to the fact that the Savior did rescue us; did take upon himself our sins and sorrows; does take our troubles for us and deal with them. In defense of these ideas, I point out that there is a difference between knowing without doubt that without his help we could not do it for ourselves and believing that we are necessary to another's success when we aren't. In terms of dealing with the consequences of sin, we are not capable at all of doing that in the eternal sense. A Savior was absolutely necessary. In relationships, we tend to think of ourselves as necessary to another when we aren't. Remember that the Savior performed the work he was called upon to do, but still leaves the acceptance of that work up to us. A supportive person leaves the choice up to the person he is supporting.

The five steps to effective leadership are:

- Planning
- Delegation
- Respect Agency and Allow Self-Government
- Service
- Evaluation

When I, as a leader, delegate a task to another, it is not my task then to find ways to hover over that person and make sure he is doing things the way I would do them. It's not even my place to see him heading for a wrong decision and prevent him from making it. Wouldn't it be strange if the Lord came down to us before we make a mistake and prevented us from making it? What the Lord does for us is epitomized in these two ideas of respecting agency and giving service. We can cast our burdens on him and he will gladly and joyfully bear them, but he doesn't come lift them off of us without our permission. It is not respectful to control someone. It is respectful, however, to offer our service and then follow the lead of the person we are offering to help.

Service with Permission

When you desire to help, ask yourself from the point of view of the one you're trying to help, "Are you trying to help me or hinder me?" Some of your damsels in distress feel like you are trying to make things worse and you often may be. When you offer help, make sure that what you are offering is helpful. Better still, just offer help and let the other person tell you how to help.

If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions. You can create a lot of problems or resentment by disrespecting a disabled person by doing for them things they can do for themselves or doing things for them that they can't do for themselves in ways that are humiliating or degrading. Remember that we all have various physical, emotional, and mental weaknesses and those around you deserve to be helped in ways that are helpful.

Application to Ourselves

How can we apply, then, these ideas about respect to respecting ourselves? A modified version of our respect definition, as it applies to self-

respect, would be:

Self-respect is believing and behaving as if I have the ability to deal with difficult information, consequences, circumstances, or choices.

This is different than the idea of self-esteem, which can sometimes lead us to believe that there is nothing that we cannot handle. The cult of positive mental attitude can deceive us into foolish and dangerous attitudes. With self-respect, though, it is not about thinking ourselves impervious to challenges. It is about believing that we can deal with them.

Showing Respect for Myself

- Self-honesty with compassion
- Honor my own boundaries
- Communicate my feelings
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Stand against injustice

As we become aware of our weaknesses, deficiencies, and errors, some philosophies would have us deal with this awareness by constructing a new awareness by the use of affirmations. Such affirmations are not necessarily wrong, but when they encourage us to ignore things in our lives that need our attention and work, they are not helpful. It is certainly good to foster a better self-image, something essential to avoiding future bad behavior. It is not good, however, to fail to own the things that are true about us. Without acknowledging things, we cannot work on them. Self-honesty is an essential part of self-improvement. Sometimes that self-honest is difficult, but with self-respect we can believe ourselves to be able to deal with the honesty and make necessary changes. While doing this, we need to be as compassionate towards ourselves as we are towards our friends, and hopefully we are very compassionate to everyone. It is possible to acknowledge our faults and be compassionate towards ourselves at the same time.

If respectful people honor the boundaries of others, they can honor their own. If I tell myself that I must stay out of certain kinds of places, self-respect means that I will do as I have promised myself.

People with self-respect communicate with others. The wonderful thing about respect is that you can exercise self-respect without sacrificing proper respect for others. If someone has hurt my feelings, I can respect myself by taking on the difficult task of expressing my feelings and respect the other by respecting his ability to deal with the information that I was upset by his actions. In this way, it really does depend on the delivery. Own your feelings as being how you reacted while not letting the other person off the hook for his behavior.

Unlike self-esteem, where I look upon myself as able to deal with things alone, self-respect encourages me to deal with what I can, but also requires me to ask for help when I need it. It allows me to be truthful about my needs because I respect myself to be able to deal with the embarrassment.

Self-respect helps me be bold and unflinching in standing up against injustice. It tells me that I can deal with the backlash of evil people when I hold fast to my integrity.

Prerequisites for Respect

- Humility with Courage
- Understanding of principles
- Honesty
- Devotion to rights
- Acceptance of responsibility

Being a respectful person requires you to spend some time pondering and practicing the principles of respect in your relationships with others and with yourself. Our natural inclination is to be disrespectful and self-centered. To be otherwise requires effort and study.

Developing respect requires a devotion to honesty and integrity. It doesn't involve saying everything that comes into our heads. When we lie to someone about the impact of their behavior, either by saying it doesn't bother us or by failing to speak up when we should, we show our lack of respect.

Some will recognize this as assertiveness. Assertiveness is the result of respect. Having respect is inspired by a devotion to the rights of human beings to self-determination, liberty, and information, but is a perfect balance between our own individual rights and the rights of others.

Respect also involves an acceptance of the notion of responsibility. Like rights, it is the perfect balance between accepting responsibility for our own actions, thoughts, or feelings, and holding others accountable for the impact of their behavior, thoughts, and feelings.

Self-Worth and Depreciation

Self-worth is frequently based on our feelings of worth in terms of our skills, achievements, status, financial resources, or physical attributes. This kind of self-esteem or self-worth often cultivates an independent and arrogant attitude. When we find ourselves not measuring up to society's criteria for worth, we suffer serious consequences. Our self-worth depreciates dramatically. The illusion of being successful and admired gives way to disillusionment as our possessions and achievements that once nourished our souls fail to satisfy our appetites. Every individual experiences basic needs -- hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc. We are conditioned to satisfy these needs by *getting* something -- food, drink, or rest. Mistakenly we conclude that by getting, we will achieve an acceptable self-worth/esteem. Nothing depreciates self-worth faster than regret, anger, or fear. The apostle Paul *"learned the secret of living in every situation"* (Philippians 4:11-13). Self-esteem is an attitude of respect for and contentment with oneself based on the recognition of one's abilities and acceptance of one's limitations.

Self-Worth and Inflation

It is impossible for you to conjure up self-worth/esteem yourself. That feeling of happiness in acquiring something is a poor substitute for the true joy of contributing. The pursuit of perfection and approval drives us steadily farther from peace and self-confidence. If we focus our attention on our worldly resources, we will inflate ourselves with pride. Jesus reminds His apostles of true worthiness. *" . . . The servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We*

are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty'' (Luke 17:10). A healthy self-worth is the result of remarkable life-change and understanding who we are in God's eyes. Change happens to all of us. We will experience physical and mental growth, personal experiences, and changing social situations that will affect our identity. Identity is a person's sense of placement in the world -- that which tethers us to our self-worth. Our identity can easily be over-inflated when our self-worth is miscalculated. It is healthy to remember, as we mature and circumstances change, that we are not bound by how other people evaluate us. "*. . . We turned our backs on him [Jesus] and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised and we did not care*" (Isaiah 15:3). As the Son of God, Jesus' self-worth was never inflated or depreciated by circumstances or those around Him. No amount of praise (inflation) or condemnation (depreciation) could alter His self-worth (Philippians 2:5-11). How then are we to achieve a life-sustaining self-worth?

Self-Worth and the Exchange Rate

Real self-worth is entirely internal. It's realizing the true source of your usefulness and value. "*For God bought you with a high price . . .*" (1 Corinthians 7:20)). Our self-esteem needs to be based on the honor God gives us (Psalms 8:3-5). We are a priceless treasure, the object of His infinite love (Romans 8:38-39). God's exchange rate for our imperfect lives makes our self-worth incalculable (John 3:16).