

Case Study: Dealing with Self-Esteem and Ego

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[0 : 00] our way through a series on biblical counseling for everybody. And so I'll pray for us, and then we can get moving. So let's pray together.

Lord, we thank You for this time. We thank You for the opportunity to gather. And we pray now that You would help us as we look at Your Word and try to understand more and more how to be people who come alongside one another to support one another, encourage one another, help one another step more and more towards maturity in Christ.

So we ask for that help by the Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen. All right, so there's a handout. Simon's got handouts at the back if you need one. All right, so we have been working through, trying to understand more and more some principles, some practical tips on how to come alongside one another as Christian friends, counselors, people who support one another in the walk of faith.

And so our goal in this series is just to grow into that more and more. So tonight what we're going to do is begin a case study. We'll do one case study tonight, and I'll be teaching in this series two or three more times, and every time I'm going to do a case study.

So a case study of examining a particular issue, some of the most common issues I'll pick, and we'll try to look at how might you help somebody else walk through that issue as a Christian.

[1 : 30] So some ways to think about it and look at it, really just applying some of the things Ryan talked about last time. All right, so let's get into it. The case study tonight is going to be dealing with the problem of self-esteem and ego, which is a universal issue according to Genesis 3.

So let's think about that together. But first let me just remind you of a couple things we've said already just to kind of reorient into what we're doing here. We are dealing with something that's very similar to the issue of evangelism, and that's that a lot of times in church we get the sense that, we've had the sense maybe in the past that ministers are the primary ones doing the work of ministry, evangelism, counseling, meeting people's spiritual needs.

And I've got here printed Ephesians 4, 11 to 12, and it says here that Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

So here we see very explicit instructions from Paul that tell us that all the times God gives gifts to people in the church to lead the church, from the time of the apostles to evangelists to the missionary evangelists like Paul to the prophets, which is just a preacher really, teachers.

He gives gifts not so that the people with the gifts will do all the ministry, but so that the people will example the ministry for everybody to do, to equip all the saints.

[3 : 01] So if you're a Christian tonight, it's your job, our job together, to do the work of ministry, to do it all together. That's what we learn here. And so Richard Baxter here says, this is his reflection.

This is a 17th century minister. It was quite famous at the time, English minister. He says, Counseling is for resolving our doubts, helping against our sins, helping fight our sins, for direction in our duties, and for an increase of knowledge of saving grace.

So he's saying that we're all meant to come alongside one of each other for at least those purposes. And that's a calling that's universal, that comes across the whole church. And so we said in week one that there is a gap in our lives.

For all of us, we all feel this gap between who we are right now, the negative emotions you experience, the ways that you struggle with pride or a sin pattern that you know in your life right now, in the person you will one day be in Jesus Christ.

So one day, every single issue that you struggle with that is sucking away your joy, will be gone. One day. So there's a gap. When Christ comes to get you, he will renew you so fully, that you will be so full of joy, that you will only have faint memories of the problems you used to face.

[4 : 22] Now what counseling is there for, is to help us in the path of sanctification. What we're trying to do is to close that gap as much as we can in this life, right? That's sanctification. Moving from being called justification to the moment of glorification, where we will become fully like Jesus.

We want to close that gap as much as we can. Not simply to make progress, not simply to check that off our to-do list, not out of performance, but because actually you can have joy.

You can have real joy the more you grow. And so we're trying to help each other grow. That's really all we're talking about in this series. And so Hebrews 3.13 gives you a really explicit command about that.

So if we want to ask, where do we get this from in the Bible? Hebrews 3.13, which is, Hebrews is a sermon, right? And the preacher says to the church in Hebrews 3, exhort one another every day as long as it is called today.

In other words, he's saying, while you have today, exhort one another. Now, exhort sounds like a negative word, but it's the Greek word parakaleo.

[5 : 26] And the Greek word parakaleo simply means one who comes alongside somebody else and walks with them. So the paraclete in the New Testament is who?

The Holy Spirit. Yeah, so exactly. We're being told in a way that's similar to the way God comes, the Spirit ministers to us, that we are charged to come alongside other people and minister to them.

And so we're just calling that counseling. Parakaleo, one another. Come alongside one another. That's it. And so we want to universalize this. We want everybody in our church to have a dear Christian friend that they are walking alongside in their life, that's talking with them about their issues, that you're able to confess your sins to one another, you're able to grow together in the same direction.

That's all this really means. So let's think about this case study. How can you help somebody? And, of course, ourselves. This applies to all of us, but we're trying to think how we can help other people with the issue of esteem, self-esteem and ego.

So the first, I've just listed some things to pay attention to here. There's eight. The first couple are prerequisites. First couple things are, before we deal and help other people in our lives, we need to be in a path where we are focusing on our own devotional life.

[6 : 46] That's really all. So number one, we must be actively addressing our own negative emotions and devotion before God in order to help other people. So all I mean by that is not, are you extremely spiritually mature and therefore ready to walk alongside somebody else in the Christian life?

That's not the question here at all or the idea here at all. Instead, are you limping with the Lord in a forward-facing direction? Limping, struggling forward.

That's really the idea. So do you have a fight in you for a devotional life? Do you have a fight in you to know yourself enough to say, these are my idols?

Do you have enough fight right now in your heart to say, I'm able to look at myself and recognize the hidden sins? So, and I want that. That's all we're talking about. A real life, not of total victory, because that's glorification, but a life where you are intentionally seeking sanctification.

So that's where we've got to be. That's a prereq for being able to help other people. So as long as we can sit alongside somebody else who's walking the path of the Christian life, but maybe struggling and say, me too.

[7 : 57] This is how I've been fighting that. This is how I've been dealing with that. That's really what we're talking about here. Now secondly, remember the principles of parakaleo, of coming alongside one another.

Number two. Now I'm not going to go through these because this is what we did the first couple meetups for this series. But I'll just list them. Number one, come and meet with Christian friends, quick to listen, active listening, ready to hear.

Number two, pray for compassion and understanding prior to meeting with them. Be very intentional about that. Number three, meet them where they are.

So don't be surprised by their lack of growth. You know, so if somebody confesses something to you and you immediately, it's like, goodness gracious, you know, that doesn't, they don't want to meet with you anymore. Okay.

They're, they feel like they've, they've been the object of your gaze. They want somebody who can say, I want to help. I want to walk alongside you in this. Number four, remember the goal.

[8 : 58] The goal is encouragement, building up. The goal is to help them take a step. Your dear friend, to take a step towards Christ. Trust, however that might look. Number five, be ready to carry their burden with them.

To say, you know, I'll, I'll stick with you in this as long as it takes, as long as you want me to. Number six, be trustworthy. It's between you and them. It's, it's just you guys.

Only expand that circle if they're, if they want you to, if you ask permission. And then number seven, remember that all scripture is useful. So we've got to have some ability.

So this is where the counseling comes in. This is where the parakaleoing really becomes effective. It's an ability to take the Bible and to take God's word and apply it to people's lives. So some ability, not, not like you've been to seminary, nothing like that, not at all, but simply, and sometimes you go to seminary and you, you walk away and you're not as good as you were before.

Maybe, but an ability, a heartfelt ability to take a text and to help somebody else feel, feel the power of that text for them. So that's, that's what we mean by case study.

[10 : 07] Okay. So let's talk about the problem for 15 minutes of esteem and ego. What is that problem? So we're listening to a dear friend.

We're looking at our own hearts. We're recognizing a problem with what is called self-esteem. Okay. Let me try, let's see if anybody's willing.

What do you, what do we mean by, what do you think of? I should ask, let me ask it this way. What do you think of when I mentioned the problem of esteem and ego? Any synonyms, any just single word answers or a full sentence, either way, but any thoughts?

Pride, yeah. So pride or despair. Yeah. Pride and despair. Yeah. I think that's, that's insightful. Come back around to that.

Yep. You can have low self-esteem and feel so inferior that it becomes an inferiority complex, which is a reverse type of pride, right?

[11 : 09] Yeah. Good. Yeah. Really good, thoughtful answers there. So all we mean by this is the problem of esteem. What is esteem? Esteem is estimation, right?

There's a family of words there, and it means the, the, the inward look at yourself to ask the question, do I have value? So when you esteem yourself, the most basic sense of that word etymologically is, am I valuable?

Do I have value? And you can have high self-esteem, right? Which is very obvious, big, boastful pride, right? So we, we know somebody, we know if we're listening carefully to a friend, if we're walking alongside them, we can usually recognize pretty obviously if they struggle with boasting.

That's a sure sign of a, of a high self-esteem issue. Another sign would be constantly turning conversations back to themselves. Another sign would be one-upmanship, right?

So a constant need to tell a better story than the story you just told. And we can think of hundreds of more ways where high self-esteem, arrogant self-esteem, a high regard of self comes out very clearly and very explicitly.

[12 : 21] And then, like Jean mentioned, you can have a very low view of self. So, some, some folks really struggle with self-loathing and self-hatred and they're asking the question, am I worth anything?

Am I valuable? And so we're always running, every single person, so the reason I chose this is because there's nobody that's not running this rat race, alright? There's nobody that's not on this hamster wheel.

It's just where are you with it? That's all. So there's a sense in which we never graduate from being psychological S1s. It's a psychological S1. It's where you walk into every room and you think, what does everybody in this room think about me?

Right? That's the psychology of an S1. And, and that's, that's true of all of us in a sense. So that happens at work, that happens in the local church, that happens. And you better believe that ministers are incredibly prone.

Better believe that, that they're in the hamster race and the rat race, hamster wheel and rat race every week of, I'm only as valuable as the sermon was last weekend. Right? That's something that has to be mortified constantly in a minister's life.

[13 : 24] And so we're all living in this issue of ego and esteem. So it's a really common problem. I'll give you a couple more examples. If you're a parent at all, or if you've worked with kids and teens, you see it.

Kids and teens wear this much more outwardly and explicitly. But, the need to perform is a need that we never graduate from. And so, all of us could probably tell stories of our own personal struggles with this in the workplace, in the university, in family.

It happens all the time in family. Even people vying for love between parents or spouse or sibling. So we're always running this. Okay, let me ask you.

Where might you take somebody to help them deal with this? Number four says here, talk briefly maybe about your own struggles in ego and low self-esteem or high self-esteem, but then let me jump to number five.

This is where counseling starts to really happen. And that's when you can effectively, meaningfully, sincerely use what God says to help somebody's life, to help their heart and soul.

[14 : 43] Alright, so, let me ask a question again. Any passages, any stories, anything that comes to your mind, okay if not, but I think there's more than one answer to this, to dealing with the problem of self-esteem and pride, low self-esteem, high self-esteem, really there's the same types of solutions that we need?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, so, you know, you can think of the steadfast love of the Lord in some of the Psalms. He is my refuge, my strength, my ever-present shield, Psalm 3, a shield all around me, no matter what anybody thinks about me.

Yeah. So, we walk in every room and we think, at the bottom of our souls, what does everybody in this room think about me? What other passages might help us deal with that?

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, that's good. Yeah, Christ's recovery of Peter's heart after such shame. Peter went back to fishing, right, because that was his original day job before Jesus has called him because he thought, I'm out, I'm out.

[16 : 12] You know, I denied Christ, I'm on the outside looking in, he will never love me again and yet he comes to him and says, get out of the boat, come to the shore, let's have breakfast together, right, that's good.

That's a nice narrational story of what Christ has done that could be used. Let me point you to one tonight that I think is really helpful and I've used this in prayer quite often.

I've used this on my heart. This has been a passage that I've come back to constantly to deal with the issues of ego and it is in 1 Corinthians 4.

So, if you were to read the full section, you would go from probably 1 Corinthians midway through chapter 3 through chapter 4 with somebody but let me just point you to 1 Corinthians 4 and I'll just read a couple verses for us just from verse 2 for a few verses.

Paul says, moreover, it's required of stewards that they be found faithful. He's talking about pastors, ministers there. But with me, it is a very small thing.

[17 : 16] It's a very small thing. I've learned, he's telling us, to make this a small thing in my life. That I should be judged by you or by any human court.

In fact, I do not even judge myself. I'm not currently aware of anything against myself but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Okay, in this passage, Paul is dealing with an issue in the Corinthian church that he had planted where Apollos and Peter had come through later and everybody's been saying in Corinth, Peter's better than Paul, Apollos is better than Peter and Paul.

Apollos was such a better preacher than Paul ever was and then they're saying, then others are saying, Apollos disciplined me so I rank before you because Paul, you know, wasn't as good of a public speaker as Apollos was and so there's all these sorts of issues going on like that.

So everybody's playing the comparison game. Everybody is and Paul is writing to deal with that problem and Paul, like he does in other places, is saying, I have learned in my time with the Lord, my devotional life, a secret, a secret of contentment and the secret of contentment is this, I do not care what you say about me and I don't care and then he shocks because you see that's exactly what the modern world says as well.

So a person might be getting counsel to struggle, they're struggling so much with feeling that they have no value because they're worried about what everybody else is saying about them and they're asking why is this, why don't I have a relationship that I want, why don't I have the job success and career that I want, why don't I have this or that, right, everybody's asking questions like that, we all are and Paul comes and says what modern counselors will say, you don't need to care about other people's opinions but then the modern counselor often will turn and say all you need to care about is what?

[19 : 22] your own opinion of yourself, you need to look inside and you need to think, look, I'm happy with who I am, I've got the resources within me to find contentment and that's the shock of this passage for a modern reader is Paul comes and says, I don't even care what I think about me so I do not trust my opinion of myself, right, and it's real key to contentment and joy in your life to not trust your opinion about yourself and he's saying I don't trust my opinion, I don't trust your opinion Corinthian church and I don't trust the opinion I have about me and he uses the language of judge, why?

Because he's taking it into the courtroom and he's saying you have stuck me in the dock and you've put yourself on the bench and said Paul was not as good of a speaker as Apollos and Paul, you know, therefore Paul just didn't really leave the legacy around here that people came after him too and he's saying I won't sit underneath that judgment I won't let my heart sit underneath that and I won't let my heart sit underneath my own judgments about myself and then he gives a solution so for the person that you're walking alongside and for all of us tonight we need to hear probably to some degree every single day the pronouncement all that matters is what God says about me he's the only judge that really matters he's the only one that has the right to look at me from the bench and put me in the dock and if you read the rest of this passage what you realize is what Paul goes on to talk about what God does say in an implicit way so what God says about you is that when you look at Christ you can say he regards me as a prince and a princess he regards me as a son and a daughter he regards me as the one that no matter what I do no matter what he will still get down on his knee accept my teary head into his shoulder and give me a hug and bring me home again he's a tender father that's what he's saying okay so what does a person need who's either struggling with deep self-loathing deep self-loathing or big arrogant pride they both need the same thing they need to be told see both both are pride issues because both people are thinking all I care about is what everybody else thinks about me or all I care about is what I think about me and how I feel both are pride issues and they can either lead to total self-hatred or total self-love big self-love right and competition it's all competition and both persons need to hear the same thing they need to hear all that matters is what the Lord says about you and when you hear that it will really humble the prideful person because if they're being honest what the Lord says about you is you're a big sinner in need of a big savior and you're not great apart from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and for the self-loathing person they need to hear do you know what the Lord says about you do you know how much the Lord loves you do you know how much he's promised he will never let you go you know that he regards you as a prince and princess in his kingdom that he wants to give you the inheritance that he's giving

Jesus Christ himself right alright so what what do you do with that as a counselor then you take that and you try to massage that into their hearts not because you're trying to be manipulative but because it's true and number six here is prescribe some spiritual exercises now what do I mean by this okay just like you've got to work out you know if you want to get stronger you've got to have resistance in your life you've got to exercise something like that in the same way our souls much more importantly have to have exercise physical training Paul says is of some value but he's trying to point to the more important thing and that's spiritual training so there does have to be spiritual training in our lives so one of the pieces that may be missing in point one and then here in our lives in my life in your life right now is I'm not taking seriously enough the discipline of spiritual exercise and they need spiritual exercise too so what does that look like it can look like a number of different things we could talk about the normal means of grace so one of the questions

I want to ask a person who's really struggling with their heart with too much pride or too low of a view of the self is I want to say are you going to church do you just you know you might struggle and not want to but you need to be there you need to get out of bed you need to go to church especially the person that's self-loathing I want to just connect them and ask are you in the normal means of corporate grace the corporate means of grace that God's given us but then I want to turn and talk about their private lives and help them and say and say it through the lens of this is what has helped me this is what this is how I've thought about this this is what has really been helpful to my life and my heart and the most important thing I think I can say quickly is this they really need to learn or be helped with the idea of Christian meditation so what is Christian meditation Christian meditation is not vacating the mind of content like in Buddhist meditation or something like that not at all

Christian meditation we see all across the Psalms and that's the daily consistent pattern of talking to yourself about what God says so David does this all the time in the Psalms he says bless the Lord oh my soul right who's he talking to in that Psalm he's talking to himself he's saying David you bless the Lord oh my soul soul you've got to you've got to get yourself in gear and start blessing the Lord praising God right he's actually talking to himself and then he's letting that roll into prayer so one of the things I would really say to a person that's struggling with big pride or self-loathing and we've gotten to have an honest conversation about that and I've said you know 1 Corinthians 4 all that matters is what God says I would say why don't you every single day for the next seven days every morning read that passage 1 Corinthians 4 1 to 4 and then just sit there in ten minutes with your eyes closed and let it soak over you this morning as I go to work as I go to perform at my job as I go to perform in public spaces all that matters is what the Lord says about me all that matters is what the Lord says about me look to Christ let that soak in over and over and then after five or so minutes of just reflection on that let it roll into prayer

[26 : 02] Lord work this into my soul change me change me plead with the Lord and then that would be one there's other spiritual practices and exercises that they could have and they may need but for the lack of time I'll move on and then from there what you do as a dear Christian friend a good Christian friend is you make a plan to meet again and to address this issue in a week and let's say let's meet back up I want to ask you how that went I want to ask you if you feel like there's been change I want to ask you what the condition of your soul is seven days from now in regard to this you could also ask questions like what other passages could we look at together next time say do that for seven days and then next time why don't we look together at this specific psalm just read it together and pray it together next time you could ask from there what book could we read what book of the bible what book so in this instance I would highly recommend short books are wonderful for helping people I would say

I would love to read Tim Keller's The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness with you can we do I'll buy it I'll bring it to you next time do this for seven days let me bring this book to you next time and let's walk through it together and then lastly we said this a few weeks back but make sure that you never leave a meeting like this a meeting walking with somebody without praying so pray for them encourage them and then I've just listed finally at the very end use calls and text messages so the the unfortunate thing about the modern world we live in is that we can all be reached all the time yeah and the beautiful thing is that it's so quick and easy to reach somebody and so it's it's a tough call on that but use text messages for ministry use calls for ministry it's you don't you don't have to be getting together as often maybe if you're just checking in and saying hey I just prayed for you did you read 1 Corinthians 4 this morning 1 to 4 and meditate on it

I thought about it I read it I thought about it I'm praying it for you today get back in if you haven't done it get back in right so this is this is using the tools we have in modern technology to really work truth into somebody's life okay let me give you a challenge as we close the challenge is just I'm saying this to me I'm saying this to all of us when we're talking about this and doing a series like this we go back to Ephesians 4 and we learn all of us are called all of us are called to the ministry of exhortation and that's all we've been describing is the ministry of exhortation parakalea coming alongside so wherever you are right now the challenge is we should all in the light of that be receiving Paul's call God's call in our lives right now to take a next step in that ministry so maybe the next step towards a more meaningful ministry of parakalea coming alongside somebody is just to say you know what tonight I realize

I've got to get my devotional life under grips not because that saves me no it does not but because I need the Lord the Spirit to be dealing with my heart in order that I can help other people deal with their hearts so tonight it may just simply be that the next step of being a counselor is to actually let the Holy Spirit be counseling you in morning devotion that might be all that you take away and so the issue here is not who in the room has 100% devotional life every single day perfectly nobody does right nobody are you just simply taking limping steps forward that's all we're talking about in growth in this area and then if you feel like you are in a place right now where God is working in your life he's dealing with your emotions he's helping you see idols fighting negative emotions that are coming up and it's a struggle but at least you're in the struggle you're in the fight then the next step could be who has God very naturally put in my life right now ideally in St. Columbus but maybe externally that's great too to say could we have a more meaningful regular meet up together once a month twice a month and answer a few questions how have you been in your spiritual life your soul have you been meeting with God in the early mornings whatever the question lists need to be depending on your circumstances taking a step of saying could we meet regularly and talk about this we all need that so it goes both ways when we do things when we take that step alright let's pray

Father we ask that you would help us by the spirit to desire more and more of you that we would want more and more of you in our lives that we would want to be with you Lord so maybe Father that's the prayer we ask tonight that you would help us to want to be with you and therefore to become more like you and then to externalize that to help other people be with you and become more like you and so that's really our request tonight so I pray that you would work in our hearts with the problem of esteem and ego whether it's very high in our lives right now very low bring it to whatever it looks like to be Christ-like we ask we pray this in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen