

I like to talk and have an opinion on most things so when Joe asked if anyone was interested in doing a 5 min focus some Sunday I volunteered.

When it came to deciding what to talk about I decided to focus on something I often struggle with which is self-esteem.

I have always had low self-esteem throughout my life. I “excel” at tearing myself down and criticizing myself.

I have always been a bit of a loner and seem to end up watching from the outside in. My shyness and quiet demeanour always seem to set me up for bullies. I was a pushover throughout my school years. I would allow others to use me - as long as they liked me it was fine - right? But if they didn't like me or include me that meant something was wrong with me - was that right too?

In college I was involved in drama chapels. In my 3rd year of college I helped co-write a few of the plays. Our last play of the school year dealt with spiritual warfare of our characters. During the play we would meet our characters in the lies that Satan tells us and then we would see Christ speak His Truth and dispel the darkness. My co-writer and I wrote using listening prayer and she mentioned how I heard the lies quite well and then quickly apologized. I agreed with her since I had believed most of those lies throughout my life and possibly still believed some of them.

I am someone who has never had a career. Instead I have moved from job to job. Because of this I have been part of many job prep groups where you focus on applying and preparing for interviews. Despite this I still struggle - cover letters where you need to sell yourself and your abilities. I still don't know how to tell the company that I can do the job if you just hire me and show me what you want done.

Then you have the interview questions - some of those were the talking points on the backside of the bulletin. What was the easiest for you to answer?

Where do you see yourself in 5yrs? I am not good at setting goals for my personal life because I never seem to meet them - and they often change as my life circumstances change. I live more in the present. I want to pay my bills and buy dog food - I need income to be able to fulfill simple life needs.

What is your greatest strength? I used to really struggle to see anything good about myself but have learned to stand back and see some good points especially as it relates to being a good employee.

What is your greatest weakness? My 1st reaction is still the same - you have no clue what kind of bottle of worms you are opening. Job wise you are supposed to talk about a weaker skill that you are trying to improve. Personally, I still find this question triggering - My neg aspects stand out so much to me - I look at myself and see so much

wrong - it may stem from my depression which seems to easily exaggerate and emphasize the neg.

I have had to learn that to start seeing myself differently I need to change how I speak to myself and to those around me. If you wouldn't say it to someone else why is it ok to say it to yourself?

Maybe that is why I resonate with songs like Victoria's Secret by Jax. We live in a world where an old man in Ohio can dictate what beauty is but we don't have to agree with him anymore. We can see a more diverse beauty around us and within ourselves. Sticks and stones might break your bones but words can leave a devastating scar on someone's soul. I have matured enough to know that a bully is the one with the issues and not you. In the moment I can seem to brush off their words but living with anxiety their words often come back later and do their damage. The lies of bullies have pushed me to the edge and I am more aware of words and how they can be used as swords/daggers.

It is easy to listen to the lies and to see how "true" those lies are - the evidence can seem everywhere. It is harder to see yourself as God sees you. It is hard to give yourself grace but it is necessary to love ourselves so that we can be able to love others. You cannot give from an empty cup. But sometimes filling your cup can be tricky and it needs to be constant. You can't fill it once and then never again.

To help fill my cup I am learning to remove toxic words and phrases from my vocabulary - like supposed to/should be and then changing it to can/able to, etc... I personally cannot just remove - I need to remove and replace with healthy words and phrases.

I have slowly been learning to love myself better - therapy/counselling, meds and much self work. I have surrounded myself with good/healthy words - calendars & posters are hung up everywhere, I write words on my mirrors. Even the shirts I wear are often words and phrases that I need to remind myself of.

It is a life long process that doesn't always get easier but the reward is always so important.

I want to leave you with the thought of how do you see yourself and how can you love yourself even a little bit better.