

August 13, 2017

Rev. Christine Tiller Bohn, Ph.D.

Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church, Greeneville, Tennessee

[All Scripture quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise noted.]

## Psalm 8 Unshakeable Worth

What are you worth?

Have you ever felt like you were barely worth the space you took up on the planet? Like everybody else would be better off if you just crawled under a rock and disappeared? Have you ever felt convinced, even for a little while, that you were too slow to be worthwhile, too fat, too lonely, too much of a failure or a burden, too one-thing-or-another to be worthwhile?

It's a common problem.

The world offers all sorts of solutions to this problem. You need more of something...more money, a younger/prettier wife who will make you feel more of a man, a prince charming who will increase your value as a woman, a more perfect body, more success, more recognition, more, more, more.

Not all of the solutions offered by the world are material. You can increase your worth, according to the world, by being more generous, more needed, or more admired for your good qualities.

Most of us would agree that some of these measures of worth are more positive than others. Still, from the vainest to the most noble, all of these measures of worth are based on comparison.

There's a problem with that. As long as my worth is based on how I measure up against somebody else, I am doomed to ride a roller-coaster of highs and lows. If money is my measure, then a bad day in the stock market will send my worth spiraling down. If a really nice car or phone or pair of shoes makes me feel worthwhile, then as soon as the next model comes out I'll start to fade. If your genes cooperate, you might be strong and good-looking, athletic and able. Someday age or disease or accident is going to take its toll. You might be the nicest person around. One day you are going to get up on the wrong side of the bed and say something that would have been better left unsaid. If our sense of self-worth is based on some measure of comparison, then it is unstable, insecure, and desperately unreliable.

And so, according to the world, we need even more. More money. The newest gadget, even if the old one works just fine. Botox and hair implants. More hiding and more acting, so that people won't notice character flaws.

Well, what if I compare myself just with myself?

Some guy shared his personal philosophy of self-worth on the internet. He rejected all of the success-based measures of worth, rightly concluding that success-based measures require perfection and perfection is unattainable. He decided that he would measure his self-worth based on his commitment to trying to maximize his goodness. As long as he's trying to be worthwhile, then he is worthwhile.

What happens on those days when he doesn't feel like committing himself to maximum goodness? Does he fritter away his worth as he fritters away his time? What

about people who aren't giving much attention to maximizing their goodness? Is a rebellious teenager not a worthwhile human being? Is a person trapped in the hold of an addiction not a worthwhile human being? Is a person buried in the depths of depression or worn down by disease not a worthwhile person? Is a child in the womb, not yet even aware of self, not a worthwhile human being?

Measuring self-worth in comparison to self is just as unstable, insecure, and desperately unreliable as any other measure of comparison.

Those who are in Christ are called to become--by the grace of God--like Christ. We are called to set the interests of others before our own--to lay down our lives for our friends; to love our neighbors as ourselves; to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; to give of ourselves for the sake of others and for the glory of God--not so that we can feel good about ourselves, but because we are unconcerned about our own goodness.

Unconcerned about our own goodness--that might be a good way to think about humility.

A key characteristic of Christlikeness is humility. Does that mean we are supposed to think poorly of ourselves, that we are supposed to think of ourselves as having little worth? No. Humility is not a lack of self-worth. Humility does not require low self-esteem. In fact, low self-esteem is likely to make true humility impossible.

For Jesus, humility was not an abandonment of his self-worth but an expression of his self-worth. Jesus had unshakeable confidence in the Father's love for him. He knew who he was, whom he belonged to, and what his purpose was. Because he was worth everything, he made himself nothing.

Humility requires being so confident of your own worth that you can be unconcerned about it. Humility requires a sense of worth that is not based on comparison and not subject to changing circumstances. Humility--which is key to self-giving Christ-like love--is not rejection of self-worth but an expression of self-worth.

Where do we get a sense of worth like that, worth that is not measured by comparison and not subject to changing circumstances, worth that does not require getting more, doing more, or trying harder? What is the source of a worth so unshakeable that we can be utterly unconcerned about it?

In the first chapter of Genesis, we are told: "God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." You and I are created in the image of God. Each person you love is created in the image of God. Each person you don't love is created in the image of God. Nothing can compare. After all your savings are depleted, you will still be created in the image of God. After your car is leaving oil stains on your driveway, you will still be created in the image of God. After your knees start creaking and your strength fails, you will still be created in the image of God. When your emotions are running amok, you are still created in the image of God. After you have experienced failure or rejection, betrayal or tragedy, you are still created in the image of God.

We can distort the image of God in ourselves, hide it, even reject it, but we cannot erase it. The image of God within each human being does not vary. Its value is the same on your best days and on your worst days. As long as you focus on God to assess your worth, nothing can diminish your sense of worth.

What is that worth? What is the image of God worth? What value does God place on human beings created in the image of God?

Jesus is God's only Son and the only human being ever to carry God's image without distortion and without disguise. Father and Son suffered the cross for the sake of God's image in you. God held nothing back for you. As long as you focus on God to assess your own worth, your sense of worth will be unshakeable.

Maybe you're wondering--what if I don't focus on God, what then? Well, then, God's opinion doesn't change. God decided long before you were born that you were worth it, and he isn't going to change his mind.

When you know your worth is unshakeable, you can be unconcerned with your own goodness. When you know your worth is unshakeable, by the grace of God, you can set the interests of others before your own; you can lay down your life for your friends; you can love your neighbor as yourself; you can clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

When we know our worth is unshakeable, we can give of ourselves for the sake of others and for the glory of God, not so that we can feel good about ourselves but because we are unconcerned about our own goodness.

Psalm 8 says that God made humankind just a little lower than the angels. That's in the New International Version, the translation I most often use. Other translations are more bold in their translations. This is the way Psalm 8 sounds from The Contemporary English Version:

Our LORD and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth! You let your glory be seen in the heavens above. With praises from children and from tiny infants, you have built a fortress. It makes your enemies silent, and all who turn against you are left speechless. I often think of the heavens your hands have made, and of the moon and stars you put in place. Then I ask, "Why do you care about us humans? Why are you concerned with us weaklings?" You made us a little lower than you yourself, and you have crowned us with glory and honor. You let us rule everything your hands have made. And you put all of it under our power--the sheep and the cattle, and every wild animal, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and all ocean creatures. Our LORD and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!

The king of heaven and earth created the angels to be his servants and messengers. The king of heaven and earth created humankind to be his family and to reign with him. Joined to the Son of God, we become his adopted brothers and sisters. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we gain our inheritance.

You are loved. You have nothing to prove. You need to nothing to prove your worth to God. God has already proven your worth. Because you cannot destroy your worth, you can live up to your worth.

In Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, wrapped up in amazing grace, you can set the interests of others before your own. You can lay down your life for your friends.

You can love your neighbor as yourself. You can clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

You can give yourself away...you can make yourself nothing...and still your worth is unshakeable.

Thanks be to God.