

*Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall - Who is the Fairest One of All? - Snow White*

I think the worst thing that happened in my marriage split-up was losing me. I actually got a talking to by my co-workers about spending too much time in the bathroom. What they missed is that is where the mirror was. I hate looking at the mirror. All I see is my eyes. Secretly, I have a tick. Someone dear to me said they could see me in my eyes. That has freaked me out. Yet, there I stood, night after night, searching my eyes in the mirror. What do I see in the mirror? My eyes? What did they see? That's where I began a journey of finding me in the mirror.

Worse than that, after my split-up I had only me. There was no-one else. Who am I in the mirror? Some trusting people loved to trash talk me. It was extremely confusing. Who to believe? So, at work I had panic attacks. To compound that, I became a Christian and everything changed. I was not doing well. In the silent bathroom, I stood in the mirror. My world turned upside down. Who was in my mirror?

Relationships are built on our self-esteem meter. Huh? I believe it. In counseling, I was told that my marriage could only be saved with a strong me. She advised me that the person I was then, could not cut it in a relationship. What was she talking about? I had been married for over 11 years, I'm fine! I was reading this article in The Nepali man magazine about self-esteem. Their view on esteem was that *how you rate yourself is everything*. Seems to me that my counselor, so many years ago, was right. I was not strong inside. I did not rate myself very highly. That hurt my relationships.

Unfortunately, I have met far too many people who bash people's character. Unfortunately, for me, they were my friends and family. People I put trust in. It's possible that

my self-esteem meter was quite low. I have been told I am fine, yet, negative voices from loved one's kept ringing in my head. How do you make them go away? Too many books have been written on esteem, empowerment, and habits to make me believe there is a solid answer. The war with self-esteem begins in your head. What do you believe about yourself? Finding "you" could begin with a long trek, counseling, or in your mirror. Books are good, but it ultimately begins with you in the mirror.

Some well-meaning people have said they just refused to believe it. Believe what? That you either have confidence or you don't. These people claim they know the truth about themselves. They insist that they have this thing called self-confidence. For most people it's something to hold high. Many have said to me that they are self-confident. Another thing I have noticed is that many people are misguided in self truth. Nobody holds the key to self-confidence.

Each one of us have great character traits. Some are a benefit and others are a flaw. Yet, they make us who we are. We will let ourselves down at times. Self-confidence is a meter. There are ebbs and flows. Self-confidence is a mirage. Have you ever heard the saying "he or she has a quiet confidence?" That's it! People who say their confident all the time are lying. I do believe many of us internally (silently) struggle with confidence.

Professional sport players struggle with their view of confidence. All they hear are lines like "Success breeds confidence." "A slump breeds doubt." Yet, players say all the time they struggle at some point during the season. There is a dance we all have with confidence. A silent internal battle between what we know and what we see in the mirror. Sometimes even great talent doubts their talent.

I know someone who is quite a militant tyrant. I believe it's just a mask. Most likely, deep within themselves is a scared little child. So, they put on this facade of arrogance and boldness to mask internal shivers. Certainly, I have talked with them and noticed their hands shake just a little. Why is it so important for someone to portray that they have it all together? Why do people bash others to level the playing field? In the mirror, the mask, struggle, and deception must be taxing. I bet they struggle looking into their eyes. I know I do.

What I've noticed about people is honesty with themselves. They either pump up their own balloon or attempt to pop the balloons around them. It's the participation medal. The lovely advice by sickening do-gooders. Bringing people down to their level with a mask of positive reinforcement. They make statements like "we all win" and "nobody is a loser." That does not help the war of self-esteem. Everyone wants their special place in the community.

These sayings are made so that nobody feels left out or less than another. Yet, clearly, I have been out skated, out run, and out classed by many. Did they hurt my little feelings? No, I should know my own strengths and weaknesses. Check these out: "One man's trash is another man's treasure" or "One person's meat is another person's poison." What suits one person might not be good for another. That does not mean anyone is less than another. Self-esteem is personal, not corporate. I should celebrate my uniqueness, not everyone else's.

People want to level the playing field by bringing others down and lifting themselves up. Self-confidence could be a hiding place. A place where we curl up in a fetal ball. Were scared and afraid that we might fail. So, we come out swinging. There is a brash confidence that barks orders. It gives its opinion far too much. It belittles ideas, and rationalizes its own decisions.

They could be narcissistic or and ego maniac. These people will do and say anything to appear stronger than you. Hiding in their self-made panic room.

Do you think it's trash that you are not a good dancer? Someone else finds their treasure in dancing. Is it that big a deal that someone can run a business well? What does a failed business venture say about you? Maybe business is not your thing? So, we belittle what we don't do well. Some people put certain individuals on high pedestals and then push them off. Why? To make our weaknesses look like treasure and make success of others look like junk. It's what we do.

Why isn't what were good at good at enough? Why must we attack the talents of others? Can't we applaud those people for what they do well? We could applaud ourselves in the mirror too? Couldn't we be cheerleaders for what is successful and right in this world? Instead, so many, are angry at the talents they don't have and the weaknesses we do have. People are not just success or failure. Humans are a combination of both.

There is a saying: little boys are made of *Snips and snails and puppy-dogs' tails*. Little girls are made of *sugar and spice and everything nice*. Those characteristics are not self-confidence. It's deeper than that. Now esteem is a different cat. I don't think it's that simple as one definition. That article in Napoli man magazine also broke down esteem into three areas: shattered, vulnerable, and strong. I'm just not convinced. I think I'm a little bit vulnerable, strong, and partly shattered. In the mirror, I know me. I like Taylor Swift even if someone called me an idiot. I love aerobics although someone said I was gay. On and on I could go. People don't know what I'm made of, yet the mirror does.

Recently, I have been mildly depressed. This has been a challenging year so far. Yet, depressed? To me, any depression I have is wrapped up in those three things: vulnerable,

shattered, and strong. I am vulnerable to depressed moments. We all are. I am strong to endure these past 4 months. Victories are small but their still victories. Yet, my wife's cancer scare has shattered me too. Who wants news like that? So, day by day, my self-esteem meter moves. Were human. Our self-esteem meter is always on the move.

I have wondered if our struggles are not just about having low self-esteem. Maybe, it's about believing that who you are is worth something. That's why keeping bad people in your life is no good. It's why staying in a berating relationship is a terrible idea. To associate with horrible family, because their blood, is a false assumption. We need those people like a hole in the head. To get past low self-esteem: our worth meter needs to rise. Bad relationships lower the meter.

I have struggled with parents. There came a moment when their terrible insights were killing my self-esteem meter. My self-worth was dropping by the day. Even with our parents, how can you honor someone who is dis-honoring you? Do I respect a parent's role and effort? Sure, but not their hurtful words. Unfortunately, the mirror does not lie. Being hurt shows up in the eyes. This is so scary. Matthew 6:22-23:

*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

The Bible has so many good truths. I have seen me in the mirror with my own eyes. I know hatred, anger, love, sadness, and fear. For many years I have allowed people the right to berate me. It was polite, courteous, respectful, and the right thing to do. Yet, my heart struggled with it. In the mirror, in pain, I had enough. The councilor said I needed a strong me? How?

To me it comes down to an idea in the Bible about silver. They call it the refiners fire. The idea is that a blacksmith heats the impurities out of the silver until they can see themselves in the metal. In Bible terms, God puts us through fire to bring out the face of God. Yet, I think it's double edged. We just might see ourselves a little better too.

I think that bad ideas and false thoughts about ourselves get piled up over the years. Midlife crisis? Duh. It's not meant to be that way. We should let some stuff go. The problem is people to some degree. Bad relationships take from our self-worth meter. Why is it that there is such a backlash towards our feelings these days? People are insulted, offended and hurt so easily. Why? It's the fire, I think. We refuse to be burned by trouble, trials, and bad people. That seems like such a good thing yet, I fear it's the worse.

Instead, we are stuck in a personal panic room. They have even tried to emulate that with public, safe spaces. Really? I believe most people don't want their inner person to be known. Why? Then, there is no reason to be laughed at, ridiculed, or slandered. Hard to throw rocks at something that is not there. So, we despise individuals and applaud the common politically correct collective. It's never been about what's right. Rather, it's about protecting what's weak, different, and odd in our character.

We should embrace people as individuals. If we did that, there is the slight chance God is real. The Bible says he made everyone as individuals. Equal, but different. Somehow, we have decided that different is bad. That being weak in an area is derogatory. Those things make us look inferior. Yet, in the mirror we know the truth. You love unique things about yourself. Yes, some voices say your weak, stupid, different, and strange. The mirror does not lie. You know it. The voices are dead wrong.

Relationships are a struggle. It is how different people learn to live together. These days it seems people are disposable if things heat up. We are prone to toss people if any word is against our character. It's not about protecting our character half as much as burning them down. Therein lies the problem. A strong 'me' should not toss criticism half as much as letting it bounce off. A healthy me is my own super hero. Be confident in your character in the line of fire.

We need fire. To be challenged is very healthy. Yes, we should toss bad relationships. I have said this already, but we need to be strong so that we pick good relationships. I dare say make good relationships. I suppose we need bad relationships to know what a good one looks like. Some would argue that makes a case for being mistreated. Of course not, yet there is a difference between mistreated and criticism. Some criticism is good for the soul. We do grow from those experiences. Yes, we do.

Be warned. There is unhealthy criticism. The damage from prolonged bashing of our character is immeasurable. Let me ask you this. What breeds winning? Is it a positive attitude and encouragement? Is it ranting and berating someone because their losing? It's found in both. Experience should teach us where the line is. Experience strengthens us to make better choices. Sometimes a hard look in the mirror is needed. A healthy discussing on what you love and what burns you.

In the movie Bambi, he is shot and stumbles in the midst of a great fire. Bambi's father rises up in the flames and tells Bambi to get up. It makes me shiver. We need help, guidance, encouragement, and direction. Sometimes it's harsh, but it's always in love. In a bad relationship it's never about love. The aggressor is always looking for an angle to look better than you. Even in the mirror, if we listen to voices, we see what they see. Sometimes we need to get up on our

own. Why? It's because in reality "you" is all you have. People come and go but the "you" in the mirror remains.

In the mirror is you. Who are you? Are you a sum of the voices that put you down? Are they insisting that's it's not you in the mirror? How do they know better than you? Being an individual is so important. We all should celebrate our differences. I'm sure each one of us wants to feel special, unique, and different. The role of the bad friend or spouse is to make you second to their first. It always has been that way. Even in the mirror, they want you to see what they see. It makes me sick just thinking of all the people that said I'm not what they envision for me. Really?

If you're in a good relationship, it's precious. Equally, it's a demon if you are in a bad one. Belonging to groups like a church, club, or sport team is great. Yet, remember that people control them. That means people are still people no matter what the sign on the door says. Someone told me this story. A girl wanted to date. The dad was leery of the boy. The girl pleaded saying "don't you trust me?" The father replied "I trust you but not your nature." We need people because we belong to the human race. Relationships are awesome. Just be cautious with human nature.

As an individual, we are best suited for a handful of people. Remember, God brought different kinds of creatures to Adam. Not one of them were the right one. In the end, a part of "Adam" was needed. Someone similar, yet different. The story says that was a woman. My point is not about gender. It's that Adam knew what he wanted. God knew what to make. The moral of the story is to know yourself and know what you like. Reject what is not for you.



Were human. Wherever a human is there will be good and evil. It's just that way. I know people who have had bad experiences with a female boss. Yet, there are wonderful female bosses. Were different because you can't paint us all with the same brush. Like the Jackson Five said "one bad apple can't ruin them all." Trust is earned. Yet, trust should be offered too. We were made to risk. We are designed to try and fail. Why? It's to win of course. With humans there will always be winning and losing no matter who you are.

The mirror shows us plenty. We should trust the mirror. If something looks wrong then something is wrong. My mamma said "believe none of what you hear and half of what you see." Yet, we can trust the mirror. It knows you. People do strange things to be important. That includes making sure you're not. The mirror will never do that. It's a discipline to know and trust the mirror. To tune out the bad voices and see the clear image.

So, let's step back from the mirror for a minute. Relationships are tricky. Usually it's because of mistakes. A harsh word comes from people, even a loved one. Are those harsh words true? An action could be mistaken as a heartless act. Is it? The best thing you can do is realize who were dealing with. You are a part of people too. Human traits, good and bad, are in everyone. To understand the difference between a good and bad relationship is to decipher misunderstandings. Let's go there next.