

Today's Christian Woman

Series

LEADER'S GUIDE

Finding Confidence

Confidence comes from knowing who we are in Christ as we live for his purposes.

Verla Gillmor writes, "If your raw data is flawed, you end up with a faulty conclusion. The same is true with how we see ourselves. If we lack self-confidence, maybe we're working with flawed data." It's easy to see the evidence of this flawed data: perpetually worried expressions, stressed-out kids, wasted gifts, credit card bills with too many charges for the clothes and beauty products that promised to make us look perfect. This can't be the life God created us for.

How can we know and enjoy the special gifts God has given us? What does it mean to be God's beloved? How can we cultivate godly confidence? These are the questions we'll explore in this study.

Lesson #4

Scripture:

Psalm 71:5–6; Proverbs 3:25–26; Song of Songs 4:1–7; Jeremiah 17:5–7; John 16:27; Romans 8:38–39; 1 Corinthians 12:4–26; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19; James 2:14–17.

Based on:

"Need a Confidence Boost?" by Verla Gillmor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, May/June 2000, Vol. 22, No. 3, Page 44



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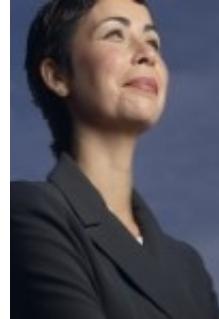
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PART 1**Identify the Current Issue**

Note to leader: Prior to the class, provide for each person the article "Need a Confidence Boost?" from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine (included at the end of this study)

Concerned about the low number of women completing graduate programs in computer science, researchers at Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley, started asking questions. They found that women were more likely than men to admit they didn't feel prepared for an exam, more likely to consider poor performance a personal failing, and less likely to pursue academic opportunities. Over half of the women who dropped out of the Berkeley program cited lack of self-confidence as a major or secondary factor in their decision. Across the board, women struggled more than men with confidence issues, even if their academic preparation and performance were equal to or better than the men's.



This reality isn't limited to the computer science field. Low self-esteem affects up to one third of the American population and has been linked to such problems as abusive relationships, anxiety, depression, divorce, eating disorders, obesity, and sexual promiscuity. These problems aren't limited to women, but women are twice as likely as men to experience a key symptom of low self-esteem: depression. Couple that statistic with the fact that anti-depressant use has more than doubled in this country since 1998, and it becomes obvious that there are a lot of hurting women out there.

Discussion starters:

Ask the questions Gillmor poses at the end of her article.

- [Q]** What judgments do you make about yourself that are, in fact, untrue? What's something wonderful about you that you've undervalued?
- [Q]** How do you typically respond when someone brags about you? Is it hard for you to receive a compliment? If so, why?
- [Q]** Do you fail to stick up for yourself when someone challenges what you know to be true?

PART 2**Discover the Eternal Principles****Teaching point one: Confidence comes from absolute trust in God.**

Read Psalm 71:5–6. This verse shows that our confidence cannot be in anything on this earth, but only in God's affection for us, which began before we'd done anything good or bad—even before our mothers knew we were coming. Our very first identity is as children of God.

Read Proverbs 3:25–26 and Jeremiah 17:5–7. Earthly circumstances and people will always disappoint us, but we can count on God to be consistent and true in the midst of difficult times.

[Q] Disappointment in self often begins in early childhood. What is your earliest memory of someone being proud of you, or of being proud of yourself? How about an early memory of someone being disappointed in you? Which memory is stronger?

[Q] Is it easy or difficult for you to imagine God as a loving father? Why?

[Q] What does being called a “child of God” tell us about our status, capabilities, limitations, and nature in God’s eyes?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. As children of God, we inherited some of his traits. These spiritual gifts are a “family resemblance,” affirming our identity.

[Q] What personality traits did you inherit from your father and mother? If you have children, what personality traits have they inherited from you? How do these similarities knit you together as a family?

[Q] What trait(s) from the list in this passage do you think you inherited? Have you ever taken a gifts inventory test or discussed the subject with a leader in your church? What traits do you see in other members of your study group?

Teaching point two: You are loved.

Read Song of Songs 4:1–7, John 16:27, and Romans 8:38–39. The first passage might come as a bit of a shock, but through most of church history, Bible interpreters have agreed that the lover in Song of Songs represents God and the beloved represents us. The more familiar New Testament verses clarify the way God feels. Insert your name in place of the word “us” in verse 39 of Romans 8, so the truth of it will sink in.

[Q] Have you ever received a love letter or a particularly romantic gift? How did it make you feel?

[Q] Is it strange for you to think of receiving love notes from God? What emotions does such an idea evoke? Is there any way we can send love notes back to him?

[Q] Hymns and praise choruses often center on the theme of God’s love for us and our love for him. What are some of your favorites?

[Q] Gillmor writes of being asked, “Are you anybody?” at a fundraising event. How would you answer that question? How might God answer for you?

Teaching point three: You have an important role to play in God’s kingdom.

Upon the foundation of a secure identity and the feeling of being loved, we build self-confidence through accomplishments. These accomplishments don’t make God love us any more than he already does, and they don’t need to be the kinds of things that get written up in the local newspaper. Rather, the good works God desires flow naturally from who he has



created us to be. Whether or not anyone else notices, these accomplishments have a profound effect on us and others around us.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–26. As you can see, these works include a commitment to the body of Christ, which depends on our particular contribution to it. Unless we are allowing God to use us to minister to other Christians, we are content for the body to limp along somewhat crippled. Satan doesn't want us to see our value to the rest of the body of Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–19. Every Christian has been given the mission to reconcile the world to God. We may do that through taking any opportunity God gives us to talk about him. Until we take up this mission, we are not fully living out the purpose for which God has made us.

Read James 2:14–17. Faith that is hidden does no one any good. As we act out our faith in deeds of love and compassion, God is glorified, and we find new confidence as we see God use our efforts.

[Q] How does living for eternal purposes boost our confidence?

[Q] Damage to one part of our bodies can sap our strength and hamper our effectiveness. What happens to the body of Christ when one part isn't functioning up to its capacity? What happens when one part tries to do too much?

[Q] We believe in salvation by grace, through faith, alone, but not in passive Christianity. What do these passages say about good works? Do the passages challenge any of your assumptions about faith?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In 1901, British Christian author G.K. Chesterton wrote (using the masculine pronouns common in his day), “There runs a strange law through the length of human history—that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird and horrible humility. This is the great fall, the fall by which the fish forgets the sea, the ox forgets the meadow, the clerk forgets the city, every man forgets his environment and, in the fullest and most literal sense, forgets himself. This is the real fall of Adam, and it is a spiritual fall. ... Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed.”

We know pride is a sin. But the wrong kind of humility—the kind that always sees the negative, devalues God’s spiritual gifts, and prevents God’s people from doing his work—can be just as destructive. And negative thinking seems to be especially problematic for women.

[Q] How can we distinguish good humility from bad humility? Confidence from pride? What’s an appropriate balance between the extremes of self-hatred and self-worship?

[Q] Looking back at 1 Corinthians 12, what part of Christ’s body do you imagine yourself to be? What are some ways you can uniquely serve your family, your church, your community, or the world?



[Q] Think of a time you accomplished something (big or small) for God's kingdom. Did that sense of accomplishment bolster your confidence? What can you do this month to build on that success?

—*Study prepared by Elesha Coffman, graduate student and former managing editor of CHRISTIAN HISTORY magazine.*

Additional Resources

-  ChristianBibleStudies.com
[Self-Esteem: Devotions by Christian Musicians](#)
[Where Do We Get Self Worth?](#)
-  *His Princess: Love Letters from Your King*, Sheri Rose Shepherd (Multnomah, 2004; ISBN 1590523318)
-  *More Power To You: Building Confidence and Self-Esteem*, Diane Smith Helder (Walch Publishing, 2002; ISBN 0825126991)
-  *Reality Check: A Survival Manual for Christians in the Workplace*, Verla Gillmor (Christian Publications, 2001; ISBN 0889651957)
-  *Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence*, Alister & Joanna McGrath (Good News Publishing, 2002; ISBN 158134371X)
-  *Self-Esteem: Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us*, Jack Kohatschek (InterVarsity, 2002; ISBN 0830830650)
-  *Wanting to Be Her: Body Image Secrets Victoria Won't Tell You*, Michelle Graham (Intervarsity Press, 2005; ISBN 0830832661)
-  "Emotional Well-Being,"
<http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6652.htm>
-  "Lack of Self-Confidence,"
<http://cse.stanford.edu/class/cs201/projects-00-01/women-faculty/confidence.html>



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ARTICLE

Need a Confidence Boost?

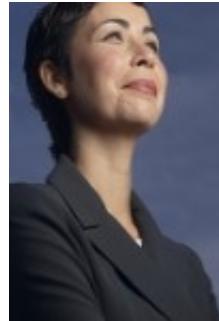
Discover these secrets to liking yourself more.

By Verla Gillmor, for the study "Finding Confidence in Our Purpose"

Recently I turned to a friend who was riding in my car and asked her, "What do you like about yourself?" We rode in silence for several minutes. Finally, she turned to me and said, apologetically, "I can't think of anything."

I was stunned. My friend is intelligent, charming, and compassionate—yet she couldn't see any of that.

I know she's not alone. Low self-esteem has become the number-one issue plaguing Christian women. Despite God's assurance that he's absolutely crazy about us, most of us can't believe he means us. It's like the cynical editor who tells the cub reporter, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out."



Check Out Your Sources

I was a reporter for 12 years. One of the first things I learned in researching a story was "garbage in, garbage out." If your raw data is flawed, you end up with a faulty conclusion. The same is true with how we see ourselves. If we lack self-confidence, maybe we're working with flawed data.

The reality is, in hundreds of subtle ways, our culture, family, friends—even our thought life—conspire to undermine our confidence. We grow up in families void of affirmation, encouragement, and respect—the building blocks to self-confidence. Then we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of a world that lionizes Size Two Hollywood starlets and Barbie-doll figures. Our paycheck, our title, our designer labels, or some other artificial yardstick gives us temporary entrée into the world of The Accepted. But in our hearts, we know it isn't real. How do we find our way to the truth?

In the J.B. Phillips translation of the Bible, Romans 12:3 reads, "Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all." Our relationship with Jesus sheds new light on who we are and what we do.



Before we can “hear” it, though, we have to identify the “dirty data” we’ve believed. We need to expose ways in which we’ve inadvertently contributed to the problem:

Comparison traps. I’m technophobic. My brother got all the genes required to understand operating manuals, to repair things, or (gasp!) to make sense of computers. When I first had to learn how to use a computer for my job, I was convinced it was the end of life as I knew it.

I remember with painful clarity a beginner’s computer class where the instructor told us to “press any key.” I searched in vain for the “any” key. By the end of the class, I was certain I wasn’t smart enough to drive myself home, much less dress for work the next day. This was despite the fact that I managed a home, a family, a job, and a professional staff.

Why was it so humiliating? Because I compared myself to the 10-year-old girl next door who effortlessly surfed the Net to research her term papers while I struggled just to log on. Instead of simply concluding that technical prowess is not one of my strengths, I concluded I must be stupid. It was a lie.

The art of the put-down. People respect us as much as we respect ourselves. That’s why the absence of self-confidence can telegraph to others not to believe in us.

For years I struggled to receive a compliment graciously. If someone complimented my hair, I’d discount it. I’d say my hairstyle made my face look fat or that my hair was a mousy color. What I really meant was, *There must be some mistake. I’m not worth your regard. I don’t like myself and can’t really believe you do, either.* The trouble is, if we persist in putting ourselves down, eventually people start to believe we’re right.

Self-doubt. Sometimes the problem isn’t faulty data. We have an accurate picture of ourselves or a situation, but we capitulate the first time someone challenges us.

Several years ago, I discovered a grape-sized lump on my left breast. My doctor scheduled outpatient surgery right away. A month later, when I resumed periodic self-examination, I felt the same lump in the same hard-to-reach place. I was certain of it! When I called the doctor to suggest he might have missed the lump in question, he insisted I was wrong. It could not possibly be a lump, he said, because he had removed it. After all, he was the doctor.

I got off the phone, doubting what I’d felt with my own hand. But fear of lethal consequences gave me the courage to insist he re-examine me, at which point he reluctantly acknowledged that, yes, it did seem to be the original lump. He removed it in a second surgery.



Reclaim the Truth

It's time to go on the offensive and regain the confidence God wants for you. Here are a few ways to get started:

Name the lies—and give them to God. Make a list of the falsehoods others have said about you (and what you've believed about yourself). Be specific. Then, agree with God that it's not how he sees you. Tell him, "God, I know you made me—and you don't make junk. These lies have got to go. I want to see myself the way you see me. Please begin the process of changing my mind."

Eugene Petersen, in *The Message* paraphrase of Romans 12:2, urges us to reject the flawed thinking of our culture and those around us: "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

Grieve the loss of what you'll never have and never be. I once knew a woman who believed the lie that she was a victim. She wasn't in an abusive situation; she wasn't poor or ill or alone. But she felt as though the world always let her down. Eventually, she confessed to God the truth—playing the victim was easier for her than dealing with her own emotional "junk." But that was only the first step. Next she had to grieve the loss of a "crutch" she couldn't use anymore. She had to find a whole new way to live.

In my case, I had to confess the lie that I was stupid because I didn't understand technical things. Yet, even after acknowledging that I'm actually a pretty intelligent person, I still had to grieve the fact that no amount of classes or training would ever completely solve my technical ineptitude!

Another lie I believed about myself was that I'd been selfish for having only one child. The truth is, I nearly died giving birth to my daughter, and my husband didn't want to adopt. Still, I spent years feeling like an inferior mother—like I should have trusted God to protect me in subsequent childbirths.

I now believe that—in my case—one child was God's will for me. I've rejected the condemnation. Nevertheless, I had to grieve that I'd never have the houseful of children I'd always wanted.

Replace the lies with the truth. God's Word is full of information about your identity and position as a believer in Jesus Christ. Let the wonder of God's perspective on you soak in. Do you fully realize what it means to be ...

Fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)

Precious to God (Isaiah 43:4)

Cared about since your conception (Isaiah 46:3)

God's child (John 1:12)



Jesus' friend (John 15:15)

Chosen by Jesus (John 15:16)

Loved dearly by God (John 16:27)

Free from condemnation (Romans 8:1)

A temple—a dwelling place—of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Redeemed and forgiven of all your sins (Colossians 1:14)

Maybe you'd prefer God say he's crazy about dishwater blondes who are 20 pounds overweight. Then you'd know he meant you. But God didn't get that specific in describing Eve! All he tells us about her in Gen. 1:27, 31 is that she was made in his image and it was very good!

He feels the same way about you.

Celebrate you! During my years as a radio news anchor and reporter in Chicago, I occasionally was called upon to participate in annual fundraising telethons. Telethon producers would round up as many media types as possible to answer phones. Most were TV news anchors with recognizable faces—the thought being they would attract viewers who would then pledge dollars to the cause. Because I worked for one of the major network affiliates, at times I was pressed into service, even though I worked in radio.

During one particular event, I stood off-camera, waiting to be told what to do. It happened during a season in my life when I was trying to figure out who I was and whether I truly liked myself. I'd been in counseling and had been studying God's Word to learn about my identity in Christ.

A twentysomething junior producer came over to me, clipboard in hand, and looked me up and down with obvious disdain. He scanned his list of "celebrity guests," then said, "Are you anybody?"

My mouth dropped open in disbelief. "Well ... no ... I'm not anybody," I said. Suddenly, the absurdity of his comment hit me and I started to laugh. "You know, once I was nobody. Does that help you? But, listen," I whispered, leaning toward him, "Now I'm somebody! I'm just not somebody you know." He shook his head, clueless, and walked away.

You, too, are somebody—somebody worth the sacrifice of what was most precious to God—his only Son. God may be the only person you'll ever know who loves you unconditionally. But once this truth soaks in, God's opinion becomes the only one that really matters.



—Verla Gillmor, a TCW regular contributor, speaker, and writer,
lives in the Chicago area.

"Need a Confidence Boost?" by Verla Gillmor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN,
May/June 2000, Vol. 22, No. 3, Page 44

Reality Checks

Pinpoint the ways you may be sabotaging yourself by answering the following questions:

What judgments do I make about myself that are, in fact, untrue? What's something wonderful about me that I've undervalued?

How do I typically respond when someone brags about me? Is it hard for me to receive a compliment—and why?

Do I fail to stick up for myself when someone challenges what I know to be true?

—V.G.





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