

## Walk in Freedom

*Presented by Mary Lowman*  
Air Dates: March 31 – April 4, 2025

### Day One

Since 1984 we've been broadcasting the good news that God's Word is relevant to all areas of our lives, and most definitely to our jobs and careers. Very early on in this ministry, God began to show me the error of the self-esteem teaching that seemed to be sweeping the country.

The general theme of this teaching was the troubles that plague our society—crime and addictions and failed marriages and abuse—all of it is attributable to low self-esteem. It was thought and taught that if we could just help people think about themselves in more positive ways, then they wouldn't do these things, and our societal problems would go away.

As I looked at myself and others, God made it clear to me that self is not my solution; self is my problem! And looking back at the topics I covered early in this ministry, I see that early on I was trying to communicate this truth. Trying to get people to feel good about themselves will not reach into the depths of their souls and bring healing. And that's because each of us was born in sin, we commit sin willfully, and we simply have a sin problem. The Bible says there is nothing good in our selves—that all the righteous things we try to do are like filthy rags to God.

That doesn't exactly fit with the good self-esteem message, does it? Recently I found a booklet by Tim Keller entitled *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*<sup>1</sup>. Tim did such a good job of explaining how this idea that low self-esteem is society's big problem is just not true.

I want share some of Tim's thoughts, which are echoes of what I've tried to say for many years on this topic of self-esteem. The title gives you a clue to where he's going: *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*. When you and I can come to a place where life is not all about us, we begin to walk in the freedom Jesus came to give us. Believe me when I tell you: Self is your problem, not your solution, and when you grasp the incredible freedom of forgetting about yourself, you are going to love it.

### Day Two

Have you ever said or thought: "My problem is I have low self-esteem"? I think most of us have had those feelings at some time. After all, that's the message we've been fed from many sources: If you could just get rid of that low self-esteem, you would feel good about yourself, and you could put all your problems behind you.

I'm sharing from Tim Keller's booklet: *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, and he points out that up until the twentieth century, almost all cultures believed and taught that having too high a view of yourself was the root cause of all the evil in the world. Human pride, selfishness, greed, and evil were presented as the cause for all bad behavior.

But in our modern western culture, we have developed a completely opposite idea. Now our educational systems, our counseling curriculums, our treatment of prisoners, and much of our

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, T. J. (2014). *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The path to true Christian joy*. 10Publishing.

legislation starts with the viewpoint that all we need is feel good about ourselves. Think of some evil in our world today—such as abuse of children. This philosophy would have us believe this evil would go away if those who abused children didn't have such low self-esteem.

Even secular psychologists have come to see the error of this belief system. Some have reported there is no evidence that low self-esteem is a big problem in society, but rather people with high self-esteem pose a greater threat to those around them. But this is hard for people to accept. As Tim writes, "The thing about the low self-esteem theory of misbehavior is that it is very attractive. You do not have to make any moral judgments in order to deal with society's problems."

If you've been trapped in this belief that you just needed some better self-esteem, I urge you to let it go and come to God's truth as given in his Word. Feeling good about yourself can only be achieved as a by-product of knowing who you are in Christ and then forgetting yourself as you live your life to love God and love others. There is great freedom in self-forgetfulness, and if you're struggling with this issue, I highly recommend this booklet by Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*.

### Day Three

I'm sharing some thoughts from Tim Keller's booklet, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*.

Tim writes: "If someone has a problem with low self-esteem, we, in our modern world, seem to have only one way of dealing with it. That is remedying it with high self-esteem. We tell someone that they need to see that they are a great person, they need to see how wonderful they are."

Do you like people to tell you things like that? I sure do—who doesn't? But guess what: No matter how many times people tell you that you are a great person, it doesn't change who you are, does it? The only way you and I can truly be changed into a person of worth is when we allow God to do it in us. And that happens when we are born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, and then the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us and begins transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, with ever increasing glory, as we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

One clear proof you are no longer trapped in this false belief about the need for high self-esteem is you truly forget yourself. You are not the first person you think of in the morning—at least not every morning! You don't compare yourself to others and feel either superior or inferior, because you just don't think about comparing yourself to others. That happens when you are learning to be content with who you are, the way God created you, and how God has gifted you.

As Tim writes: "Boosting our self-esteem by living up to our own standards or someone else's sounds like a great solution. But it does not deliver. It cannot deliver." If you're missing the freedom that is rightfully yours as a daughter or son of God through faith in Jesus Christ, if you're trapped in a pursuit of good self-esteem, I invite you to find real freedom by learning what it means to live in the joy of self-forgetfulness. This is not to degrade yourself or deny your gifting. Rather it is coming to a place where you are not always plagued with trying to be what others want you to be or trying to make yourself look good. You're just not very concerned with what others think about you, because you are just not thinking about yourself that much.

### Day Four

If you were asked to name the greatest Christian in all of history, who would you name? The Apostle Paul would be high on most of our lists—maybe top. What a great man of God who did so much to birth the early church. With his track record, he should have had very high self-esteem, don't you think?

Listen to what he wrote about himself well into his years of ministry:

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst (1 Timothy 1:15).*

He didn't say he was the worst sinner, but he said: "I am the worst sinner." As Tim Keller points out in his booklet, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, this is incomprehensible to our modern western ears. "We are not used to someone who has incredible confidence volunteering the opinion that they are one of the worst people. We are not used to someone who is totally honest and totally aware of all sorts of moral flaws—yet has incredible poise and confidence."

Paul understood fully he was a sinner, but he did not allow his sins to become his identity. Tim writes: "He does not see a sin and let it destroy his sense of identity." In the same way, he does not connect his accomplishments with his identity.

Think of how differently we think. If I see myself as a bad person, then I assume I can't do anything worthwhile, and I have no confidence. But not the Apostle Paul. As Tim writes: "Paul has reached the place where he is not thinking about himself anymore. When he does something wrong or something good, he does not connect it to himself anymore."

That doesn't mean he is no longer accountable, but it simply means his identity is based on what Christ has done for him and what Christ has declared to be true—that he is a new creation, and he is counted righteous because he has been given the righteousness of Christ. The more you get that, the less you have to think about yourself, and the less you think about yourself, the more you become like Christ. It is our self-absorption, our self-centeredness that drives us to despair and keeps us in bondage. Incredible freedom is ours as we more and more don't think about ourselves.

## Day Five

I'd like you to think of someone you know who you consider to be a truly godly, mature Christian. What is the major characteristic you admire about that person? I doubt you would say, "They have very high self-esteem." And yet we often hear you must have high self-esteem in order to be successful.

In his booklet, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller talks about gospel-humility, which he defines as not needing to think about yourself. That is a lesson God has been teaching me for years—that self is not my solution, it's my problem. The more I can forget myself, the better off I am. When you don't need to think about yourself, it means you have a very good understanding of who you are in Christ, and that's all you need to know.

Tim writes, "True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself." It's not something we try to do; it's something that happens as we more and more know our true identity in Christ.

A truly gospel-humble person doesn't hate herself; she just doesn't think about herself. This self-forgetful person would never be terribly hurt by criticism because she doesn't put much value on what other people think about her, any more than what she thinks about herself.

Not long ago someone was very upset with me, due mainly to miscommunication, and she let me know it. Although her response didn't make me happy, I was amazed to see it did not devastate me. I'm slowly getting to the place where my self-worth depends less and less on what other people think about me—even on what I think about myself. Criticism or praise from others is not what my identity is built on any longer—at least not like it has been in the past. And my friends, this is wonderful freedom.

There is true freedom in self-forgetfulness. You get to that place by immersing yourself in the truth of God's Word, making loving God and loving others your highest priority, and then you discover gradually you are thinking less and less about yourself, about your hurt feelings, about how you compare to

others or what others think about you. It is marvelous freedom, and every Christian should know and live in this freedom.