

Andrew's Story

There are different kinds of stories we can tell. One kind of story that Christians often tell is a 'testimony' i.e. the story of how they became a Christian. This *is* kind of that kind of story, but it's told from a particular angle of one key part of how I became a Christian and how I changed after that.

So this is not the whole story, but this is one part of it.

And that part is about what was the *driving force* in my life before I became a Christian: the thing that motivated me, and got me up out of bed in the morning. Which is (I'm slightly ashamed to say) *competition!*

Look, I always was (and in some ways still am) a *competitor*. So for example, when I was a kid, I *loved* sport, because of the competition. And at school (too) I was that annoying kid in Year 11 & 12 who, when everyone got their test results back, would go round the class finding out what everyone else got! Not that I cared so much about their mark, *but I cared about whether I got a better mark than them!* Because it was about competing; or rather (specifically) it was (for me) about *beating other people* when I competed.

And that was important for me (though this only became clear as I got older...) because it was about *propping my self-regard (self-image or esteem)*.

See, on the outside I was a really confident person; on the outside I showed lots of bravado. But on the inside (really) I was plagued with self-doubt, about whether I really was a worthwhile person or not. And so I competed because... *if I beat you at something then I must be worthwhile* (so I thought), or at least more worthwhile than you.

And in some ways, for awhile (at least) that worked out ok. I was happy when I won at tennis on Saturday, I was pleased when I got some good marks at school.

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But in other ways, it didn't work out so well. For example, one of the problems with always having to win is that it doesn't make you a very nice person! I remember there was this kid at school who I know God would want me to be nice to (because not many other people were nice to him). But it was very hard to be nice to him when I was always *competing* against him. See he was a geeky kind of guy and pretty smart. I'd try to be nice to him often, but when he beat me at Chemistry or Maths (and my self-esteem crumpled temporarily!) I hated his guts!

The other problem (in how it worked out for me) is that when you always have to win to prop up your self-image, your self-image is (actually) a pretty brittle thing. Because if you win, everything's sweet. But if (as with that geeky guy I just mentioned) you lose at something... psssswww... bouggghhhh! down goes your self-esteem, and you feel (again) that you're not worth very much.

(And thirdly, it's actually pretty *exhausting* always competing against everyone!)

At this point, I probably need to back up a little and just mention that as a kid, I didn't really have a faith in Jesus. I knew about him (from Sunday School & church – our family went to church most Sundays) but I wouldn't say I was following him. (But I did know, for example, that God wanted me to be nice to people... like that geeky guy at school!)

I guess as I got to know Jesus and start to follow him, it affected this part of my life in a couple of ways. First, just in *realizing* at one point that my whole life was based on beating other people: that deep down it was my most basic motivation for life – the motivation underneath the other motivations – and how that really wasn't good.

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And at a key point when I was learning about Jesus (at uni), that really came home to me: that if you (and certainly if God) looked at my life, then what He would see is someone who was kind-of-nice on the outside, but underneath was motivated by this incredibly self-centred desire to win. Because if you can only prop up your own self-esteem by climbing over other people, then that's a pretty bad motivation for life!

And I saw at that point, just my whole basis for life fall away (that it was rubbish). I really wasn't the kind of person God (or anybody) would have wanted me to be, on the inside.

Another way my growing faith in Jesus affected this part of my life came a couple of years later. I'd just lost my job, and so again, at that point my reason for being (my 'prop' for my self-image) was kicked out from under me.

And I can't remember exactly how I came to realise this (probably just through the teaching at church) but I realized that God wanted my self-image to be based *not* on whether could beat people, but on His view of me in Jesus.

See, God wants me to see myself (firstly) just as a human being: 'fearfully & wonderfully made' (as Ps.139 puts it): gifted and talented to the extent God has seen fit to gift & talent me, and being happy with that.

But even more importantly as a Christian, God wants me to see myself as he sees me *in Jesus*.

And what that means is, as a Christian, in terms of God's 'regard' for me (if I can use that word) it's based (not on who *I* am or what *I've* done) but on *Jesus* and what *he's* done.

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I mean, that's the truth of the gospel, isn't it(?): that through Jesus' death, we get to be 'seen' (regarded) by God as having *all of Jesus' merits* and *none of our own faults*.

God of course, still knows my faults(!). But his 'good opinion' of me (his regard, his *esteem* for me) isn't based on how well I perform or on how many people I *beat*. But it's based on who *Jesus* is, and the kind of life *he* lived. So God's 'esteem' for me (because of Jesus) is really high, even when I don't win. And if his regard for me is so high, then I can regard myself as worthwhile too.

And that means (a) I don't have to *exhaust* myself competing all the time in order to prop up my self-image, and (b) it just makes me a nicer person(!): because I can be free to interact with others while *not* competing with them. And if they win then that's fine.

In summary, being a Christian allows me to interact with people free from my natural competitiveness, because my self-esteem is based on how God sees me in Jesus, not on beating people.