

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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All Roads Lead To Rome

When I was in high school, and in college, we studied the history of the Roman Empire's architecture and infrastructure. The Romans were master road builders and at the peak of the Empire, their roads stretched thousands of miles. Roman roads were built with deep, multi-layered foundations and their roads "crowned" toward the middle to allow for better drainage. These roads were built so well that many are still in use today, 2000 years later. All Roman roads were connected to eventually lead you back to Rome, hence you may have heard the phrase "All Roads Lead To Rome."

At some point in my counseling career it occurred to me that self-esteem is the "Rome" of emotional health. That is to say that when dealing with emotional and/or relationship problems, most issues can be traced back to self-esteem or lack of self-esteem. Most everyone (including myself) grapples with self-esteem issues during their lifetime. No one is immune—children, teenagers, adults, the elderly. I often see clients whose self-esteem appears to be fractured. I will use that term with them, "fractured," because it provides great visual imagery. Imagine a person's emotional self just cracked right down the middle. The great news is that fractures can be repaired and they can heal. Very often in a marriage relationship, individual self-esteem problems lead to marital problems. Too often, lack of self-esteem leads to spouses taking things personally, overreacting and causing unnecessary conflict within their marriage. One spouse, or both, may not feel very good about themselves and either overtly or covertly take this out on their partner. A spouse that appears to be arrogant and/or abusive may use their behavior to mask their own fractured self-esteem. Unfortunately, folks will belittle others in an effort to feel better about themselves. It reminds me of one of my first interpersonal conflicts which occurred in kindergarten. A classmate called me an "idiot," and I could not understand why he would do this. My mother explained it this way, "He probably called you an idiot because he has been called an idiot (by his parents)." In a moment of parenting brilliance, my mother taught me empathy. My classmate probably did not like himself too much, and he was taking it out on those around him.

I often encourage my clients to evaluate what sources or roles provide them with self-esteem. From where do you derive your own sense of self? Is your self-esteem fractured or intact? Are deficiencies in your self-esteem causing problems in your marriage? What steps can you take to improve your self-esteem and confidence? What roles—family, work, friendships—provide you with the most fulfillment? If you can answer these questions and then concentrate on what really makes you happy, then you may find that your self-esteem improves. If you can take responsibility for your own self-esteem and well-being, then you may find that your marriage relationship improves. In the future, if you are experiencing marital conflict, take a step back and examine what role your identity is playing in the current conflict. Does the road to this conflict lead back to your self-esteem? If so you can begin the process of repairing and rebuilding your self-esteem. Be patient, because this process may take some time. Remember, "Rome wasn't built in a day."

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