Low self-esteem is basically the polar opposite of the sin of pride. In order to better understand low self-esteem it would be helpful to look at the sin of pride. The sin of pride occurs when we leave or refuse to occupy our proper place in God's design. According to this definition, pride is usually exhibited in three ways:

1. When we improperly estimate our worth. Pride happens when we place too high a value on ourselves, our work, our behavior.
2. It is exhibited when we measure our worth by the things we possess. The Bible calls this "...the boastful pride of life" (I John 2:16). Status seeking and exclusivity are forms of this pride.
3. Self-sufficiency is another exhibition of pride. The belief that we and we alone control our own lives. The effort at self-actualization and self-empowerment are forms of self-sufficient pride.

And so, any discussion of low self-esteem begins with a look at the various forms of pride such as:

1. Exaggerated sense of self worth
2. Elevated status derived from things
3. The desire to be self-sufficient without reference to God

I mention pride because many times this is a symptom caused by low self-esteem. This is not always the case but sometimes pride, in its various forms, is the result of a person over compensating for low self-worth. For example, a person unsure of self overcompensates with bragging and arrogance.

It's not the only manifestation of low self-esteem and it is not always caused by low self-esteem, but in a discussion about this problem we would have to begin by saying that at times, various forms of pride
can be attributed to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. The temptation here is to drift into a discussion of this topic based on psychological terms:

- The various signs of low self-esteem.
- Some cures and strategies to deal with these feelings in a purely social and psychological way.

I'll avoid that road because I'm not a licensed counselor and because we're looking at this problem from a spiritual perspective. Of course, this doesn't mean that our study will not be helpful in practical ways, after all many such problems have their roots in the spirit and manifest themselves in the psyche. And so, for low self-esteem and its related problems manifested in such disorders as: pride, depression, self-hatred, anxiety, insecurity, etc. All of these manifestations of poor self-esteem are addressed by the same scripture that speaks to the issue of pride:

> Because of the privilege and authority God has given to me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

- Romans 12:3

When Paul, through the Spirit, says we ought not to think more highly of ourselves, he is also saying silently, that we ought not to think more lowly of ourselves either. The goal is sober or sound judgment of ourselves. To see ourselves as God sees us is to have neither high nor low estimate of ourselves. The advantage that Christians have is that God has revealed to us our true selves and we can know this true self not from meditation or psychotherapy but from His word contained in the Bible.

**THE SOBER TRUTH ABOUT SELF**

The conflict that people, all people, struggle with is the battle waged between:
1. The inward man. That part of us still able to recognize that we are made in the image of God. It is what others call the noble self, the higher self, the creative self, the moral self. The inward man aims high, seeks perfection, creates and promotes beauty, goodness, purity.

... and the opposing side...

2. The flesh. Our sinful yearnings and instincts. Our evil desires, shameful lusts and deeds. From here come jealousies, hatreds, adulteries, lies, blasphemies, and all manners of sinfulness and disobedience.

Much of our high/low esteem problems stem from an improper understanding of these two forces within us. Some deny the weakness of the flesh by projecting a dishonest image of goodness or achievement and thus create a self-righteous or proud character. Others, discouraged by their weaknesses which may have been emphasized by poor teaching or exploited by others in their youth - begin to believe that the flesh is all there is, and this produces despair and self-defeating behavior.

Of course, without the revelation of the gospel, the best that one can do through secular treatment is to recognize and accept that they are a mixture of both:

- The healing process for the "conflicted" in the world is to mitigate the effects of the flesh (in other words try to minimize the damage caused by the flesh). (i.e. therapy, medication, behavior modification, acceptance, catharsis.)
- Mitigate the effects of the flesh and accentuate the potential of the inner person. (i.e. follow your heart; become all you can be, be yourself (whatever that is), follow your dream, live up to your potential.)

An old song summarizes well the approach to finding a balance between too low and too high an esteem of oneself and solving the problems that come with these from the worldly perspective:

You've got to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative, and latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with Mr. in-between.
For Christians that sober truth about self begins in the same way as non-believers. The inward man knows God, sees his potential, yearns to do what is good, what is right, what is best. The flesh, on the other hand, is full of self, full of sinful yearnings and enslaved to carry out the deeds of sinful disobedience.

Paul talks about this conflict in several instances:

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.
- Galatians 5:17

The conflict is that a person cannot fully give in to the flesh or the inward man (Spirit) because each has a pull.

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,
- Romans 7:22

Here Paul describes his own personal struggle with this conflict of him seeing, knowing and wanting to act fully from his spirit/inner man side, but being thwarted by the weakness of his flesh. There is disagreement among scholars over this passage. Some say Paul felt this way before he became a Christian. Others say that he felt this way before and after he became a Christian (I agree with this). My reason for believing this is that he is speaking in the present tense and explains how he deals with his present predicament. I also believe he is speaking in the present tense because as a Christian I can relate to his conflicted experience.

All Christians at one time or another actually feel the conflict in their natures:

- As Christians they know the truth, God's goodness, the how and why to live a Christian life before God, and they desire to do it.
- As human beings they also see that even if they have been forgiven for sin - their sinful nature still has a powerful and
negative impact on their overall lives; often diluting the impact of their Christianity.

But for Christians the result is not: pretending they are better than they really are, or giving in to feelings of defeat, despair, or self hatred and low self-esteem.

For Christians the answer is to have faith in God and believe in what He has done for us because of, and despite our conflicted state. If you know anything about the "grieving process" you have learned that you can go from anger to denial to bargaining and depression, back to denial and anger again several times before you finally arrive at acceptance. And acceptance, true acceptance, is accepting the reality of the true situation facing you, whatever that is.

When it comes to our conflicted natures we often travel between too high or too low estimates of ourselves (along with all the expressions of these exaggerated positions), but the Bible sheds light on our true selves - who and what we have become as Christians. As the one who wrestled with this in his writings, Paul serves well as an example of the true self in Christ. A sober and true opinion of ourselves as we really are in God's eyes (the only eyes that count) should be based on this fact:

**WE ARE IN CHRIST**

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
- Galatians 3:26

We are neither too high nor too low or should we strive for either because as Christians we have a new position before God: we are "in Christ." While others strive to raise their esteem or keep their self-esteem from pulling up into pride; Christians can rest in the knowledge that their esteem finds its perfect balance in Christ. In other words, my value as a person is based solely on my relationship to Christ and not on my abilities, looks, success, intelligence, possessions, not even on my level of goodness.
Before God I am judged (man's judgment is not really important), but before God I am covered with sin and unworthy:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean. And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. And all of us whither like a leaf. And our iniquities, like the wind, takes us away.
- Isaiah 64:6

So it doesn't matter - high or low esteem of self, therapy, balance, whatever...when God judges us, no amount of esteem can overcome our moral deficiencies. When we come to Christ however, we take on a new value before God, we take on the value of Christ Himself to God because we are united to Him by faith through repentance and baptism. Because we are still human there is the conflict that Paul speaks of in Romans 7, but because we are "in Christ" that conflict has no bearing in how God judges us.

We have to deal with the conflict (up or down), it's part of the human experience. However God's estimate of us is not based on this measurement (how well we are doing with the conflict), God's estimate of our value/our self-worth is based on our relationship with Christ, and those "in Christ" are fully acceptable and completely validated before God.

That's why Paul says:

There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- Romans 8:1

Yes, there is conflict and pain as the battle within continues, as the spirit and the flesh conflict within the same body, but there is no condemnation because the individual is united to Jesus by faith, or as the Bible says, "in Christ." So we have conflict (just like people in the world do) but we have no condemnation, and this knowledge, this
reality, gives us the peace that surpasses understanding. In other words, we have peace, despite the conflict that rages within, the kind of peace that knows beyond doubt that those in Christ have no condemnation.

**Summary**

Paul explains the same idea in different ways in other letters:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

- I Corinthians 6:9-11

Here Paul uses different words but he's making the same point. They had been slaves of their lower nature, but because of their relationship with Christ (not self-will or personal effort) they were now considered in a different light by God.

John repeats the same idea in the book of Revelation:

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood - 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father - to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- Revelation 1:5-6
Through Him, through His sacrifice, we are transformed into something glorious (priests, a kingdom) before God. The lesson is repeated over and over again: God deals with our esteem conflict by raising our value in His eyes through faith in His Son. What does this mean for our self-esteem?

1. **God decides our value.** God is the one who estimates our value, not the world, not ourselves, not our possessions; God determines what we are worth. This means that a sober or true evaluation of our worth can only be determined by God.

2. **Our value is priceless.** If Jesus, the only Son of God, died for us, we must be worth a great deal to God. This means that our intrinsic worth is not based on what we do or what we have, it is based on whether we have a relationship with Christ or not, and if we do, we are priceless in God's eyes.

3. **Accepting reality is accepting these sober truths.** Too high or too low esteem, conflict without peace - these are signs that one has not accepted the truth about their value in God's eyes.

Having sober judgment about ourselves and our worth requires that as Christians we accept the value God gives us in Christ and endure the on-going conflict we experience in the flesh. We know that despite this conflict's debilitating presence within us, we are not condemned, and because of Christ, we are worthy enough for God and therefore can accept ourselves.

**Further reading:** *The Shifts Behind the Shootings* by J. Warner Wallace