



PREPARATION

Spend the week studying Psalm 139:1-18 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 in addition to Matthew 22:34-40. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

PRAY | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

FOCUS ON THE MAIN POINT | Loving yourself is embracing who you are in Christ.

◦ Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

1. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Our culture is obsessed with self. Go to your local bookstore, and you will find New York Times bestsellers devoted to “becoming a better you,” “finding your purpose,” or “how you can build a successful business.” Self-help gurus are in high demand and speak to massive crowds about achieving “your best life now.” Social media has become a sounding board for our thoughts and a gallery of selfies, food we eat, clothes we wear, places we've been and things we've done.^[1]

Given all the attention to self, you might think our culture would produce well-adjusted, healthy individuals. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our culture is filled with people who are depressed, anxious, addicted and unsatisfied with life. People everywhere are turning inward for answers, but finding nothing that speaks to their longing for true love, identity and purpose.

How would you describe our culture's obsession with self? Where is it most evident?

1. In 2013, the Oxford Dictionaries named 'selfie' its Word of the Year. “The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013,” The Oxford Dictionaries, November 19, 2013, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/press-releases/oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year-2013/>



INTRODUCTION [Cont.'d]

◦ Turning Inward – Turning Outward

Sin turns you inward; it leads you to live only for yourself, not for God and others. Jesus came to turn our focus outward, because that's the only way for us to find the love, identity and purpose we were made for. He desires that we experience the abundant life of living for God and others. A life of flourishing only happens when we turn outward.

When Jesus says to love the Lord with your whole self (Matt. 22:37) and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v.39), he is pointing us to the fundamental ethic of love. God is love (1 John 4:8), and Jesus calls to live in the light of that love.

You can't love yourself unless you, first, understand God's love for you. And you can't truly love your neighbor unless you see yourself as loved and accepted by God. Loving yourself is all about finding your worth and identity in God's love.

What is meant by the statement that, “a life of flourishing only happens when we turn outward”?

LEARN

Select 3-5 questions to discuss as a group.

◦ Warning Signs

Jesus sets us on the path towards an abundant and fulfilling life in Matthew 22:34-40. But the enemy wants us to follow another path—the path of low self-worth and self-loathing. The enemy tries to lure us off Jesus' path by casting doubt on our true worth and identity in him.

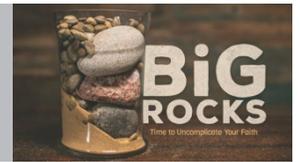
The following are warning signs on the path to an abundant and fulfilling life. They are popular tools of the enemy. So, pay attention to the warning signs and consider whether you've thought or said any of these statements.

◦ Comparing Yourself to Others – “If I had their life, I'd be happy.”

It's tempting to compare yourself to others and what they have, look like or what they've achieved. But Jesus doesn't want you to play the comparison game, because it's futile. What matters most—what's truly valuable in this life—is what you have in Christ. Nothing can compare with the joy and satisfaction of your relationship with God.

What are the costs of comparing yourself to others? What are the benefits of not comparing yourself to others?

What would be different about your life if you found contentment in what you have in Christ?



LEARN [Cont.'d]

◦ Guilt and Shame – “The real me is unlovable.”

Sin mars your view of self. It tries to condemn you and casts accusations against you. But Jesus wants you to see that, in him, you no longer stand condemned. And God has adopted you into his family. As a child of God, you are loved and accepted by the Father.

What are the main accusations you hear from the enemy? How does God’s Word respond to those accusations?

How does being a child of God enable you to love yourself?

◦ Pursuing Perfection – “I can’t feel loved unless I do everything right.”

There may be a part of you that believes you have to earn God’s love by performance. But Jesus says that’s religion, not a relationship. He loves you despite your shortcomings.

No one is perfect. Everyone has flaws and weaknesses. Jesus understands this and wants to show his strength through your weaknesses. Loving yourself shouldn’t depend on your performance, but on how loved you are by God.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Why does Paul boast in his weakness?

Brennan Manning said that, “God loves you as you are, not as you should be.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

LIVE

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

You Are Unique

You are made in God’s image and that gives you infinite value. There is no one on this earth like you. You are a unique creation of God with a personality, gifts and background unlike any other. God has given you a story that no one but you can tell.

Divide Psalm 139:1-18 between group members and read the passage together. Since the psalms were traditionally set to music, consider using background music (without words) to accompany your reading. As the passage is read, pay attention to how David views himself in relationship to God.

How would you describe David’s relationship with God? Is that kind of relationship possible for you? Why or why not?



LIVE [Cont'd]

o You Are Valuable

Value is determined by what someone is willing to pay for something. The cross was God's way of showing how much he values you. Paul touches on this when he writes, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

In what ways has God shown how much he values you in your life? Recall any events or conversations that come to mind.

LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

o You Have Purpose

You were saved for a purpose—to serve God and others in love. God wants to use your story to tell his story, and he wants to use your gifts and talents for his purposes. Loving yourself means seeing your purpose and calling as a disciple of Christ. And that calling is to reflect God's love (1 John 4:19).

What gifts and talents has God given you? How can you use those to serve God and others in love?

What's one thing you could do to reflect more of God's love in your life? What's one thing your group could do?

PRAY

Praise God for taking the initiative to love you and for giving you identity and purpose in Jesus. Meditate on what he has done to love you and bring you into relationship with him. Pray to embrace his love in a way that turns your focus outward to others.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

Memorize Psalm 139:14 and reflect on what it means that you are “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

What’s one change you could make in life to turn your focus outward to others?

COMMENTARY

◦ “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus cites this Old Testament commandment from Leviticus 19:18 as a compliment to his other citation from Deuteronomy 6:5 (“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”). Love is the measure of whether we are disciples of Jesus: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Paul echoes the ‘Golden Rule’ of Matt. 22:39 in his letter to the Ephesians: “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body” (Eph. 5:28-30). Paul’s point is that we should care for others the way we care for ourselves. In the same way, Christ cares for us.

◦ The Intimate God [Ps. 139:1-18]

God is the only being in the universe with full knowledge of everything. This is what David praises God for in vv.1-6. God’s knowledge is intimate and reaches into the depths of the soul: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). God’s understanding is beyond measure (Ps. 147:5).

In vv.7-12 David shifts from God’s knowledge to his presence. No one can escape God’s presence (cf. Jer. 23:23-24). Job declares that God is omnipresent: “His eyes are on the ways of mortals; he sees their every step” (Job 34:21).

In vv.13-18, David focuses on God’s creative activity. Because God was his Creator, David could declare, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (v.14). God is an artist, and his creation reflects his artistry. Therefore, we should see ourselves as works of art. We aren’t a mass produced object; we are a one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

◦ Love Responds to Love [1 John 4:19]

John’s statement on God’s love is simple and, at the same time, profound: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God’s love for us is our motivation to love others; our love is a response to God’s taking the initiative to love us. If we truly embrace God’s love for us, we cannot help but share that love with others.