

Imagine Great Relationships...With Ourselves
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Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31 NIV)

Love yourself. Sometimes this is the most difficult part of the Great Commandment and one we tend to shift to the recesses of our brains as a minor piece of what Jesus was trying to convey. Do you place the words of Jesus into a sort of hierarchy starting with love God, and then others and oh yeah, by the way, yourself too? If so, you are not alone. As we will discuss through this sermon and guide, loving ourselves must be an equal part of the equation if we are to have any hope of extending God's brand of love to others.

Digging Deeper

Ways we try to hide our lack of self-love...

PRIDE

- Pride can be used to build emotional walls that safeguard our hearts from becoming vulnerable and as a result, prevent any authentic feelings from getting in or out. It can cause us to take on an "I'll get them before they get me" kind of attitude and will manifest itself in the form of sarcasm, bullying or arrogance. Have you been guilty of using any of these tactics as a means of guarding your heart? God tells us we are to love ourselves because we were purchased at a high price. We must honor this gift by opening ourselves up to love others, even if it might mean we get our feelings hurt from time to time.

PITY

- Oh, pity me for I know not what I do. I'm just not as good as, as smart as, as good looking as...etc. Self-deprecation is another way we can minimize the wonder of all that God created in us and thus show disrespect to our Heavenly Father. God doesn't make junk! So we can't treat ourselves as if He possibly made a slight boo-boo in our craftsmanship because (in our feeble estimation) we don't measure up to someone we admire as "having it all". Comparison is the thief of joy and God wants us to be filled with joy at the marvelous, unique creation He conjured up in each of us! What are some ways your internal voice gets you down? How can you use God's Word to silence those inaccurate descriptions of yourself?

PERFECTIONISM

- Have you ever thought something like this, "If I could just accomplish (fill in the blank) my life will be perfect! Then I'll have it all and if I don't make it, it must be because I am a big failure." This could apply to work, family, friends, activities or anything you are striving for that you have made a bigger priority than pleasing God. In what ways have you allowed perfectionism to become an

idol in your life? Without taking the opposite approach and striving for nothing, how can we love ourselves better by calling upon the truth that God's Word doesn't demand flawlessness? Devotion, yes. Perfection? Only one has ever been able to make that claim and He died on the cross for us over 2,000 years ago leaving no need for us to try to earn salvation through our works.

PUNISHMENT

- When love of self is absent, proper care of self becomes less important. God created you as a living temple meant to house His Holy Spirit. Would you ask your best friend to live in a dump with you? No way! Why allow His Spirit to reside in a place where love cannot be found? Many people comfort themselves with food, physical harm or even worldly substances when life gets hard. These are poor substitutes for the nourishment found in God's Word and cannot sustain the health of the physical or spiritual beings that we were created to be. Have you (or a loved one) used earthly replacements for God's Word as a form of self-abuse in the past? How did these things affect your/their love of self?

What does God's Word tell us about loving ourselves?

There is a PROPER AMOUNT. (Romans 12:3)

- We are all necessary, important parts of the Body of Christ. We must never allow inflated egos to throw shade over this fact. How do God's people handle situations where this becomes an issue? We humble ourselves before the Lord and serve as He leads.

We are CREATED in God's image and "wonderfully made". (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 139:14)

- Have you ever stopped to marvel at the fact that God made you, with all of your unique complexities, *in His image*? God loved us so much that He wanted us to be His reflection! The next time you look in the mirror, feel the power of the truth that He is shining through you and is meant to be reflected to others who are not aware of His presence within.

We are so LOVED and VALUED God gave His Son to save us. (Romans 5:8-11)

- God sent His Son to die for our sins because He loved us and wants us to live eternally with Him. Now that is love literally personified. We must never devalue that gift by underappreciating our worth as His children. We are children of the Most High God so let's make a vow to start treating ourselves as such! Think of some ways you can show your love for God by properly loving yourself and act on them today!

We are honored to be called God's CHILDREN. (1 John 3:1-2)

- What an honor to be a member of the family of God! He holds a seat at the table for all who will accept His invitation. As a child of God, honor His presence in you by making your life a living sacrifice to Him. Food for thought: does your behavior convey your knowledge of Him?

Conclusion

In John's gospel, Jesus gives a new commandment by saying, "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." (John 13:34 NIV) If we are to have any hope of loving our neighbor in the same way as Jesus loves us, shouldn't we place a high value on loving ourselves like He does? And we should all be familiar with that kind of love, the kind He paid the ultimate price to display, for it is a complete and powerful love!