

READINGS

One day, on a hillside, Jesus began to teach his disciples about the way God sees the world. Jesus said ...

'God loves it when people understand they have nothing to offer him, who know in their hearts that they must depend totally upon his mercy. He can really work with them, because they're a perfect fit for his kingdom.

God's heart breaks when people grieve. He just longs to wrap his arms around them and wipe away their tears.

God loves it when people don't push themselves forward, but instead trust in him. He's got a whole new world waiting for them.

God is so proud of those who ache for what is right, because he wants the same. One day, they'll be able to watch him straighten everything out.

God loves it when people copy him by being forgiving. Whenever they need forgiveness themselves, all they have to do is ask. It's guaranteed.

God loves those who won't allow anything rotten to take up space in their hearts. One day, their eyes will drink in all the wonders of heaven.

God strengthens those who try to bring his peace to others. He knows it's one of the hardest things. He's planning to adopt them as his children.

God stands alongside those who are taunted and even hated because they believe in me. It's always been that way. You can be sure that all those who put him first will receive life which lasts forever.'

(Matthew 5:1-12, my translation)

RECAP ON SERMON ONE - RELATIVISM

- relativism is the insistence that there is no 'big picture'; no absolutes, no objective truth, no overarching morality, no such thing as 'right' & 'wrong'; everything is as valid as anything else
- relativism is the 'Operating System' for the modern world's mental & cultural software, an open platform on which any idol is welcome to pitch a throne

THE LEGEND OF NARCISSUS

In Greek legend, Narcissus was a strikingly handsome young man who fell in love with his own reflection in a forest pool. Many beautiful women tried to gain his attention; but he was so enchanted that he remained alone by the pool until, finally, he died.

THE CULT OF NARCISSUS (SELF-OBSESSION)

- the dethronement of God & the exaltation of self
- the consumer culture & the harrowing of self (should Christians even consider this subject?)
- self-love or self-hatred are both expressions of self-obsession
- psychology & self-help books – seeking the 'me' within
- health & beauty magazines, letters to agony aunts
- celebrity worship
- health issues – eating disorders, self-harm, suicide
- religious dynamic (Shirley MacLaine & other New Age gurus)

- temptation in Eden to eat the forbidden fruit for the lie 'you will be like God' (Gen 3:4)
- gaze at your own reflection – discover the god within
- Babel – 'let us make a name for ourselves' (Gen 11:4)
- ultimately, as with Narcissus, it leads to stagnation and death

CAUSES OF SELF-OBSESSION expressed in poor self image (low self esteem)

- our world view
- our consumer society
- our upbringing

CONSEQUENCES OF SELF-OBSESSION expressed in low self esteem

- hurt people hurt people
- an overemphasis on the external or material
- genuine friendships become very difficult
- resistance to authority
- self destructive patterns of behaviour
- self alienation
- dysfunctional behaviour (see extra sheet)
- an inability to trust God's love
- an inability to pursue true humility
- an inability to worship

RESTORING A HEALTHY, BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF

"Seeing yourself as God sees you – no more and no less"
(Josh McDowell)

- caution – nothing wrong with self-awareness and a healthy interest in looking our best ... all a question of focus
- focus on God: Father, Son & Holy Spirit (self-giving, Phil 2:1-11)
- allow God's word to dwell in us richly (Col 3:16)
- look at what Jesus says in Matt 5:1-12

- ⇒ recognising our own spiritual poverty
- ⇒ feeling the pain of others
- ⇒ advancing the interests of others
- ⇒ hungering for the right things, not the selfish things
- ⇒ giving up our tendency to judge others
- ⇒ scrutinising our own lifestyle
- ⇒ becoming sensitive to disagreement and disunity
- ⇒ giving up our need for self-protection and the esteem of others

God first, others second, self last

QUESTIONS

- Where do you see self-obsession in the world in which you live?
- How does self-obsession play out in your life?
- Do you tend to love yourself too much or too little?
- How easy do you find it to be 'lost in wonder, love and praise'?
- Consider God's self-giving nature and ask for grace to imitate him.

Additional Worksheet 1

1 DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOUR RESULTING FROM POOR SELF IMAGE / LOW SELF ESTEEM

- pessimistic outlook on life
- lack of social confidence
- extreme sensitivity to the opinions of others
- severe self consciousness about appearance, performance or status
- only able to see others as competitors
- striving to become someone else rather than enjoying who you are
- habit of mentally reviewing conversations, wondering what the other person meant
- critical, judgmental view of others
- constant defensiveness
- chips on shoulder
- inability to accept praise
- being a 'door mat'
- tendency to 'clinging' relationships
- avoidance of intimacy for fear of rejection
- inability to express emotions
- perpetually rigid, legalistic and ritualistic preferences in worship
- dependence upon material possessions for security
- habit of using negative 'labels' about self
- anticipating the worst
- tendency to follow the crowd, avoiding independent behaviour
- interpreting the world as hostile
- use of anger / rudeness to avoid being hurt
- inability to sustain lasting relationships

2 CULTIVATING A HEALTHY, BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF

"A healthy view of self means seeing myself as God sees me - no more and no less"
(Josh McDowell)

1 Focus on the scriptures – allow God’s word to dwell in you richly (Col 3:16)

Gen 2:27 God created man in his own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (cf Col 3:9,10) to be human is to be made in God’s image; to be Christian is to be renewed in God’s image

[you are] a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned with glory and honour (Ps 8:3-6)

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13,14)

... we are God’s workmanship (Eph 2:10)

Each one should test his own actions without comparing himself with somebody else (Gal 6:4)

In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5) – you are adopted into a Royal Family

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion (Phil 1:6) – God loves you just the way you are; but He loves you too much to leave you the way you are

You were redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:18,19)

Meditate on Romans 8:28-39 this week, allowing the Word of Truth to soak into your spirit - In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us

2 Answer these questions honestly

- Do I ever wish I was somebody else?
- Do I like the person God has made me?
- Do I think more highly of myself than I ought?

3 List 5 strengths or good things about yourself and thank God for them

4 List 5 weaknesses or bad things about yourself and ask God to work in you to transform them

5 Focus on the cross & ask yourself

- Do I truly believe that Jesus died for me, and would still have died if only I needed saving?
- What does that tell me about my worth to God?

6 Write a prayer, thanking God for the way he has made you. Include specific characteristics or attributes which God has given you. Begin your prayer with these words from Ps 139 - “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

7 Work through this paper with a prayer partner or someone else to whom you are accountable.

Additional Worksheet 2
The 'One Another' sayings in the New Testament

Love one another	John	15:12
Be devoted to one another	Romans	12:10
Honour one another above yourselves	Romans	12:10
Live in harmony with one another		12:16
Don't judge one another		14:13
Accept one another		15:7
Wait for one another	1 Corinthians	11:33
Care for one another		12:25
Greet one another with a holy kiss	2 Corinthians	13:12
Serve one another	Galatians	5:13
Don't provoke one another		5:26
Don't envy one another		5:26
Bear one another's burdens		6:2
Be patient with one another	Ephesians	4:2
Be kind and compassionate to one another		4:32
Forgive one another		4:32
Encourage one another		5:19
Sing to one another		5:19
Be subject to one another		5:21
Don't lie to one another	Colossians	3:9
Bear with one another		3:13
Teach one another		3:16
Admonish one another		3:16
Comfort one another	1 Thessalonians	4. 18
Build one another up		5. 11
Stir one another up	Hebrews	10. 2
Don't speak evil of one another	James	4. 11
Don't grumble about one another		5. 9
Confess your sins to one another		5. 16
Pray for one another		5. 16
Be hospitable to one another	1 Peter	4. 9

See over for a practical application of these sayings and some questions

Watchwords - setting the standards

Love...	John	15. 12
Be devoted to...	Romans	12. 10
Live in harmony with...	Romans	12. 16
Care for...	1 Corinthians	12. 25
Be subject to...	Ephesians	5. 21

Attitudes - the way we think of others

Honour one another above yourselves	Romans	12. 10
Don't judge one another	Romans	14. 13
Accept one another	Romans	15. 7
Wait for one another	1 Corinthians	11. 33
Don't provoke one another	Galatians	5. 26
Don't envy one another	Galatians	5. 26
Be patient with one another	Ephesians	4. 2
Forgive one another	Ephesians	4. 32
Don't lie to one another	Colossians	3. 9
Bear with one another	Colossians	3. 13
Don't speak evil of one another	James	4. 11
Don't grumble about one another	James	5. 9

Practicalities - our pastoral response to others

Greet one another with a holy kiss	2 Corinthians	13. 12
Serve one another	Galatians	5. 13
Bear one another's burdens	Galatians	6. 2
Be kind and compassionate to one another	Ephesians	4. 32
Encourage one another	Ephesians	5. 19
Sing to one another	Ephesians	5. 19
Comfort one another	1 Thessalonians	4. 18
Build one another up	1 Thessalonians	5. 11
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Specific Ministry - offered to others

Teach one another	Colossians	3. 16
Admonish one another	Colossians	3. 16
Confess your sins to one another	James	5. 16
Pray for one another	James	5. 16

Questions

- In what sense is the first one a heading for the whole list?
- Which ones are the hardest to put into practice?
- Are there any which make you feel uncomfortable, or which you would struggle to offer to 'one another'?
- How do you 'live in harmony' (Rom 12:16) with those you find difficult or with whom you disagree?
- How do you 'stir one another up'?
- Is it sensible to 'confess your sins to one another'?
- What relation does 'I' have with the needs of 'one another'?