

# Sift wk 5 - Self Love

## Intro

We live in a time where self-love is of utmost importance isn't it? I understand why people are going there though! Anxiety and depression are probably no strangers of yours. I know so many people struggle with their mental health, with feeling at home in the body God gave them, with being content and happy. We want those things, right? Many of you in this room feel like something is missing. And people will tell you, if only you "loved yourself more" then you would be happy.

I'm saying this with the utmost gentleness as someone who has struggled with my own flaws and accepting that I have flaws without condemning myself. I've battled anxiety and depression. Is self-love the cure? Are we able to lift ourselves out of our struggles by loving ourselves more?

## Self Love

Today, as we continue our series called "Sift," I want to gently look at the common phrase "self-love" and sift it through the gospel and see what parts of it we should keep and what parts are better off tossed away. I want you to thrive.

- I want you to see God's great love for you.
- I want you know deep down that He has a plan for your life.
- I want you to step into the gifting He has given you, using the experiences you've had, and by the direction of the Holy Spirit, go into the world and bring Him great glory.
- I don't want you to be led astray or tricked into adopting a belief into your worldview that is unfulfilling, destructive, or simply untrue.

Let's look at God's Word together and see what Peter had to say to the early church and see what we might glean from it about whether self-love is or isn't a good thing. Let's sift it.

### 1 Peter 1:3-9 pg. 588

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

What is Peter communicating here?

- You will endure many trials for a little while. But be truly glad because there is wonderful joy ahead.
- You have an inheritance: some good things that you are about to receive in heaven that can't be taken away or destroyed.
- Even though you will experience trials, God will protect you by His power until the day He takes you to be with Him in heaven.
- In other words, nothing can take away the hope that you have. Nothing that happens to you on Earth can steal your future.

Even though you are rebellious and inconsistent and prone to wander away from God, because of His great mercy for you, you are a new creation because of Jesus.

God knows your every imperfection, every flaw, every wicked thing you have ever thought, and your deepest darkest secrets.

Yet, He showed His love for you on your worst day and was willing to take the punishment you deserved on the cross. Not only did He get you out of the death you deserved, but He also has adopted you into His family and made you His beloved child.

You are precious to God. You are loved by the one who invented math and science and art and nature and beauty and love and hope and joy.

## Identity

He is your identity. It is not found in your appearance. It is not found in your achievements. It is not found in the approval someone has of you. It is not found in your desires. It is not found in your emotions. It is not found in your friendships. It is not found in how well you behave or do religious things. **Your identity is found in God alone.**

So, based upon the Scripture, let's sift the idea of "self-love." Because it sounds like there may be a better love than the one we can give ourselves.

**1. Let's start with God's authority.** Because God is the creator of all things, He defines the laws of physics and also the laws about value and identity. **We don't get to define ourselves; God defines us.** He has the authority to do that. If I held the Earth from spinning just a degree differently, then I would have that authority.

**2. The Bible teaches that we are "made in the image of God."** (Genesis 1:27). Anything good in us reflects our creator. God ultimately proved our value by sending Jesus to die on the cross to bring us back to Him (1 John 4:9-10). And the Bible is clear that we are treasured by Him (Luke 12:7, Psalm 139, Romans 5:8). So, **instead of trying to prove to ourselves that we are lovable, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to show us what God has already spoken over us.** We are His.

**3.** Because of this broken and fallen world (see Genesis 3) mental health conditions exist that cause us to doubt our value and inflict suffering.

Psych Central says these are ways to love yourself:

- Saying positive things to yourself
- Forgiving yourself when you mess up
- Meeting your own needs
- Being assertive
- Not letting others take advantage of or abuse you
- Prioritizing your health and wellbeing
- Spending time around people who support you and build you up (and avoiding people who don't)
- Asking for help
- Letting go of grudges or anger that holds you back
- Recognizing your strengths
- Valuing your feelings
- Making healthy choices most of the time
- Living in accordance with your values
- Pursuing your interests and goals
- Challenging yourself
- Holding yourself accountable
- Giving yourself healthy treats
- Accepting your imperfections
- Setting realistic expectations
- Noticing your progress and effort[1]

To some degree, these are just concepts the Bible calls wise. I would encourage you to do them. As we sift this idea of self-love, I don't see these as things that would get filtered out. I would encourage you to do most of these. **But it's just that without the complete picture of God's love for you, His authority over your identity, and knowing that doing all these things won't "fix" you, it is an incomplete picture.**

For some of you in this room, because of a variety of factors, you bear the burden of depression, and it is an all-out battle for your heart to understand your worth. Please seek trauma informed, Christian counseling. Please let someone help you get to the root of the problem, and if need be, along with your parents and trusted healthcare professionals, consider medication and other wholistic ways of getting your brain to where God created it to be. Please do not let this message be a burden to you. Instead, **ask the Holy Spirit if and where you are finding your value in things outside of God.**

### **"Being true to your self"**

4. The next piece we need to sift is the idea that self love means all of our desires are valid.

The reason Jesus had to go to the cross was because "our heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9) and our "sinful desires have dragged us away from Him" (James 1:14).

**Our culture is highly individualistic and believes truth is relative. This means everyone will tell you that if you want to be happy, you need to show some self-love and embrace your deepest desires fully; that suppressing your deepest desires is not "being true to yourself."**

"The danger of focusing solely on self-love is that God doesn't want you to accept your sins. We forget the crucial difference between Christ's invitation to come as you are and the unbiblical invitation to stay as you are." [2]

**The Bible teaches that celebrating our desires won't bring about the satisfaction that our souls long for. Our desires, instead, point to our need for Jesus.**

[Leader Note: Share a quick story or have a student or adult leader share how they say yes to Jesus instead of their desires right now in the present.]

## Self-love will let you down

“Self-love philosophy promises that if you look inward and can find a way to love what you see, you will find peace. But due to our massive shortcomings, we cannot find satisfaction in ourselves. The philosophy of self-love is based on the idea that humans are fundamentally good and lovable. But that’s not true. We are sinners. Loving ourselves is often not enough. We may still feel depressed.”[3]

Self-love might bring temporary relief, but it cannot compare to the overwhelming relief of true love and acceptance by God as redeemed people through Jesus.

Some people might bring up the verse where Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” They might say to first develop a high sense of self-esteem, and then — and only then — will you be able to be of any use in loving others.

Jesus is not commanding self-love here. He assumes it as a default position.”[4] “When we are hungry, we go get something to eat. That is self-love. Jesus was commanding that we treat other people as well as we treat ourselves.

Scripture never commands us to love ourselves; **it assumes we already do**. In fact, until we die and go to heaven all **people will love themselves too much—that is our problem**. We want to be our own god. Self-love is already deeply rooted within every man.”[5]

## Self Love & Sacrificial Love

6. Self-love can distract from Jesus’ command to love and serve others in a sacrificial way. If you are focused only on self-love, you won’t allow yourself to be uncomfortable or inconvenienced by the needs of your classmates, little siblings, parents, neighbors, teammates, people in poverty or strangers across town.

Your acts of love and service and selflessness towards others are a way God wants to make you look more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[Leader Note: tell a story here or have a student share one of how serving helped their own mental health.]

## We are not legalistic.

To be a Christian does not mean to be a martyr and put yourself down in the name of selflessness. It also doesn’t mean correcting someone when they say, “I’m showing myself self-love today.” We shouldn’t be legalistic. The Jesus way is simply thinking of our self, less often. We can’t do that by trying harder or focusing on thinking of ourselves less, but instead through simply coming to Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 (NIV), “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” **We shouldn’t focus on self-improvement or following rules. We should focus on Jesus.**

## Ask the Holy Spirit to align your values with His.

God wants to make you more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The result of being close to the Holy Spirit are the nine fruits you may have learned as a child.

### Galatians 5:22-26

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

You don't get the fruit by trying hard to be selfless. Set your eyes on Jesus and ask for the Holy Spirit's fruit and He will put them in you!

I found a great example about changing a worldly desire for self-love into a gospel-centered view of self. Let me tell it to you:

"Eleanor, a college student, is so tall that every time she stands in front of the mirror, she either laments or curses what she sees. In fact, she becomes so distraught that she starts to avoid contact with people. She becomes a recluse, a dismal, depressed, sour young woman. She loses all motivation for study and friendship and starts to fail in her school work. Then she is encouraged to talk her problem over with me. When I find out the problem, what should my goal be? My goal is not to cultivate her self-love or positive self-image. To be sure, I would have nothing against her coming to like being tall. But that I regard as a superficial goal unworthy of a Christian counselor. My goal is to transform her values, namely to diminish the value she puts on height. I would try to convince her that her treasure is in the wrong place and that her heart is therefore starved, because it was created to relish something greater than outward appearance. I would not try to convince her that she is not really all that tall, or that people like tall girls, or even that she should like her tallness. Instead, I would try to create in her a new hierarchy of values which would knock physical beauty out of its reigning position. The value I would seek to instill in its place is the surpassing value of knowing Christ, or better, of being loved by him. More specifically, I would try to get her to cherish above all things on earth the promise that for those who love him, God works all things together for their good. I would seek to kindle a happy confidence in the ability and will of God to turn even her awkward height for her eternal benefit."<sup>[6]</sup>

**God is love.** In Jesus, He sacrificed all His heavenly comforts to come to this Earth, live a perfect life, and die a terrible death in our place. In those hours, he was not eating chocolate out of His self-love care package. He was sacrificing the comfort He deserved FOR US.

**Who are we?** We are treasured people, children of God who once were chained to selfishness, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, are transformed to self-forgetfulness for the glory of God. We are free from having to prove anything to anyone, including ourselves, because we are His.

We can't make ourselves happy. **Only God can satisfy our hearts.** No amount of loving our deepest selves will soothe the soul. Our deepest self is broken and yet loved with a "never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love."<sup>[7]</sup> All the self-love talk isn't bad. We don't need to throw it all away, we just need to remember to sift. Let's pray.

- [1] <https://psychcentral.com/blog/imperfect/2019/05/what-is-self-love-and-why-is-it-so-important>
- [2] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-love-yourself-enough>
- [3] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-love-yourself-enough>
- [4] <https://www.gotquestions.org/self-love.html>
- [5] <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/you-dont-need-more-self-love>
- [6] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/self-love-and-the-christian-counselors-task>
- [7] <https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Storybook-Bible-Every-Whispers/dp/0310708257>

# Small Group Material

**Series Goal:** In this series we want to help students learn to sift through our culture's distorted version of reality to uncover the truth. Addressing commonly held beliefs of our day, we will challenge students to use the Bible as their sieve, as they build their worldview. We do all of this in love, welcoming questions and doubts as they take steps to own their faith. Our heart is to also encourage students to love others well, even as they disagree with their friend's conclusions. This is a worldview, theology, apologetics, and identity series wrapped into one—addressing hard to talk about topics in a way that is both faithful to a high view of Scripture, but also with the winsomeness necessarily to reach the lost.

**Common Worldview:** Self Love

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 1:3-9

**Get To Know Your Group:** Have students share highs and lows from the week and any prayer requests they might have. Set a timer if necessary.

## Small Group Questions:

- How has self-love let you down? How have you struggled to believe you are loved even when you try harder?
- What pitfalls might there be when you focus on yourself?
- To what degree have you struggled with anxiety or depression? What do you think the root causes might be?
- Who does God say you are? How does what you do or don't do affect God's acceptance for you? What made it possible for you to be forgiven?
- How have you mixed up the way to be saved and fallen off either side of "trying harder to be good" or "doing whatever you want all the time because you know you are forgiven?"
- Why do you think rules and laws exist?
  - *[For our flourishing (God knows how things work best), but also to show us that we could never live up to God's perfect standard and we needed Jesus to make us righteous in God's sight.]*
- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
- How will getting our deepest desires and fantasies not fix the brokenness we experience?
  - What do those fallen desires point to biblically?
- What is the Holy Spirit's role in our transformation (sanctification) towards Christlikeness? Can we try harder to be more selfless?
- What is the result of time spent with Jesus?
  - Why is this a priority or not a priority in your life?
- If you looked at the 24 hours you have in a day, what is the biggest thing you prioritize with your actions and thoughts? What things do you worship with your time, energy, and thoughts? Do they lead you to hope or despair?
- How can we not become legalistic as Christians?
- How could you practically show people in your life this week that they are loved by God? What could we commit to together?