



SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON 3: HOW CAN CHRISTIANITY HELP ME THROUGH LIFE?

FACILITATOR NOTE

How does Christianity address Brokenness and Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization, Self-Efficacy, Self-Concept, and Self-Awareness issues in all aspects of life (family, work, mid-life crises, stress/anxiety, depression, addictions)? How does God help us deal with the inner struggles in life we face? This lesson will help us all realize how we should both love ourselves and therefore love others (as Christ loves us). Spend this time helping your participants dig into seeing and loving themselves as God sees and loves them. This can be a very encouraging and uplifting lesson. Let the Spirit guide you through this time.

PRAYER

Spend time in prayer with the class. Allow for requests and center your prayer on this lesson.

LESSON

I. LOVE OTHERS AS WE LOVE OURSELVES

When Jesus was questioned about what the most important commandment was He answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"¹ However, Jesus wasn't finished with quoting the Shema' (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). He goes on to share with the scribe that the second greatest commandment is indelibly tied to the first. Jesus says, "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."²

Jesus understood firsthand that our love for God must be expressed in how we love others. As Greg Ogden says, "Essentially, Jesus is saying that these two commandments are inseparable and therefore must be treated as one. He could not imagine loving God without loving your neighbor; the natural outflow of our love for God will be our growing capacity to love our neighbor."³ With this in mind, we will use our conversation this month to focus on what it means to love others as Jesus described in the second greatest commandment.

¹ Mark 12:28-30.

² Mark 12:31.

³ Greg Ogden, *The Essential Commandment: A Disciple's Guide to Loving God and Others* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Connect, 2011), 153.



Loving Ourselves?

The commandment that Jesus quotes here is found in Leviticus 19:17-18, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*: I am the LORD." Here we see that God is continuing to share with His people how to be holy before Him (a Holy God) so that He could dwell among them. His desire was to be with His children and walk amongst them. This is demonstrated later in Leviticus after the laws have been shared. God lets His people know that if they love, honor, and obey Him, then He will bless them. The text says in Leviticus 26:11-13:

I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

This is beautiful imagery of God's love for His children and His desire to be with them always. But to do so, His people had to live holy lives, set apart from the rest of the world and the cultures that surrounded them. One of the ways in which they would live holy before a Holy God was in how they treated each other. They were not to hate or bear grudges against their brothers and sisters in the Israelite community, but were instead to love their neighbors as themselves. Why? Because He is GOD (Yahweh). As God demonstrates love toward us, our natural response **should be** to love others. But the addition here is loving others as we love ourselves. What does that mean?

We live in a society where loving our self is taught and encouraged. Many people find themselves dealing with a low concept of their self, so our counselors, teachers, leaders are telling us that we need to love ourselves and emphasize the building of the view of our self. In fact, much of goals involved in the studies of Humanity (psychology, sociology, counseling, etc.) are centered on helping individuals grow in the areas below:

- **Self-Esteem/Self-Worth** – reflects a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth.
- **Self-Efficacy** – the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals.
- **Self-Actualization** – the motive to realize one's full potential. Self-actualization can be seen as similar to words and concepts such as self-discovery, self-reflection, self-realization and self-exploration.
- **Self-Awareness** – is the capacity for introspection and the ability to recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals.



- **Self-Concept** – (also called self-construction, self-identity, self-perspective or self-structure) is a collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles and sexuality, and racial identity. Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to “Who am I?”⁴

The common belief is that if a person has high self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-actualization, self-awareness, and self-concept, then they will be happy individuals and live fulfilled lives and contribute positively to society. This concept also creeps into our church families. One can find Christian publications promoting these concepts of building our self in order to live successful Christian lives (or so that you can be the best you, become a better you, and live your best life now). With these concepts in mind, we can easily translate Jesus’ second great commandment into, “you must love yourself well in order to love others.” Ogden picks up on this and says...

In our age, when we think low self-esteem is the root of all of humankind’s problems, we have stressed loving ourselves as the means to loving our neighbor. Common therapeutic wisdom backs us up here, telling us that we can’t love others if we do not love ourselves. I suppose there is some truth to that, but this can and often does lead us to emphasize the “as yourself” part more than love for our neighbor. When we do this, we actually turn Jesus’ response into three commands, not two, and twist his words around to mean, “Love yourself as the way to grow in love for neighbor.” This is not what Jesus is saying.⁵

Are you picking up on the problem with these concepts? The root of the problem is an overinflated approach to and view of the self. Jesus (quoting from Leviticus 19:18) shares that we are to love others as we love ourselves. He didn’t say we need to love ourselves in order to love others. Truth be told, we have no problem loving ourselves. In other words, **“I love me some me.”** Now, some may quibble with me to say that we know that individuals struggle with low self-worth and therefore not everyone loves themselves. To which I would respond, you are correct (kinda). Why do I say that? That low view of self comes from a skewed view of self that a sinful world has taught us. Even with a low view of self, we still love ourselves enough to fight to survive, find happiness, seek fulfillment, and so on.

This low view of self typically stems from what we have been taught is the ideal of human happiness, fulfillment, worth, and the like. Most of those teachings are rooted in a “human-centered mindset”. Yet, it is exactly this view of “self-love” that we need to move from **self** to **God and others**. We are to love others and care for their worth, happiness, survival, and souls as much as we love and care for our own. This “self-love” (our natural tendency to make ourselves god rather than God Himself)⁶ should be redirected toward God and others. As Brooks notes, “The statement ‘as yourself’ does not justify the self-love advocated by modern psychology as necessary for a healthy self-image. It

⁴ Taken from your general Wikipedia definitions.

⁵ Ogden, *The Essential Commandment*, 153.

⁶ Consider the thoughts from our *Third Conversation*, 60-61.



merely acknowledges that human beings do love themselves—far too much in fact—and that God deserves as much—actually far more.”⁷ Jesus is teaching us that in the second commandment God is simply addressing humankind as they are, sinners who love themselves, and that love should be turned from *self* to **God and others**.⁸

With this in mind, consider a revision to the concepts above:

- **God-Esteem/God-Worth** – reflects a person’s overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth based on how God values them.
 - For God loved you so much that He gave His only Son to save you (John 3:16).
 - You are more valuable to God than anything else in creation (Matthew 6:26, 30).
 - You are worth so much to Him that he knows how many hairs are on your head (or lack thereof for some of us) (Matthew 10:30).

- **God-Efficacy** – the extent or strength of one’s belief in God to grant them the ability to complete tasks and reach goals in their life based on His will and purpose for their lives.
 - Commit your work and goals to God and He will establish them (Proverbs 16:3).
 - In your heart you make your plans, but God establishes your steps (Proverbs 16:9).
 - You will make your plans, but God’s purposes will stand (Proverbs 19:21).
 - God gives you the gifts and abilities to accomplish tasks and reach goals (1 Corinthians 12:1-12; Ephesians 4:7, 11-16)
 - It is God who works in you to accomplish tasks and reach goals for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

- **God-Actualization** – the motive to realize one’s full potential as God has purposed in one’s life.
 - God know His plans for you and the potential He has given you to accomplish them. Plans to give you hope and a future. If you seek Him to find your potential, you will find Him (Jeremiah 29:11-13).
 - Trust in God and He will guide you toward reaching your fullest potential that He created in you (Proverbs 3:5-6).

- **God-Awareness** – is the capacity for introspection and the ability to recognize oneself as created in the image of God and unique from the environment and other individuals, yet indelibly linked to God and others by design.

⁷ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 198.

⁸ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 433.



- You are created in the image of God and are uniquely a reflection of Him (Genesis 1:26-28).
- No one has ever seen God, but when we love one another, we see and know God as He reveals Himself to us through one another (as images of God) and perfects His love in us (1 John 4:12).
- **God-Concept** –Generally, God-concept embodies the answer to “Who am I in God?”.
 - In God I am a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 - I am a royal priest, holy, God’s possession (1 Peter 2:9).
 - I am God’s workmanship created for good works (Ephesians 2:10).
 - I am the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - I am a child of God (John 1:12).
 - I am a son of God (Galatians 3:26).
 - I am the temple of God and His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

When our view of self is seen with these concepts rather than the previous ones, then we will be able to love people as God loves us. And that is exactly the type of love we are instructed to love our neighbors with.