

Message #1054
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"LOVING THAT PERSON IN THE MIRROR"
{Matthew 22: 34-40}

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In his book, "DARE TO LIVE NOW," Bruce Larson tells of an unusual man whom he met at a retreat some years ago.

"While eating breakfast one morning this man walked by my table. I grabbed his hand as he went by and said, 'Trevor, I want you to know that I thank God for you!' "Oh, Bruce,' He said smilingly, 'I thank God for myself!' "I was amazed! I thought, this explains his attitude. He can love others because he loves himself. He has all the troubles we have and is not perfect, but he can love himself because he knows that Jesus Christ loves him and he dares to call himself 'beloved.'" In our text of the morning a Pharisee sought to trap Jesus by asking Him...

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?

"Jesus replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.'" {Matthew 22: 36-40}

So, how do you feel about that person you see in the mirror? Can you say with Trevor, "I thank God for myself?"

This is quite a radical statement by Jesus. Frequently we stop short when we think about these verses and take the two commandments to basically mean...

...love God

...love our neighbor

...however, note He tagged on an attachment to His second command..."as yourself!"

The directive to "Love your neighbor as yourself" is fine; but, if you don't love yourself, how are you ever going to love your neighbor? I came across an article the other day entitled: "Love Yourself! You May Hurt Others!"

...talks of one who awakens in the morning--peers into the mirror and is enthralled with the face they see

...the author equated self-love with narcissism.

You may remember the Greek myth of Narcissus, a young man who wandered the countryside breaking young women's hearts.

...he was so good looking that in the end he fell in love with his own image that he saw reflected in a pool

...he wasted away his life looking at himself

That's not what Jesus was alluding to when He commanded us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves; however, there are Christians who are quick to toss out proof-texts implying that loving ourselves is a sin.

They quote Job...

"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." {Job 42:6}

They remind us that Jesus told His disciples...

"If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me!"

They say that Paul wrote that...

"We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God!" {II Corinthians 3:5}

And again, Paul's statement in Romans is quoted...

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." {Romans 12:3}

These must all be interpreted in the context in which they were given...as must Jesus' command to "Love your neighbor as yourself!"

If we are to quote Paul, let's look at how he admonishes men as it relates to their relationship with their wife...

"Husbands ought to love their wives AS THEIR OWN BODIES. he who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church." {Ephesians 5:28-29}

REASONS WHY WE SHOULD LOVE OURSELVES

We should love ourselves...

1. Because we are made in the image of God

...every one of us

...and, when God created you He saw that it was VERY good!

As the poster said: "God doesn't make junk!"

...what God makes is worthy of love!

So, we can say: "I am made in the image of God! God loves me; therefore, I'm not so bad after all...so, I can love what God created...ME!"

2. Because God loves us

Every time we look at the cross we are reminded of God's love for us.

...the cross is a symbol of love

...the cross is God's way of saying: "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

John wrote..."This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins!" {I John 4:10}

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us!" {I John 3:16}

3. Because Jesus Tells us to

In Luke we read..."Love your neighbor as yourself...do this and you will live!" {10:27b-28}

What does this imply?

...this is the key to eternal life

...loving God with your entire being

...loving your neighbor

...AND...loving yourself

WHAT IS MEANT BY SELF LOVE?

Self love is NOT narcissism.

Self love doesn't put ME in the center of everything.

Self love is NOT a preoccupation with self!

Self love is NOT arrogance {Mohammed Ali: "I am the greatest!"}

Self love is NOT the same as self esteem.

..this has to do with how we think about ourselves

Self love is MORE than emotions...MORE than what we feel.

...self love is how we choose to act

...how we respond to God's love for us
...how we develop into the person God has created us to be
Self love is seeing ourselves as God sees us!
...a person of worth
...an unique individual
...a person whom He loves
Love of self is an action we choose to take!
...absence of self love creates a void...unhappiness and dissatisfaction with our lives
...leads to depression
...can make one suicidal because of the lack of self-worth
...AND...until we learn to genuinely love ourselves, we will have a difficult time loving others!

YOU CAN LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF

Some times people have told us that we are unlovable...

...a parent
...teacher
...and those comments affected our self love!
...we bought the message!

But, the truth--the real truth--is that God loves us so we can learn to love ourselves in a healthy way...and in the end we will love God and our neighbors as Christ commanded us to.

Michael Kent in his book, "How to Fall in Love with Your Self" lists more than forty-five things we can choose to do to love ourselves. Let me just highlight a few for you...

First of all, when we think about how to love ourselves, we need to focus first on the inner work that we need to do.

...self love is NOT about what's out there!
...the actions we need to take are about us--NOT about what others have done and/or said about us
...when we begin to love ourselves, we need to remember it's about us and be responsible for our actions

Secondly, we need to take charge of our lives--mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. We read in Luke 2:52--"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men!"

...how do you feel about your appearance?
...are you taking good care of yourself?
...are you taking breaks emotionally?
...where are you spiritually?
...what is your relationship with the Lord?
...how is your personal devotional life?
...how is your prayer time?
...are you nourishing yourself daily spiritually?

Thirdly, loving yourself also involves paying attention to the messages and the thought processes going on in our minds and doing something about the ones that are not healthy!

...are you replaying negative tapes in your mind?
...can you hear those negative thoughts placed in your mind by thoughtless individuals?

Have others inferred...and/or told you that...

...you are worthless?

...you are unlovable?

...you messed up...again?

If so--rewrite those tapes...! Say to yourself...

"I am somebody special!"

"God created me!"

"God loves me!"

"God made me unique"

"I am a person of worth!"

"God forgives me when I mess up!"

Affirm yourself daily...several times daily...that you are a child of God...a person of worth. Affirm yourself by reminding yourself who you are in the sight of God.

Fourth, self-love invites us to allow ourselves to love and be loved.

...tear down the walls you've built to keep others out

...walls that keep us from loving others

CONCLUSION

We can choose to be loved in healthy ways...and we can choose to love God...and others...and we can choose to love ourselves!

So, today, LOVE YOURSELF! Find ways to do that!

Say out loud: "I thank God for myself!"

Accept the challenge this morning...and...

...know that you do not do that alone. There is a loving God who thinks you're very special!

...He loves you dearly

...and remember--NOTHING...and NO ONE...can separate you from His love!

The words of the last verse of "Bryan's Song" by Bryan Sutton sums it all up for us.

I love myself the way I am

And still I want to grow

But change outside can only come

When deep inside I know

I'm beautiful and capable of being

The best me I can

And I love myself...

Just the way I am!