session 4 study guide

the stress of negative self-image

starter

DESCRIBE YOURSELF: Ask the group members to pair up with a friend of the same gender. Then have them complete the following information.

Describe your height (short, tall, average): _____
Describe how you view your weight: _____
Describe your nose: _____
Describe your hair: _____
Describe your feet: _____
Describe your eyes: _____
Describe your mouth: _____

Now complete the following information for your friend:

Describe your friend's height (short, tall, average): _____
Describe your friend's weight: _____
Describe your friend's nose: _____
Describe your friend's hair: _____
Describe your friend's feet: _____
Describe your friend's eyes: _____
Describe your friend's mouth: _____

When you are finished, compare your answers with your partner's. Then, as a large group, discuss the following questions:

1. Were the descriptions that you wrote about yourself and your friend's descriptions about you the same or different?
2. How accurately do you think your friend described you?
3. Were you honest when you described your friend?
4. What do you like the best about your physical appearance?
5. Was it hard or easy to share what you liked about yourself?
6. Would you change your appearance if you could?

message

The classic tale *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo tells the story of a man named Jean Valjean. The story takes place during a dark time in France's history when people were starving and had no way to feed their families. Jean was one such man, and he stole food to feed his family. He was caught and sent to prison. After serving his time, he was released and wandered through the countryside, looking for a way to make money.

One day, Jean came to the house of a kind priest. The priest fed him and allowed him to spend the night. During the night, Jean stole the priest's silver knives, forks and spoons and, once again, was caught by the police as he made his escape. When the police saw the silver, they knew to whom it belonged, so they brought Jean back in chains to the priest. Jean knew he had stolen from a man who had been kind to him and he was sure the priest would press charges. Jean would be sent back to prison.

However, when the police asked the priest if Jean had stolen the silver, the priest said that he had not only given Jean the silverware, but that he had forgotten to take the silver candlesticks as well. The police had no alternative but to release Jean and leave. As the priest put the two candlesticks into Jean's hands, he said:

> My brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God![1]

What the priest showed Jean was a picture of who Jesus is to us. No matter what we do, Jesus loves us. In fact, He loves us so much that He gave everything to give us the opportunity to know Him and belong to Him. Jesus poured out His love and compassion on us by dying to pay the price for our sins—something we all need but don't deserve.

our bodies are temples

In Romans 5:8, Paul says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When we give our lives to Jesus, we belong to Him and know Him personally. We become a holy place for His Spirit to live. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul describes this transaction this way:

> *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

1. What is the purpose of a temple?

2. Who do these verses describe as a temple?

3. What price did God pay to allow us to belong to Him?

4. If we are Christians, how should treat our bodies?

we are valuable to God

Consider this fact: we are so valuable to God that He chose to sacrifice the life of His only Son so we could be set free from sin and live with Him forever. In John 3:16-17, Jesus describes God's love and purpose in a nutshell:

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

God created us, and He wants to be near us. Yet the relationship came at a price. It was expensive for Him to make a way to be with us, but He thinks that we are totally worth it! In Psalm 139:13-16, David writes:

> *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;*
> *your works are wonderful,*
> *I know that full well.*
> *My frame was not hidden from you*
> *when I was made in the secret place.*
> *When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,*
> *your eyes saw my unformed body.*
> *All the days ordained for me*
> *were written in your book*
> *before one of them came to be.*

1. God was there at the very beginning of us. Fill in the blanks based on this passage:

   He _____ our inmost being
   He _____ us together in our mother's womb
   We are _____ and _____ made
   All the _____ we will live are written, or known by God
   before we have lived any of them.

2. What does God know about us?

3. What do the words "fearfully" and "wonderfully" say about how God looks at us?

4. What does the phrase, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be," mean?

5. According to this psalm, what was God's intention in creating you?

dig

Once we understand what God did for us and how He feels about us, we have a choice to make. We can choose to accept His gift and His love, or we can choose to reject it. If we accept His love—and accept Jesus' sacrifice for our sins—we are also accepting a new way of seeing ourselves.

1. What do the following sentences say about how you should see yourself and the person you truly are in God's eyes?

   You are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

God's spirit lives within you.

You belong to God.

You have been saved from sin.

You have been given eternal life.

God created you, and all His works are wonderful.

God knows your future.

2. In 1 John 3:1, we read, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" How does a loving father feel about his child?

3. What place does a loved child have in a household?

4. How does a child whose father generously lavishes him or her with love often feel about himself or herself?

5. What does it mean to you to be called a "child of God"?

apply

Read the following story about Anne, and then consider the difference between the way she sees herself and the way God sees her.

> Anne is obsessed about being thin. She deliberately starves herself and has developed an eating disorder known as anorexia nervosa, which literally means "loss of appetite because of nerves." Because she is not in the later stages, Anne feels hungry, but she chooses not to eat. She is extremely thin, but when she looks in the mirror, she still sees herself as fat. So she exercises—a lot—and hides the fact that she uses products to "help keep her weight down." Anne is a perfectionist. If she doesn't get help and put on some weight, her obsession to be thin could be fatal.

How does Anne see herself? What are the consequences of her negative self-image?

an incredible creation

The following true or false quiz will give you a picture of just how incredible you are as a part of God's creation—worthy of loving care and protection. (Answers are given at the bottom of the page.)[2]

1. An unborn baby's heart doesn't start to beat until three months after conception.
2. Usually, the first hair that an unborn baby starts to grow is an eyebrow.
3. Thirteen weeks after conception, the unborn baby is the size of a watermelon, and its heart is the only organ that functions at this time.
4. Your brain is more complex than the most powerful computer.
5. Messages from your brain travel through your body at speeds of 100 miles per hour.
6. The average adult male is made up of 100 billion cells.
7. Twins have the same body odor.
8. Your body produces a chemical known as adrenaline that gives you super strength.
9. The human nose can identify 100 different smells.
10. Your eyes can distinguish up to one million color surfaces.
11. Your body contains enough water to fill a five-gallon tank.
12. Your feet can produce a pint of sweat a day.
13. Your stomach acid is strong enough to dissolve zinc.
14. Your bicep is the strongest muscle in the body.
15. A sneeze can travel at speeds in excess of 100 MPH.

holy and sacred

Unfortunately, many young people today do not realize just how incredible they are and do not see their bodies as being something holy or sacred. In fact, researchers report that 1 in every 5 teens has purposely injured themselves at some time (by cutting, scratching, burning, mutilating or hitting oneself, or anything else that causes bodily harm).[3] Even if a person does not carry self-abuse to this extreme, many abuse their bodies with smoking, drugs, alcohol and sex. But God wants so much more for us. In 1 Peter 2:9, we are told, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Answers: (1) F—it starts beating about three weeks after conception; (2) T; (3) F—all of the baby's major organs are formed and fully functioning at 13 weeks; (4) T; (5) F—they travel at around 250 miles per hour; (6) F—adult males are made up of 100 trillion cells; (7) T; (8) T; (9) F—the human nose can identify 50,000 different smells; (10) T; (11) F—it can fill a 10-gallon tank; (12) T; (13) T; (14) F—your tongue is the strongest muscle in your body; (15) T.

1. Why do you think teens often have a difficult time seeing themselves as valuable?

2. Why do you think they participate in harmful activities?

3. What thoughts or feelings have you or someone you know expressed that indicate a negative self-image?

4. What events might have contributed to these feelings?

5. What do you think God would say to you about your value? How would that make you feel?

6. The Bible is God's Word, and the descriptions of God's love are intended for you personally. Review John 3:16-17 and 1 Peter 2:9. How would believing the truth of these words and living according to these truths change the way you see yourself?

7. How would this change the way you behave or treat yourself?

8. How can seeing yourself and others from God's point of view affect the way you respond to someone else who has an unhealthy self-image?

reflect

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the degree to which you care about yourself?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
hate myself									love myself

2. What attitudes and behaviors do you display that show how you feel about yourself?

3. Is there anything you need to do right now to protect yourself from harm? If so, who can you talk to about it?

4. What would you have to change for your body (including your mind) to be a temple of the Holy Spirit?

5. What does a healthy self-image look like? How is it different from projecting yourself as being better than others?

6. How can you begin a relationship with God or strengthen your relationship with Him? Who can come alongside you to offer support and guidance?

You are extremely valuable to God, as He proved through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. So take time now to talk to God. Ask Him to help you change unhealthy things in your life, and then praise Him for His love and acceptance. Celebrate any progress He helps you to make in seeing yourself through His eyes!

meditation

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.
EPHESIANS 2:10, *NLT*

Notes

1. Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 73.
2. Information taken from "14 Facts About Your Unborn Baby," Ask a Mum, http://www.aska mum.co.uk/Pregnancy/Search-Results/Health/14-facts-about-your-unborn-baby/; "50 Incredibly Weird Facts About the Human Body," BSN Program, February 22, 2010, http://bsn program.com/2010/50-incredibly-weird-facts-about-the-human-body/; "Amazing Human Facts," Hub Pages, http://vinodpaulson.hub pages.com/hub/AMAZING_HUMAN_FACTS.
3. Jennifer LeClaire, "#CutForBieber Trend Mocks Pain of Tormented Teens" Charisma News, January 8, 2013, data from CNN poll. http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/35159-cut forbieber-trend-mocks-pain-of-tormented-teens.