

Does the Bible Really Say to Put Yourself Last?

Most of us are dedicated to taking care of others before taking care of ourselves. This flows out of a well-meaning but jaded way of looking at how we are to live the Christian life.

JOY

I learned in my teens that JOY stands for Jesus first, Others second, then Yourself. The message I heard from every pulpit was that focusing on myself would be selfish and only get me in trouble.

I understand clearly where this message comes from, and it is true. We are humans, and as such, we are self-centered and want what we want. The JOY acronym, though, is misleading.

Focusing on Jesus first is always right. However, we have to go to His Word to find where we need to focus next.

Great Commandment

Jesus, in answering a Jewish leader about what commandment is greatest, told us the answer: “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these’” (Mark 12:29-31, NIV).

Jesus clearly tells us that we cannot love others if we have no love for ourselves. He also tells us we cannot really love Him unless we are taking care of our heart, soul, mind and strength. If we don't take care of every part of ourselves, we have nothing left with which to love Him.

The Amplified version makes how we love ourselves even clearer when it adds, “You shall [unselfishly] love your neighbor as yourself.” Once again, how can we unselfishly love our neighbor if we don’t love ourselves the same way?

Unselfish Self-Care

Many people read that they should love themselves and think that means they are being prideful about how they look, how smart they are or what talents they have.

That isn’t what Jesus means by loving ourselves. What He means is to take good care of ourselves—body, soul and spirit. If we take good care of ourselves, we will know how to take care of others.

Unselfish self-care is making sure we are healthy in every way—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. This means eating healthy, getting enough exercise, expanding our minds by reading and studying, taking good care of ourselves emotionally and staying in touch with God spiritually, which includes reading and studying His Word.

These are our basic needs. However, many people, especially those who are trying to please other people, put all their needs aside and expend all their energy trying to take care of others.

They do a poor job of it, though, because they have not taken of and invested anything in themselves. As a result, they quickly burn out. That leaves those who were depending on them not knowing what to do.

The Golden Rule

The Great Commandment goes hand-in-hand with the golden rule. “In everything you do, be careful to treat others in the same way you’d want them to treat you, for that is the essence of all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12, TPT).

I thought I had taught this verse to one of our foster sons who was not being very kind to kids in his classroom. After being suspended from school again for shoving a boy in his class, I had him repeat the verse to me. He said, “‘Do unto others what they do to you,’ and he said mean things to me, so I shoved him.”

He didn’t get what Jesus was saying at all. However, when I asked, “How would you want him to treat you?” The wheels began to whirl in his brain.

“I want him to be nice to me,” he said.

“Then you need to be nice to him first even if he isn’t nice back. Can you do that?”

Positive Self-Care

He was honest and said he didn’t know if he could be nice because the boy was mean. At that point, I realized he had no deep well of self-care to draw from.

All of his life, he had been told he was worthless, stupid and no good. If we could change how he thought about himself, he might be able to begin to see others in a different light. We began working on that, but for some people, it takes a long time to change their view of themselves.

What about you? How do you view yourself? What words do you use to define yourself? What negative things have people told you about yourself that you cannot get away from no matter how far you run?

Change Your Self-Talk

In order to treat others with love, we first have to learn to treat ourselves with love. When this concept began to make sense to me, I took an inventory of all the negative self-talk I told myself throughout the day.

My big one was: "Teresa, that was a stupid thing to do." The other was, "You can't do that. You're too fat or you're too dumb." I was my own worst enemy.

In addition to working on loving myself by taking care of my body, eating healthy food and exercising, I also had to start eliminating the negative words I was speaking over myself. Words like "stupid," "fat" and "dumb" had to go.

Positive Affirmations

I had to begin to tell myself the things God says about me. I kept track during the day of when I said negative things to myself and replaced those with positive words. That day, I spilled the entire contents of my purse in the checkout lane at the grocery store.

I immediately went to my default and said out loud, "Teresa, you are so stupid." Realizing what I had just done, I corrected myself and said, "Teresa, you're smart for picking everything up. It was just an accident. Everyone has accidents."

Don't get me wrong. I didn't change all at once, but God began shining His light on all the ways I was beating myself up over and over again.

I had to learn how to take care of and love myself even in my spoken and unspoken words. I had to take those negative words captive and replace them with what God says about me.

What God Says About Me

To really understand that, I searched the Scriptures and wrote down 77 positive affirmations with references. These are things God says about me, and so I repeat them over myself when I need encouragement.

To begin with, I chose one affirmation and repeated it to myself at least 10 times a day to get the truth down inside

me. The great thing about God is that when He cements these truths in our lives, they will overflow into the lives of others. This is huge, and it's one way loving ourselves helps us love others.

One of my favorite affirmations is "I am beautiful." I have one kind of socks I wear. I have many pairs, of course. They all say, "I am beautiful" on the toes. It reminds me every day of what God says about me when I am about His work.

"What a beautiful sight to behold—the precious feet of the messenger coming over the mountains to announce good news!" (Isa. 52:7a, TPT). There are 76 others that are just as powerful as this.

77 Affirmations

The list of 77 affirmations is a free download on my website. It's also something I encourage those embarking on a lifestyle change journey to read, internalize and keep handy to refer to every day.

The scripture references are included, but I purposefully did not write out the entire verse. Looking up the verses is all a part of internalizing the truths of how God sees us. It helps us to understand more of what He is saying to us.

The big truth is for us to love ourselves unselfishly by seeing ourselves as God sees us. Then, we can really love Him with every part of us and love others in that same way.

You may download the 77 affirmations as my gift to you. Go here: [. {eo}](#)

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