

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU

SELF-IMAGE



BIG IDEA: THE ONLY ADEQUATE AND ACCURATE FOUNDATION FOR MY SELF-IMAGE IS THE WORD OF GOD.

We are constantly bombarded with messages from other people and our culture. Consciously or unconsciously, we accept and adapt many of the messages to form how we view ourselves. For some it forms a “positive self-image.” For others it becomes more “negative.”

Authentic Christian living isn’t having either a positive or negative self-image. It’s having an accurate one, based on God’s Word and the truths that it reveals about us.

This study investigates the foundation or source we use to build our self-image.



DESIRED LIFE CHANGE: As a result of this study, the members of your group should begin to consciously sort out the inaccurate beliefs about themselves and replace them with truth derived from God’s Word.



AUDIENCE: This study is designed for younger believers who accept the authority of God’s Word but are just learning how to apply it to their lives.



LEADER’S PREPARATION: Read through the entire lesson, answering the questions in the way you anticipate your group might. You should also read Psalm 139 in its entirety. Reading the notes in a study Bible or commentary will help you become more familiar with the Psalm. You will need to provide a 3x5 card for each group member to do the exercise on Student Guide page 4.



AT A GLANCE

As your group interacts in this study, they will think . . .

This is my **WORLD:** Everybody, including me, forms an image of themselves based on information from many sources.

This is my **NEED:** My image of myself will not be accurate if I base it merely on what I have learned from others and my culture.

This is my **ANSWER:** Only God’s Word can give an accurate and adequate foundation for my self-image.

This is the **DIFFERENCE** it will make: By applying God’s Word, I can replace my “misbeliefs” with truths about myself.

This is what I’ll **DO:** I will begin to write out brief prayers to God, expressing gratitude for who God has made me to be.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?



Our image of ourselves affects how we feel about ourselves and how we live. M. Blaine Smith writes, “I doubt that anything more strongly affects our sense of fulfillment and well-being than our self-image. When we feel good about ourselves, we can endure a great deal of tension and challenge and still hold on to a basically positive view of life. But when our self-image is low, we find a way of making even the most encouraging circumstances seem bleak.” (*One of a Kind*, IVP., pp. 15, 16.)

The Bible teaches a great deal about who we are and how we should think about ourselves. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to survey it all; however, it is essential for each believer to begin the process of replacing “lies” or “misbeliefs” with “truth.” The first step in this process is recognizing the source or foundation upon which self-image is built.

Accepting the Bible as the only adequate and accurate foundation for our self-image, we begin the process of building a healthy and accurate self-image.

1 **ASK:** How many of you recognize Stuart Smalley's phrase, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and, doggone it, people like me?" (Stuart Smalley is a character on *Saturday Night Live* who is the self-image guru. He deals with his negative self-concept through positive self-talk. He is the star of his cable TV show called "Daily Affirmations.") Why is Stuart so popular (and funny)? (Because while we identify with him in his struggles, he is so extreme in how he deals with it.)

2 **ASK:** What do students do to try to feel better about themselves? (Party, drink, get involved in all kinds of activities, try to excel in something—like grades . . .)

3 Take a moment and think. How would you complete the statement, "I feel better about myself when . . ." What do you do to feel better about yourself? Write your answer down.

4 **STATE:** Most of us probably wrote down something that has to do with things we do, like "when I'm in shape," or "when I've done all my homework." How we feel about ourselves can play a big part in our self-image.

5 **STATE:** Our self-image could be described as what we have come to believe about ourselves.

6 **ASK:** What difference does it make in your life in regard to what kind of self-image you have? (Our self-image affects virtually all dimensions of our lives.)

Let's look more closely at how self-image affects our relationships.

7 **ASK:** How would you describe a person with too high of a self-image? (Proud, arrogant, stuck-up . . .) How do you feel around a person like that? (Don't enjoy it, resent their attitude . . .)

8 **ASK:** What are some words you would use to describe a person with too low of a self-image? (Negative, critical, unmotivated . . .) How do you feel around a person like that? (It gets old listening to them be negative . . .)

9 **ASK:** How would you describe a person with an accurate self-image? (They seem to accept themselves and not be all caught up with themselves . . .) How do you feel around them? (They are a lot more comfortable to be with . . .)

10 **ASK:** How about you? How would you rate your self-image? Don't answer aloud, just think about it.

interActa
life applications™

VERSION 1.1

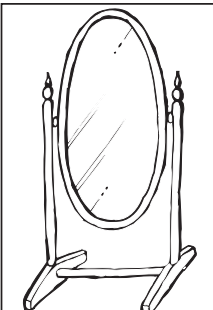
THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU

To feel better about themselves, students . . .

TOOLBOX
 THINK
 OBSERVE
 CLOSE-UP
 WRITE
 DISCUSS
 FEELINGS
 BRAINSTORM
 REFERENCE
 PASSAGE
 ARTICLE
 BIG IDEA
 CROSSROAD

REFLECT

I feel better about myself when . . .



"I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and, doggone it, people like me."
(Stuart Smalley, *Saturday Night Live*)

SELF-IMAGE

What we have come to believe about ourselves

What difference does it make?

How would you describe a person with a self-image that is . . . ?

TOO HIGH

PROBLEM

We tend to compare our weaknesses to another person's strengths (or vice versa).

TOO LOW

ACCURATE

How would you rate your self-image?
Too high, too low or accurate?

8 **ASK:** What are some words you would use to describe a person with too low of a self-image? (Negative, critical, unmotivated . . .) How do you feel around a person like that? (It gets old listening to them be negative . . .)

1 **ASK:** Where do you think one's self-image comes from? What are some of the different sources we draw our view of ourselves from?

2 Write those answers in the ovals at the top of page 2. (Family, friends, media, achievements . . .)

3 Let's pick three of these sources. What kind of messages do we receive from each source? (Our family can be real positive and accepting, or it might be negative and critical; the media gives us unrealistic standards to compare ourselves with . . .)

4 **READ:** What effect do the messages from each source have on you? (It's really complex, but for many of us, we seem to fall short of expectations.) For example, let's take . . . (source #1).

5 **READ & DISCUSS:** Why are these sources not an adequate or accurate basis? (Others have a limited perspective or wrong standards . . .) Can I learn the truth about myself from these sources? (Yes, but not a complete picture.)

6 Let's consider another source. **READ** the verses aloud.

ASK: How do these verses describe God's Word?

Where do you think one's self-image comes from?

Our self-image tends to be the product of the messages we have embraced—consciously or unconsciously.

Self-image

QUOTE

A recent study suggests that watching even 30 minutes of TV programming and advertising can alter a woman's perception of the shape of her body.

—*Journal of Communication*, (Summer 1992), p. 108.

KEY ISSUE: Are these adequate and accurate sources for what we believe about ourselves? Why or why not?

CONSIDER

Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. —Proverbs 30:5

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. —Mark 13:31

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. —Isaiah 40:8

The Bible

Self-image

CONTRAST

How does God's Word contrast to the sources we discussed previously?

God's Word reveals many truths about us.

7 **ASK:** How does God's Word contrast to the sources we discussed previously? **ASK:** If what God's Word says about me conflicts with what I have come to believe, based on others' expectations, which is the more reliable source? Which should I believe? (These questions are more rhetorical than discussion oriented.)

8 **READ**

1 TRANSITION STATEMENT: God's Word reveals many truths about us. We want to zero in on one of them to apply it to our lives today. It's found in Psalm 139.

READ ALOUD

Let's consider one . . .

PSALM 139:13-16

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 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.
16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

CONTEXT

Psalm 139 is a prayer of meditation regarding the security and significance of the believer's relationship to God. It considers this in light of God's knowledge (vv. 1-6), presence (vv. 7-12), sovereignty (vv. 13-16) and holiness (vv. 17-24).

INSIGHT

"God is the Creator, superintending both the psychological (inward parts, v. 13a) and physical (knit me, v. 13b) structure . . ." (*New Bible Commentary*, p. 539)
Verse 15: *The depths of the earth* is poetic imagery, a figurative reference to the mother's womb.

What do I learn about . . . ?

GOD		ME

PARAPHRASE

4 ASK: How would you put the truths of this passage into your own words? Write this down.

EVALUATE

How easy is it for you to accept this truth about you?

NOT EASY ← → EASY

REFLECT

What obstacles keep you from fully embracing this truth?

5 ASK: How easy or difficult is it for you to accept this truth, that is, to believe it's true about you? Put an "X" on the arrow.

6 ASK: What obstacles keep you from embracing this truth fully?

OPTIONAL SHARING: I'm overweight. It conflicts with everything I've been told.

NOTE: This is not to imply that I am not responsible for how I care for and develop what God has entrusted to me. I am a steward. However, I am not to reject how He has designed me.

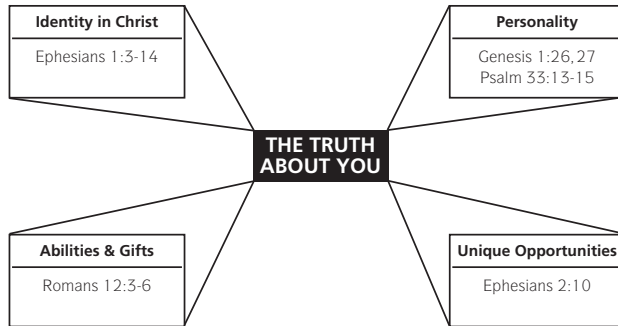
2 STATE: Read the insight box and read these verses to yourself. Circle every use of "God" or personal pronoun referring to God. Underline every use of "I" or pronoun which refer to the author.

3 LIST: Record the insights you discover about God and yourself.

DISCUSS: What are some of the insights you discovered about God? (He is Creator; He does His forming skillfully and with a design in mind.) About yourself? (I am not a product of chance or merely physical process; I am wonderfully and uniquely designed.)

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS: What sort of images do the words "knit" and "woven" bring to mind? (When a person knits or weaves, they have a specific result in mind. It is artistic.) What does it mean to be "fearfully and wonderfully made?" (The product is awesome, hard to comprehend.)

The Bible reveals many more truths about you. For example, consider . . .



Since the Bible is true, what it teaches about me is true . . . regardless of the messages I hear from other people or my culture.

Try this

On a 3 x 5 card, write out a prayer to God like David's in Psalm 139:14. Tape it to a place you will see often. Repeat it to God throughout the week.

Next week, try it again with another verse from the above diagram, "The Truth About You."

SELF-CHECK

Do I recognize that my view of myself is often affected by inaccurate and inadequate sources?

SELF-CHECK

Do I accept God's Word as the authority for my life and the basis for my view of myself?

KEY

I must build a new view of myself based on what is true about me. I must also recognize and reject misbeliefs, replacing them with truths from God's Word.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the New International Version, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ISBN 1-885702-80-9

© 1994 WSN Press, Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc. 741-0595

printed on recycled paper

1 TRANSITION STATEMENT: God's Word reveals many other truths about me. We could consider what it teaches about who I am or my identity in Christ. We could also consider how He helped shape my personality, gave me special abilities and even guides the plan or design for my life. (If time permits, you can look up one or more of these examples.)

2 READ STATE: While much more can be involved in developing an accurate and healthy self-image, the foundation for what we believe about ourselves is the truth of God's Word.

3 STATE: Ask yourself these two self-check questions.

4 APPLY: Hand out 3x5 cards and give them a few minutes to try this exercise.

5 READ



BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

One Of A Kind – M. Blaine Smith (IVP)

His Image . . . My Image – Josh McDowell (*Here's Life*)

The Sensation of Being Somebody – Maurice E. Wagner (Zondervan)

Self-Image – James Moore (*Institute of Biblical Counseling / NavPress*)

ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

What do we mean by *self-image*? And what does it mean to have a *self-image problem*? When the term *self-image* is used in modern language, it usually refers to the way we view our personal distinctiveness. Our self-image is our attitude toward our individuality. To look at this more specifically from a biblical standpoint, we can summarize biblical teaching on the nature of humanity under four broad areas.

1. The created nature. God gives each of us certain characteristics which make us human, such as a body, soul, the capacity to think and act.
2. The moral nature. Each of us has fallen drastically short of God's ideal for our lives. We are all sinful.
3. The redeemed nature. When we give our lives to him, Christ forgives us and gives us a new nature and eternal destiny.
4. The individual nature. We are each given certain distinctive features which give us individuality, make us unique.

These first two areas have to do with factors that we share with all humans, the third with those we share with all Christians. The fourth area involves those factors that are unique to us, which give us our distinctiveness.

—M. Blaine Smith, *One Of A Kind*, (InterVarsity Press, pp. 25, 26)

HABITS TO DEVELOP TO ENHANCE YOUR SELF-IMAGE

1. Do not label yourself negatively ("I'm clumsy" and so on). You tend to become the label you give yourself.
2. Behave assertively (but not aggressively) even in threatening situations, particularly when you don't feel like doing so.
3. When you fail, admit or confess it to God, your Father, and then refuse to condemn yourself. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Remember, you are in the process of becoming like Christ. Growth takes time. Be as kind to yourself as you would be (or would hope to be) to any other person.
4. Do not compare yourself with others. You are a unique person. God enjoys you in your uniqueness; have a similar attitude toward yourself.
5. Concentrate and meditate of God's grace, love and acceptance—not on criticisms from other people.
6. Associate with friends who are positive, who delight in you and who enjoy life.
7. Start helping others to see themselves as God sees them . . . by accepting them, loving them, and encouraging them. Give them the dignity they deserve as one of God's unique human creatures.
8. Learn to laugh; look for the humor in life and experience it.

—Adapted from *His Image . . . My Image*, Josh McDowell (*Here's Life*)

O V E R V I E W O F M E E T I N G T I M E



Planning your group session

	INTERACTION AS A GROUP	INTERACTION WITH THE STUDY & WORD	INTERACTION WITH GOD	UPCOMING INFORMATION	OTHER IDEAS
	Ice breaker? Refreshments?	Provided. Add personal story?	Worship / Praise / Prayer time?	Next meeting? Special event?	Music / Video?
Allocating your time	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Primary Author:
Lori Carlson

Other Contributors:
Damon Barnes, Dennis Brockman, Dave Carlson, Judy Clark, Jarvis Davis, Keith Davy, Conrad Koch, Lori Maynard, Annika Riegert, Barry Rush, Kevin Scoleri, Eric Swanson, Ned Williams, Dave Sander

Design:
Thompson & Thompson