

BOOK FOURTEEN IN THE SERIES:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

CHANGING YOUR SELF-IMAGE

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible-based study for individuals, small groups, and classes

- Day One: Who Do You Think You Are?
- Day Two: Believe the Truth, Not Others' Lies
- Day Three: Reject False "Solutions"
- Day Four: You Are in a Growth Process
- Day Five: Review and Test

Changing Your Self-Image: Book fourteen in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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ISBN: 978-1-930153-63-9

Version: TOM1420170919A

Revised: September 19, 2017

Published by LifeTree Books, Sacramento, CA • Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com



The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?*
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer*
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ*
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible*
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible*
- Book 6: How to Pray*
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices*
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living*
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life*
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will*
- Book 11: Obeying God*
- Book 12: Living in God's Power*

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ*
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image*
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes*
- Book 16: Living with Humility*
- Book 17: Living with Purpose*
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control *
- Book 19: Living with Integrity*
- Book 20: Growing through Problems*
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture*
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly*
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships*
- Book 26: Making Friends*
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others*
- Book 28: Forgiving Others*
- Book 29: Serving Others*
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts*
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure*
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex*
- Book 34: Healing Racial and Social Divisions
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)*
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)*
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection*
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)*
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)*
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: TBD
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame*
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement *
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure*
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death



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Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Be sure to share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they will be impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?" instead of "Do you have any thoughts about this?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Foreword

When I was first approached about writing a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, let me encourage you to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.



Day One: Who Do You Think You Are?

Who do you think you are? In this book, you will read God's answer to that question. But first, what is your answer?

You might have a fairly positive self-image. Or you might make some of the following comments:

I'm a failure. My parents rejected me. I'm different from other people. No one really likes me. My friends aren't real friends. I can't get a decent job. There's no purpose to my life. I don't have a future. My life sucks, but I don't deserve any better.

Or you might say:

I look good on the outside. I'm successful. I have a position of power. I take care of my body, and I'm in pretty good shape. But something is missing. I don't think my life has much meaning. Inside, I'm insecure, afraid someone will come along who is better than me



On a different level, when you look at yourself in the mirror, you might be unhappy about your physical appearance:

I am so ugly. No wonder no one likes me. I'm overweight. I have a double chin. My teeth are crooked. My breasts are too small (or too large). I'm in terrible physical shape. My health is getting worse. I'm losing my hair.

Do any of these comments describe the way you think about yourself? If they do, you aren't alone. Many people think similar things about themselves.

Discussion question

1. How would you describe yourself? Do you see yourself in any of the above descriptions? Explain your answer.

Do you believe what God says?

Before you read any further, let me ask you an important question: When God says something, do you believe him? Just as important, do you believe that the Bible is true, that it is God's Word?

Here's what the Bible says about itself:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

I'm writing about the Bible to encourage you to believe it, not your emotions. That's because I am going to quote the Bible in this book, and you might have trouble believing what God says about you.

Discussion questions

2. Do you believe the Bible is God's Word, and that it is reliable (true)? Explain your answer.
3. Do you sometimes trust your emotions more than you trust God's word? If so, take a minute to pray. Ask God to help you believe what he says about you in the Bible.
4. Why can we be thankful for the Bible?

God created you, and you are special to him

When God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, he created them "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27).

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

God did more than create Adam and Eve. He also created you, for he "forms the hearts of all" (Psalm 33:15). He made you in his image, breathed life into you, and gave you an eternal soul. It's easy to take being alive for granted, but when you think about it, it's awesome.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Psalm 100:3)

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:14)

Read that last verse again. You were fearfully and wonderfully made, and God's works are wonderful. That includes you.

You are unique, one of a kind, and God has a purpose and plan for your life. Even if you have made major mistakes, you are God's workmanship, and you are special to him.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Discussion question

5. Do you believe that God created you, and that you are special to him? Why or why not?

God loves you

Regardless of who you are or what you have done, God loves you unconditionally—even if you have killed someone or committed another type of terrible crime.

You haven't done anything to deserve his love. (Actually, no one has, no matter how "good" he or she is.) He just loves you.

If you have never experienced a parent's love, it may take a while to get used to the idea of being deeply loved by your heavenly Father. But the fact is that God loves you with a greater love than you could possibly imagine.

The apostle Paul knew that some Christians in Ephesus had trouble grasping God's love, so he wrote the following prayer in his letter to the Ephesians. As you read these verses, make them your personal prayer:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Discussion question

6. God says that he loves you. Do you believe him? Why or why not?

God forgives you

The Bible says that when you confess your sins, God forgives you totally and completely—no matter what sins you committed or how awful they were.

Not only does he forgive you, he purifies you. That means he washes away the stains of your guilt. It's as if you took a spiritual bath.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

Accept God's forgiveness and love with thanksgiving. Don't live in the past. Instead, rejoice in the fact that God, the One who created everything, loves you deeply and fully forgives you.

Discussion question

7. The Bible says that when you confess your sins, God forgives you and purifies you from all unrighteousness. Do you believe that? Why or why not?

God wants to have a close friendship with you

Here comes another truth that might seem impossible to believe, but remember that it is God who is talking. After you are born again (John 3:3-7), you enter into a close friendship with him.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)

This is the most intimate friendship possible, for Christ's Spirit actually dwells in you when you become a believer.

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 Corinthians 6:19-20)

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27)

Discussion question

8. God's Word says when you are born again, his Spirit enters you, and you begin a close relationship with him. Do you believe that? Why or why not?

God values you highly

Let's review everything you have read:

- God created you, and you are special to him.
- God loves you deeply.
- God forgives you for everything you have done wrong.
- God purifies you from all unrighteousness.
- God wants to have a close friendship with you. His Spirit lives inside you.

When you look at all of these truths, it's obvious that God values you highly. Base your self-image on these facts, not on your old fears and emotions. God is with you, and he has a plan for you.

Discussion question

8. Today's study began with the question "Who do you think you are?" Has this study helped you answer this question? Has it helped you have a Christ-centered self-image? Why or why not?

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Homework – Day One

1. Why did the first page in this study ask, “Do you believe what God says”?
2. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is reliable (true)? Why or why not?
3. Read Ephesians 3:16-19 as your own personal prayer. Describe how it speaks to you (or doesn't speak to you):
4. Are you sure that God has forgiven all your sins? Are there some sins you aren't sure he has forgiven? Explain your answer:

Day Two: Believe the Truth, Not Others' Lies

If you have a negative self-image, there's a good chance you have been criticized or ridiculed for years, and that you believed what you heard.

In today's study, you will see that many of the things you have been told are wrong. They are lies.

Some of the lies are actual lies, words that are literally not true. Worse, though, are the underlying lies, messages that say:

You're no good.

You're a failure.

You will never amount to anything.

I am calling these messages lies because they attack your character, not specific things you did wrong. They can go deep into your core.



Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

Discussion questions

1. Have others criticized you a lot? If so, how has this affected you?
2. If you were criticized as a child, does this still affect you today? If so, how does it affect you?

What "messages" did your parents give you?

When I counsel people, I often ask:

What were your parents like? Were they encouraging and positive most of the time, or were they critical and discouraging?

Did they go to your school and sports events, or were they absentee parents?

Many people say one or both of their parents were frequently angry and critical. In addition, many say one or both of their parents were rarely or never home, or they were not involved in their kids' lives.

If your parents often were angry with you, or if they were absentee parents, you probably felt unloved and abandoned. There's a good chance you thought you were a bad person. You still might think there was something unlovable about you that caused your parents to treat you that way.

That's not true. Even though you behaved badly at times (most children do), it was your parents who had the real problem, not you.

That's because they were adults and you were a child. You were wounded by their behavior.

The Bible is very clear about how they should have treated you. Read, for example, Paul's instructions to fathers. (Although they were written to fathers, they also apply to mothers.)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21)

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

Now read how your parents should have corrected you when you did something wrong:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Notice that this verse says the person who is doing the correcting should be spiritual and gentle. He or she should have the goal of restoring, not simply criticizing or punishing.

Let me encourage you to reject your parents' lies—the messages that you are a bad person, that there is something wrong with you, or that you are unlovable.

Discussion questions

3. Read Ephesians 6:4. What could a parent say or do that would make his or her children bitter?
4. Read Colossians 3:21. What are some reasons children might become discouraged?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12. Compare this passage to the way your parents dealt with you.

What "messages" did you get from other people?

I don't know your life history. You may have heard teachers, principals, counselors, police officers, parole officers, judges, bosses, or others constantly criticize you or attack your character. Instead of correcting you with loving concern and wisdom, they tore you down.

There are countless ways people may have given you negative messages, messages that said you are no good—messages that you may still believe today. For example:

- An aunt or uncle may have said you were immoral, and that you would end up a prostitute.
- Your spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend may have constantly criticized you.
- Someone who sexually abused or raped you may have said you invited the abuse.
- A supervisor at work may have yelled at you, calling you stupid or lazy.

Find freedom from negative messages ("lies")

Regardless of who attacked or criticized you, God can help you break free from the pain of their actions or words.

One way to break free is to see the abusive person more clearly.

Typically, when someone has been constantly criticized or yelled at, he or she sees the angry person as being a powerful, emotionally overwhelming person.

A more accurate way to look at the other person is to realize that he or she is an emotionally weak, immature person. This person acts like you are the one with a problem when he or she is really the one with a problem.

If someone yells at you or severely criticizes you, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Were the words (or actions) Christ-like?

Even if you did something wrong, did the other person (parent, boss, whomever) treat you the way Jesus would have wanted? The obvious answer is “no.” Remember Paul’s words:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

2. Were the words (or actions) loving?

Again, the obvious answer is “no.” They were angry and maybe even hateful.

3. Were the words (or actions) wise?

Once again, the obvious answer is “no.” If you want to help someone actually learn and change, you are much more effective if you talk with respect and love.

So who has the problem?

When you think things through, it’s clear that the other person has a big problem. When you realize this, it can help you move out of the emotional role of a victim.

Discussion question

6. You have just read how to see the abusive person more clearly. Were these insights helpful for you? Explain your answer.

Pray for the other person

Once you break free from believing the other person’s lies, you can see him or her more accurately, as someone who has serious problems, someone who needs God’s help to make some major changes. Instead of being emotionally crushed, you can pray for him or her because you see him or her through Jesus’ eyes, not through the eyes of a victim.

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)

Memory verse

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible studies

Studies on your self-image

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/self-image

Notes

Homework – Day Two

1. Underlying lies can go deep into your core. Describe what underlying lies are:
2. Do you agree that underlying lies have the potential to have a negative effect on someone's self-image and on his or her life experience? Why or why not?
3. How can a parent's word cause a child to think he or she is a bad person?
4. Describe a loving, respectful way a parent could correct his or her child:

Day Three: Reject False “Solutions”

In Day 1, you read that God values you highly. You also read how to base your self-image on who you are in Christ by enjoying God’s love, finding freedom in his forgiveness, and rejoicing in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit lives within you. These are good, godly ways to build a positive self-image.

Today you will read about false ways most of us try to build a positive self-image. These “solutions” don’t work in the long run, and they tend to move us farther from God.



Do you base your self-image on others’ opinions?

If you base your self-image on what others think of you, you slip into an easy trap, one that can leave you feeling either prideful or inadequate. You can escape this trap by changing your focus.

- Aim to please God, not others.

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

- Make it your goal to be influenced by what God says, not what others say.
- Instead of believing what others say about you—good or bad—believe what God says.

Stay balanced.

Your self-image should not be based on others’ opinions. But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be concerned about how you get along with others. God wants you to love others and represent him well.

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (1 Corinthians 9:19)

Be friendly. Seek to get along with others. Learn from feedback. But don’t allow others to control you. Leave that up to God.

Discussion questions

1. How important are other people’s opinions to you? Explain your answer.
2. How can you avoid being devastated if other people seem to dislike or disrespect you?

Do you base your self-image on your activities or successes?

You may think the more you do, the better a person you are. You may feel driven to get super-involved, often motivated by a sense of insecurity and the desire to feel valuable.

Along the same lines, you may judge yourself by your successes and failures. After all, it's normal to feel good when things work out. It's also normal to feel bad when they don't work out. For example, when you win in sports, you feel like a winner. When you lose, you feel like a loser.

The main problem with basing your self-image on your activities, successes, and failures is that you are focusing on what you do, not who you are in Christ.

- You can become prideful when you succeed.
- You can become depressed when you fail.

Focus on pleasing God, not the results.

“Failing” isn't always a bad thing. For example, Stephen gave a great sermon, but—although he did what he was supposed to do—in a sense he “failed” since he was stoned to death (Acts 7:1-60). Focus on obeying God, not on the results.

Stay balanced.

God wants you to throw yourself into life—your family, community, job, and church—and to aim for success at whatever you do. But stay balanced:

- Get involved in activities, but don't be compulsive.
- Try to succeed, but don't give up if you lose.
- If you succeed, give God the glory, not yourself.

Discussion question

3. How can you have a positive self-image if you are not successful on your job, in your ministry, or in other activities?

Do you base your self-image on your status (or power)?

I used to have a position of authority over many people, and it made me feel important. It took some time for me to change my attitude and understand the truth of what Jesus told his followers:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:43-45)

If you think you are better than other people because of your job, status, power, ethnic background, or family heritage, you forget that Jesus taught us to have a servant's heart.

Stay balanced.

It's not wrong to be in a position of power or authority. But watch out for pride and feelings of superiority. Don't base your primary sense of who you are on your position. Study 1 Samuel 15:12-23 to see how pride caused King Saul to fall.

Discussion questions

4. Are power, status, or position too important to your self-image? Explain your answer.
5. Is it possible to be in a position of power but truly have the heart of a servant? Explain your answer.

Do you base your self-image on your appearance?

Bob, a man approaching middle age, told me in my counseling office that he worked out two hours every day. He desperately wanted to look like a twenty-year old. Of course, he could not achieve that impossible goal. He still looked middle-aged.

Julie, a woman I counseled, told me that when she felt bad about herself, she put on a tight sweater and went into public places where she could watch men stare at her.

Bob and Julie were not alone in their focus. Many of us put too much emphasis on our appearance—our physical condition, how we dress, and how attractive we are.

No matter how hard we try, we ultimately find that our efforts to feel good about ourselves based on our appearance fail. We still battle the same insecurities.

Although we base our self-image on how we look on the outside, God doesn't look at us that way. Jesus said:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Matthew 23:25-26)

What God really cares about is how you look inside. He wants you to grow in the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). He's not impressed by how tall you are, or how strong your legs are.

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. (Psalm 147:10-11)

Stay balanced.

It's okay to put some effort into how you look if you don't go overboard. After all, you don't want to seem like a slob when you represent Jesus. Take care of your body, for it is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19). Exercise, watch your weight, and eat healthy food. But keep your priorities straight. Make growing in Christ your top priority.

Discussion question

6. Is your appearance too important to you? If so, in what way is it too important? How can you change your priorities?

Do you base your self-image on your money or possessions?

It's easy to measure your self-worth by your bank account, the value of your home, the make of your car, or the quality of your shoes, clothes, furniture, jewelry, or other possessions. Rich, poor, or in-between, your finances and possessions probably are important to your self-image.

Even if you are extremely poor, your sense of self can come from an old rocking chair you own, your watch, or your smartphone. (It also can come from how “godly” you feel being poor.)

Whether you are rich, poor, or in-between, your possessions and wealth have nothing to do with your real worth in Christ. If you are rich, you are in danger of feeling self-sufficient and prideful. If you are poor, you are in danger of feeling resentful and inferior. Either way, the love of money can cause huge problems.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

Stay balanced.

The love of money, not money itself, is “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Although the Bible warns against the dangers of riches, it also says that God prospers us so we can be generous.

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:11)

It's not necessarily wrong to have plenty, and it's not necessarily wrong to have little. What matters is what you do with what you have, how it affects your self-image, and how it affects the way you interact with others.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Philippians 4:11-12)

Discussion questions

7. How can you break free from the love of money? How can you have a godly self-image regardless of your financial situation?
8. Review the false solutions you read about in today's lesson. Which one is the greatest temptation to you? Explain your answer.
9. Say a short prayer, asking God to help you base your self-image on who you are in him, not on the false solutions in today's lesson.

Memory verse

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

Want to learn more?

Book by Doug Britton

Living by Grace

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/live-by-grace

Homework – Day Three

1. Today's lesson discusses "false solutions" to overcome a poor self-image. Do you agree that these "solutions" do not work in the long run? Why or why not?
2. What is a good alternative to trying hard to please others? How would you go about putting this alternative into practice?
3. Is it always a bad idea to try to please others? Why or why not?
4. Why is being successful described as a false solution? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer:

5. When and why is it a good idea to pay attention to your appearance?

6. When and why is it a bad idea to pay a lot of attention to your appearance?

7. Do you agree that people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap? Why or why not?

8. Is it possible to have a healthy self-image if you are poor? Why or why not?

Day Four: You Are in a Growth Process

Do you think you must do everything perfectly in your Christian walk? If so, you have given yourself an impossible expectation, and you probably suffer from self-criticism, guilt, or frustration.

The day after I became a Christian, I started reading the Bible. I was not raised in a Christian home, so almost everything I read was new to me. Much of it was exciting and encouraging.

However, after a few weeks I began to wonder if I was really a Christian. That's because some verses told me to be holy:

*Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.
(Leviticus 19:2)*

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

The Bible said to be holy, and I wanted to be holy, but I knew I was not holy in everything I did. I almost gave up on my Christian walk. I am thankful for a friend's good advice (which you will read about later in today's lesson).



Discussion question

1. Do you get discouraged, overwhelmed, or upset with yourself because you aren't living up to a high standard? Explain your answer.

Realize that we grow as Christians

It was hard to tell someone I thought I might not be a Christian because my actions did not match up to the Bible's call to holiness. However, I finally talked with a mature Christian man.

His answer was very helpful. He said that no one is perfect and that everyone is in a growth process. He went on to explain that:

We start as babies in Christ.

When we become believers, we are "born again" (John 3:3). Spiritually, we become like newborn babies. We have a lot to learn.

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3)

We grow in maturity.

Just as babies grow into maturity, we grow in our relationship with Christ. Both of the following verses remind us that we are in a growth process. Understanding this growth process helps me overcome my self-condemnation and focus on growing closer to Jesus.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The new self ... is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

Discussion question

2. How can knowing you are in a growth process encourage you?

Realize that you will never be perfect in this life

Another insight that helps me deal with perfectionism is realizing I will never be perfect in this life. No one is perfect except Jesus. We all make mistakes. We all make bad decisions. We all sin.

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. (James 3:2)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8-9)

These verses were written to encourage you when you sin, not to discourage you (or to give you freedom to choose to sin). Remember, when you confess your sin, God forgives you (1 John 1:8-9).

Instead of constantly criticizing yourself because of your failures or sins, look at them as opportunities to grow. Pray about them. Learn from them.

Remember that you are in a growth process, and that one day you will be like Jesus.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:49)

Discussion questions

3. Does realizing you will never be perfect in this life encourage or discourage you? Why?
4. Does knowing that sometimes you will make mistakes or sin prompt you to think, "Since I'm going to mess up sometimes, I don't need to try to live right"? Explain your answer.

Don't avoid doing something for fear of making a mistake.

Everyone makes mistakes. Accept the fact that you will too. Don't hold back from doing things because you're afraid to fail. When you do make a mistake, learn from it.

Realize that the early Christians were imperfect

I love how the Bible describes people's failures as well as their successes. I especially appreciate the honest portrayal of early Christian leaders in the New Testament.

They went through the same kinds of emotional turmoil you and I experience. For example, Paul was perplexed (2 Corinthians 4:8), and he struggled with fear (2 Corinthians 7:5).

In addition, sometimes early Christians sinned. When I read about their failures, I feel encouraged. I know that since they failed and didn't give up, I don't need to give up if I fail.

Here are some examples of early Christians' failures:

Sometimes they were hypocrites.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. (Galatians 2:11-12)

Sometimes they gave in to peer pressure.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. (Galatians 2:13)

Sometimes they cursed and lied.

Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." (Mark 14:70-71)

Sometimes they argued.

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)

Sometimes they were afraid.

When he [Saul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. (Acts 9:26)

Sometimes they were selfish.

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only. (Philippians 4:15)

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 2:20-21)

Sometimes they were disbelieving.

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. (Luke 24:11)

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:25)

Sometimes they criticized their leaders.

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him. (Acts 11:1-2)

Sometimes they disobeyed God.

Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (Acts 10:13-14)

Discussion questions

- 5 Does knowing that the early Christians sometimes sinned encourage you? Explain your answer.

Do, love, leave

As you read previously, basing your self-image on whether or not you are always successful is a bad idea. Do what you think God would want you to do, love everyone the best you can, then leave the results in God's hands.

I have a three-word phrase I sometimes say to myself that sums up this approach:

- Do** Do what you think God wants.
- Love** Love everyone involved.
- Leave** Leave the results in God's hands.

Sometimes, when things don't work out, knowing that my heart was in the right place comforts me—even if I can see that another approach would have been better.

Discussion question

6. Will thinking about “do, love, leave” help you? Why or why not?

“Accept yourself”

Don't ever think of yourself as a “second-class citizen.” Whether you are a janitor or bank president, rich or poor, popular or unpopular, pastor or volunteer, athletic or clumsy, healthy or sick, what really matters is knowing that God loves you and that you are part of the body of Christ. Remember that:

- God created you, and you are special to him.
- God loves you deeply.
- God forgives you for everything you have done wrong.
- God purifies you from all unrighteousness.
- God wants to have a close relationship with you. His Spirit dwells within you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Discussion question

7. Do you “accept yourself?” Are you content knowing who you are in Christ?
8. Pray to feel content because of who you are in Christ, and to know his peace.

Memory verse

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

Homework – Day Four

1. The Bible says, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Should you give up when you realize you still sometimes make mistakes or commit sins? Why or why not?
2. How is being a Christian similar to being a newborn baby? Explain your answer:
3. Should you constantly criticize yourself because of your failures or sins? Why or why not?
4. Is it encouraging to you to realize that many early Christians failed in various ways? Why or why not?

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- T 1. To change your self-image, it's important to truly believe God loves and forgives you.
- F 2. God forgives your sin, but he doesn't purify you from all unrighteousness.
- T 3. Condemning messages (or lies) from your childhood can affect you as an adult.
- T 4. Recognizing that a lie is a lie can help remove its power over you.
- T 5. Aiming to please God, not others, should help you have a healthy self-image.
- F 6. Looking good and finding success are great long-term solutions to a poor self-image.
- F 7. You should be able to "achieve" holiness within five years of becoming a Christian.
- F 8. Children are rarely affected by their parents' angry words or criticism.
- T 9. Asking yourself if someone's words are wise can help protect you from being wounded.
- F 10. The early Christians provided a great example of never sinning or failing.

Memory verses

- 1. Proverbs 12:18

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

- 2. Galatians 1:10

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

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Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

Free online Bible studies for daily living

Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

More Books by Doug Britton

In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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