

Part 15: 'As you Love Yourself'

Start with a short prayer and/or a time of silence. Share something about the sources of your feelings that you noticed this week. (15 minutes)

Attitudes

Last week we focused on feelings and tried to identify the inner agendas or other causes underlying them. Identifying our problem areas is one thing, accepting them and owning them as a part of ourselves is quite another.

There is in each of us the potential for a healthy level of self-love, a mature self-esteem and regard for one's life as gift. This was made a part of us as we were being created. However, our brokenness and the effects of living in a broken society have distorted and disfigured this self-love.

Let us look for a while at the things in ourselves that we find difficult – perhaps it is a shyness or a poor self-image; an unhealthy self-centredness, a perfectionism or a critical nature. There may even be an angry or fearful side. Whatever it is, this part is there for a reason. The attitude that controls this part originally developed to look after us and protect us, making our lives as free from stress and distress as possible.

These attitudes which we now find in ourselves are the result of our previous inner efforts to overcome our brokenness and to avoid further pain and disadvantage. Sometimes we find them blocking what we are trying to do, at other times they seem to urge us on. These distortions or wrong attitudes may deter us from finding freedom and peace by getting in the way and hiding the real self. At times warped attitudes will spur us on to being hurtful and further entrenching self-seeking priorities.

'As you love yourselves'

How do we feel about ourselves? Can we love our many sides and so be at peace with ourselves? Do we accept ourselves as we are, with the many things in us that we have not as yet put right?

Why do we struggle with parts of ourselves? Who says that some parts are okay and some are not ok? Where does this condemnation come from, and why do we accept its judgement of ourselves and take up its refrain? If we look at our bodies, do we have similar themes? 'I'm too fat', 'I'm too thin', 'my nose is too big' or 'I'm too short'. Who has the right to define perfection, implying rejection for those who have not made it?

An even bigger question is, 'Why do we accept this arbitrary definition and then become enslaved to its judgements?' Are we even aware of the condemnation to which we subject ourselves in everything that we do? We feel forced to measure ourselves against this imaginary super-being and to try to make something of this dismal self left to us. In the process we deny our uniqueness which defies comparison. Why do we feel we have to do this?



- If we can accept ourselves as we are, 'warts and all', with our strengths and our weaknesses, our mature sides as well as our sulky ones, our bad habits and good, our originality as well as our boring anxieties, our fears, our pains and our frustrations;
- if we can own all that we find in ourselves as part of ourselves, becoming aware of and trying to understand the different parts, rather than judging them;
- if we can begin to embrace our whole selves, distorted but precious, disfigured but of great value, damaged but created in the likeness of the one for whom there is no comparison; –
- then the restoring work can begin.

Then the unique and original treasure can slowly and patiently be revived; the encrusted layers from years of unreality can be painstakingly softened and lifted.

We must accept that God, like a caring doctor, is concerned about the pains and the festering sores; that God is not shocked or scared off by any ugliness and nothing we reveal is unacceptable to God.

This is our freedom: to stand as we are, naked before our Lord, fully ourselves; loving ourselves and coming to a new reality and fulfilment with ourselves and with God.

Reflect on the following two passages for 15 minutes focusing on your condemnation of your imperfections and looking at where they have come from:

Romans 8:31–39

Revelation 12:10–12

Journal for five minutes and then share with the group what your reflections reveal to you. (30 minutes)

For next week, which will be a short evaluation of the group so far, bring some goodies to eat or drink and some music to listen to, and have some more relaxed time together, perhaps in a different venue.

At home this week

Continue with the thoughts begun in the group and try to go deeper in your understanding, being particularly tuned in to the many, often small, occasions when you condemn yourself. This awareness can be the beginning of changes in attitudes.

Read Romans chapter eight as a background.

Romans 8:26–39

Romans 12:1–3

Romans 14:1–8

Romans 5:1–11

- What makes you acceptable?
- Where do you stand before God and before your fellows?
- What obligation do you have to God and to others?



Sergio Milandri has a Masters in Personal Formation and has been a relationship mentor in South Africa for over 25 years. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and run the Sans Pareil Retreat Centre from there.

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