



# FINDING SELF-WORTH IN CHRIST

6-SESSION  
**BIBLE STUDY**

HOPE FOR THE HEART BIBLE STUDIES

# FINDING SELF-WORTH IN CHRIST

BIBLE STUDY

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June Hunt



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Peabody, Massachusetts



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Finding Self-Worth in Christ Bible Study

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For more information on Hope For The Heart, visit [www.hopefortheheart.org](http://www.hopefortheheart.org) or call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673).

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# About This Bible Study

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**THANK YOU.** Sincerely. Thanks for taking the time and making the effort to invest in the study of God’s Word with God’s people. The apostle John wrote that he had “no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). At **HOPE FOR THE HEART**, our joy comes from seeing God use our materials to help His children walk in the truth.

## OUR FOUNDATION

God’s Word is our sure and steady anchor. We believe the Bible is *inspired* by God (He authored it through human writers), *inerrant* (completely true), *infallible* (totally trustworthy), and the *final authority* on all matters of life and faith. This study will give you *biblical* insight on the topic of self-worth.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS BIBLE STUDY

The overall flow of the study looks at self-worth and low self-worth from four angles: Definitions, Characteristics, Causes, and Biblical Steps to Solution.

- The **DEFINITIONS** section orients you to the topic by laying the foundation for a broad understanding of self-worth from a biblical and psychological standpoint. It answers the question: What does it mean?
- The **CHARACTERISTICS** section spotlights various aspects that are often associated with low self-worth, giving a deeper understanding to the topic. It answers the question: What does it look like?

- The **CAUSES** section identifies the physical, emotional, and spiritual sources of low self-worth. It answers the question: What causes it?
- The **BIBLICAL STEPS TO SOLUTION** sections provide action plans designed to help you—and help you help others—find your self-worth. It answers the question: What can you do about it?

The individual sessions contain narrative, biblical teaching, and discussion questions for group interaction and personal application. We sought to strike a balance between engaging content, biblical truth, and practical application.

## GUIDELINES

Applying the following biblical principles will help you get the most out of this Bible-based study as you seek to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

- **PRAY** – “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1). Any progress in spiritual growth comes from the Lord’s helping hand, so soak your study in prayer. We need to depend on God’s wisdom to study, think, and apply His Word to our lives.
- **PREPARE** – Even ants prepare and gather food in the harvest (Proverbs 6:6–8). As with most activities in life, you will get out of it as much as you put into it. You will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). Realize, the more you prepare, the more fruit you produce.
- **PARTICIPATE** – Change takes place in the context of community. Come to each session ready to ask questions, engage with others, and seek God’s help. And “do everything in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14).
- **PRACTICE** – James says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). Ultimately, this Bible study is designed to impact your life.

- **PASS IT ON!** – The Bible describes a spiritual leader who “set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules” (Ezra 7:10 ESV). Notice the progression: *study . . . do . . . teach*. That progression is what we want for your journey. We pray that God will use the biblical truths contained in this material to change your life and then to help you help others! In this way, the Lord’s work will lead to more and more changed lives.

## OUR PRAYER

At HOPE FOR THE HEART, we pray that the biblical truths within these pages will give you the hope and help you need to handle the challenges in your life. And we pray that God will reveal Himself and His will to you through this study of Scripture to make you more like Jesus. Finally, we pray that God’s Spirit will strengthen you, guide you, comfort you, and equip you to live a life that honors Jesus Christ.

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# A Note to Group Leaders

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*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

**THANK YOU** for leading this group. Your care and commitment to the members doesn't go unnoticed by God. Through this study, God will use you to do His work: to comfort, to encourage, to challenge, and even to bring people to saving faith in Christ. For your reference, we've included a gospel message on page 12 to assist you in leading people to Christ. The following are some helpful tips for leading the sessions.

## TIPS FOR LEADERS

- **PRAY** – Ask God to guide you, the members, and your time together as a group. Invite the group members to share prayer requests each week.
- **PREPARE** – Look over the sessions before you lead. Familiarize yourself with the content and find specific points of emphasis for your group.
- **CARE** – Show the members you are interested in their lives, their opinions, and their struggles. People will be more willing to share if you show them you care.
- **LISTEN** – Listen to the Lord's leading and the members' responses. Ask follow-up questions. A listening ear is often more meaningful than a good piece of advice.
- **GUIDE** – You don't have to “teach” the material. Your role is to *facilitate group discussion*: ask questions, clarify confusion, and engage the group members.



# BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

## Schedule

- Determine the size of the group. Keep in mind that people tend to share more freely and develop genuine intimacy in smaller groups.
- Pick a time and place that works well for everyone.
- Decide how long each session will run. Sessions shouldn't take more than an hour or hour and a half.
- Gather the group members' contact information. Decide the best method of communicating (phone, text, email, etc.) with them outside of the group meeting.

## Set Expectations

- **CONFIDENTIALITY** – Communicate that what is shared in the group needs to stay in the group.
- **RESPECTFULNESS** – Emphasize the importance of respecting each other's opinions, experiences, boundaries, and time.
- **PRAYER** – Decide how you want to handle prayer requests. If you take prayer requests during group time, factor in how much time that will take during the session. It may be more effective to gather requests on note cards during the sessions or have members email them during the week.

# AT THE FIRST MEETING

## Welcome

- Thank the members of your group for coming.
- Introduce yourself and allow others to introduce themselves.
- Explain the overall structure of study (Definitions, Characteristics, Causes, and Biblical Steps to Solution), including the discussion/application questions.
- Pray for God's wisdom and guidance as you begin this study.

# LEADING EACH SESSION

## Overview

- Summarize and answer any lingering questions from the previous session.
- Give a broad overview of what will be covered in each session.

## How to Encourage Participation

- **PRAY.** Ask God to help the members share openly and honestly about their struggles. Some people may find it overwhelming to share openly with people they may not know very well. Pray for God's direction and that He would help build trust within the group.
- **EXPRESS GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION.** Thank the members for coming and for their willingness to talk.

- **SPEAK FIRST.** The leader’s willingness to share often sets the pace and depth of the group. Therefore, it is important that you, as the leader, begin the first few sessions by sharing from your own experience. This eases the pressure of the other members to be the first to talk. The group members will feel more comfortable sharing as the sessions progress. By the third or fourth session, you can ask others to share first.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** Most of the questions in the study are open-ended. Avoid yes/no questions. Ask follow-up and clarifying questions so you can understand exactly what the members mean.
- **RESPECT TIME.** Be mindful of the clock and respectful of the members’ time. Do your best to start and end on time.
- **RESPECT BOUNDARIES.** Some members share more easily than others. Don’t force anyone to share who doesn’t want to. Trust takes time to build.

## Dealing with Difficulties

- You may not have an answer to every question or issue that arises. That’s okay. Simply admit that you don’t know and commit to finding an answer.
- Be assertive. Some people are more talkative than others, so it is important to limit the amount of time each person shares so everyone has a chance to speak. You can do this by saying something like: “I know this is a very important topic and I want to make sure everyone has a chance to speak, so I’m going to ask that everyone would please be brief when sharing.” If someone tries to dominate the conversation, thank them for sharing, then invite others to speak. You can offer a non-condemning statement such as: “Good, thank you for sharing. Who else would like to share?” Or, “I’d like to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Who would like to go next?”

- Sometimes people may not know how to answer a question or aren't ready to share their answer. Give the group time to think and process the material. Be okay with silence. Rephrasing the question can also be helpful.
- If someone misses a session, contact that person during the week. Let them know you noticed they weren't there and that you missed them.

## WRAPPING UP

- Thank the group for their participation.
- Provide a brief summary of what the next session will cover.
- Encourage them to study the material for the next session during the week.
- Close in prayer. Thank God for the work He is doing in the group and in each person's life.

We are grateful to God for your commitment to lead this group. May God bless you as you guide His people toward the truth—truth that sets us free!

*"If [your gift] is to lead,  
do it diligently."*

ROMANS 12:8

## FOUR POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

The gospel is central to all we do at Hope For The Heart. More than anything, we want you to know the saving love and grace of Jesus Christ. The following shows God's plan of salvation for you!

### **#1 GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOU IS SALVATION.**

God sent Jesus Christ to earth to express His love for you, save you, forgive your sins, empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life (John 3:16–17; 10:10).

### **#2 YOUR PROBLEM IS SIN.**

Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is right, but choosing what is wrong (James 4:17). The penalty of sin is spiritual death, eternal separation from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23).

### **#3 GOD'S PROVISION FOR YOU IS THE SAVIOR.**

Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins (Romans 5:8).

### **#4 YOUR PART IS SURRENDER.**

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God's approval (Ephesians 2:8–9). You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this: “God, I want a real relationship with You. Please forgive me for my sins. Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. Come into my life and be my Lord and Savior. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.”

### **WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT NOW?**

When you surrender your life to Christ, God empowers you to live a life pleasing to Him (2 Peter 1:3–4). Jesus assures those who believe with these words: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).



SESSION 1

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# DEFINITIONS OF SELF-WORTH

*"He made us accepted in the Beloved."*

EPHESIANS 1:6 NKJV

**W**hat happens when you long to receive a gift, but only your sister is given a gift? What happens when you long to be held on your mother's lap, but only your sister is allowed on her lap? What happens when you long for your mother's love, but only your sister is given her love?

Ask Dorie Van Stone.<sup>1</sup> She published a book about the torn pages of her life, *Dorie: The Girl Nobody Loved*. She would tell you that repeated rejection is the breeding ground for low self-worth. Her own single mother never wanted her and called her "ugly."

Not one person valued her. No one found pleasure in her, and she found favor with no one. Since no one esteemed her, she had no self-esteem. She could easily see which of the other children were treated with value and, as a result, they felt valuable. Her sister was one of these highly favored ones.<sup>2</sup>

Emblazoned in her memory are scenes of her mother putting her sister into bed saying, "Marie is a pretty girl. She's not like you." Then after tenderly kissing Marie, she would callously walk past Dorie.<sup>3</sup>

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*Repeated rejection is the  
breeding ground for  
low self-worth.*

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In this session, we'll look at the definitions of self-worth, self-esteem, and inferiority complex. We'll also look at how to biblically understand self-worth.

## *Write from the Heart*

Do you identify with Dorie in any way? Explain.

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Describe a time from your childhood when someone said or did something that either built up or tore down your feelings of self-worth.

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# Definitions

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## WHAT IS SELF-WORTH?

- **Worth** signifies the value, merit, or significance of a person or thing.<sup>4</sup>
- **Self-worth** is the belief that your life has value and significance.<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

- **To esteem** means “to set a high value on.”<sup>6</sup>
- “**To esteem**” in the Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew *hasab*, which means “to consider, plan, reckon, or think over.”<sup>7</sup>
- **To have self-esteem** is to respect or have high regard for yourself.<sup>8</sup>

How do you know your own worth? Do you look to yourself or others in order to grasp your value? If you look anywhere other than to God—the God who created you with a purpose and plan—your view of your own value is in grave danger of being distorted. Before you were born, God established your real worth by knowing you and choosing you.

The Bible says . . .

*“He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*

EPHESIANS 1:4

# WHAT IS AN INFERIORITY COMPLEX?

Repeated rejection instills feelings of inferiority.

- **An inferiority complex**<sup>9</sup> is a painful, debilitating feeling of being less valuable than others.

*Inferior* means less valued than others.

A *complex* is a group of beliefs based on the past that has a powerful influence on present behavior.

- **An inferiority complex** is an acute sense of low self-worth, which has two very different results:

*Fearfully timid* attitudes and actions as a result of giving in to others or feeling rejected by others: “I’m nothing. I know I don’t matter.”

*Overly aggressive* attitudes and actions to compensate for feeling rejected: “Since people hate me, I’ll give them something to hate!”

*“Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors  
and an object of dread to my closest friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from me.  
I am forgotten as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.”*

PSALM 31:11–12

# *Write from the Heart*

Rejection is hard to forget. When people don't feel valued, their thoughts, emotions, and behavior are affected. Think of a time when you experienced rejection or felt unvalued. How did that experience affect your thoughts, emotions, and behavior?

**Thoughts:** .....

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**Emotions:** .....

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**Behavior:** .....

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# Assessing Our Self-Worth

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Clearly, Dorie struggled with having no sense of self-worth. Some people would say she should not have self-worth—that's prideful. Others say she should have more self-worth—that's healthy. Which is right—especially from a Christian standpoint?

Is there a place in the life of a Christian for self-respect, self-worth, and self-love, or does the Bible exhort us to disrespect, devalue, and even hate ourselves? Since the Bible cannot contradict itself, we need godly discernment to know how to think about ourselves accurately.

## *Write from the Heart*

### **Read Romans 12:3.**

How are you to view yourself based on what the apostle Paul says here? How are you to *not* to view yourself?

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What are some biblical and practical reasons you shouldn't think of yourself "more highly than you ought"?

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What does it mean to think of yourself with "sober judgment," and why is it important to look at yourself this way?

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We are to love what God loves, that is, we are to value the truth that God loves us. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

The Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The essence of God is *agape*—a love that always seeks the highest and best on behalf of others. If we are truly godly—and we are told to be godly—then we will value what He values and love what He loves. We are to love the fact that He has a purpose for us. We are to love the fact that He values us. We are to love the fact that He has given us worth.

- You have godly *agape* for yourself when you do what God says is best for you, cooperating with His perfect plan for your life.
- And you have *agape* for others by doing what is consistent with God’s very best for them.

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

MATTHEW 22:37–39

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*Agape: a love that always seeks the highest and best on behalf of others.*

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## *Discussion/Application Questions*

1. What would the world look like if everyone had a positive sense of self-worth? What would the impact be on marriages, parents and children, churches, and work environments?

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2. What are common barriers people face when trying to develop a positive sense of self-worth? What barriers do *you* face?

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3. Read Ephesians 1:3–14. Based on these Bible verses, in what ways has God proven that He loves and values you?

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4. Read Isaiah 53:1–6, a prophecy about Jesus and the rejection He endured. Describe what it means to you to know that even Christ experienced rejection—that He knows the pain *you've* endured.

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5. Read Hebrew 4:15–16. Write out a prayer, thanking the Lord for understanding what you’ve experienced. Ask Him to help you deal with anything that hinders you from understanding your worth in His eyes.

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# Notes

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*“God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them.”*

Genesis 1:27



SESSION 2

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**CHARACTERISTICS  
OF  
LOW SELF-WORTH**

*“When my heart was grieved and my spirit  
embittered, I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was a brute beast before you.”*

PSALM 73:21–22

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## His Life-changing Love

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In the throes of threatening circumstances, people react in one of three ways: fight, flight, or freeze—get even, get going, or get hurt. Those who fight can quickly become aggressive victimizers.

Because she was beaten and abused, Dorie chose to become defiant, to clench her fists and dominate her peers by intimidation. She bullied them into compliance, forcing her will on them and terrorizing them by pinching or hitting them without provocation. According to her own words, “I was mean, mean, mean!”

Because Dorie *knew* that no one would ever love her, she took the offensive and gave them no reason to love her. She cried alone at night and made others cry during the day. No one would get the best of her, no one! She *had* no one, so she would *need* no one. That was her philosophy, at least until the day she met Jesus and opened her heart to His life-changing love. He gave her a new heart.<sup>10</sup>

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*

EZEKIEL 36:26

In this session, we’ll look at the characteristics of low self-worth, substitutes for healthy self-worth, and spiritual factors related to self-worth.

## *Write from the Heart*

How would you have reacted if you were in Dorie's shoes? What is your instinctive response when you feel threatened or fearful?

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What connection do you see between bullying and low self-worth? Why does a bully *bully* others?

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## What Does Low Self-Worth Look Like?

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When Dorie went to grade school, she said, “Those of us from the orphanage could be easily identified by our shabby clothes and distinctive haircuts.” The harsh matron, Miss Gabriel, placed a bowl on their heads and snipped off their hair. Dorie and the other students all looked the same. When they walked to school, people would point at them and stare. Dorie thought, “We’re all oddballs and besides, I’m ugly.” It’s as though Dorie kept looking through distorted mirrors.<sup>11</sup>

Think about going to a fair and walking through “The Fun House” with its warped mirrors. Your image appears distorted. Your head looks like a huge oval egg with narrow slanted eyes and your neck has disappeared. Your arms look like wavy tentacles and your hips are the size of a blimp.

Unfortunately, people like Dorie walk around with warped mental images of themselves. Over time, their inner mirror becomes warped by criticism, disapproval, and pain. But God does not look at you from a warped perspective. He sees you through the eyes of purest love. The closer you are to God, the more you will be able to see yourself through His eyes.

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*The closer you are to God,  
the more you will be able to  
see yourself through His eyes.*

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Do you identify with any of the following statements about inner insecurities? Place a check mark (✓) by the statements that are true of you.

### Inner Insecurities Checklist

- I am self-critical and have feelings of self-loathing.
- I am fearful of failure and avoid taking risks.
- I am overly impacted by the opinions of others and strive to meet their standards.
- I am undeserving of, yet desperate for, the approval of others.
- I am unhappy with my personal appearance and/or personal achievements.
- I am negligent of my appearance.
- I am unable to set boundaries.
- I am ashamed of my background, and I often struggle with depression.
- I am controlled by a victim mentality.
- I am inferior and incompetent when compared to others.

If you struggle with insecurity, you need to take to heart these words of encouragement from the Word of God:

*“Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him,  
for he shields him all day long,  
and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.”*

DEUTERONOMY 33:12



## *Write from the Heart*

Look at your own “inner mirror.” Describe the reflection you see on a day-to-day basis. How do you feel about yourself when things *are* going well? How about when they *aren’t* going well?

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*“Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,  
even as I am fully known.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

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# Substitutes for Healthy Self-Worth

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Although Dorie was powerless to prevent unjustified beatings at the oppressive orphanage, she learned how to get power by overpowering the other children. This gave her the feeling of significance—a sense of self-worth.

“If I can be tough,” she reasoned, “I can survive. I bullied the other children. I was never subtle. I pushed and shoved. I hit. If another child wouldn’t let me see his toy, I would grab it. The others didn’t hit me, but I hit them and felt good about it.”<sup>12</sup>

All of this false bravado merely served as a substitute for true self-worth—a quick fix that was really not a fix.

If you are suffering with low self-worth, you may be seeking ways to deny, disguise, or diminish your emotional pain. People cope with their woundedness in different ways. However, many of these ways do not offer a cure, but rather are a counterfeit—an adhesive bandage that only covers up the wound without healing it.

The problem with self-worth substitutes is that they do not deal with the cause of the pain—those wrong beliefs about yourself that fester in the heart and mind. The true solution to low self-worth is to apply the healing balm of truth to the wound in the soul. Your mind will be transformed and your life will be changed. Therefore, beware of worldly substitutes that ultimately do not satisfy.

*“Do not love the world or anything in the world.  
If anyone loves the world,  
love for the Father is not in them.  
For everything in the world—  
the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,  
and the pride of life—  
comes not from the Father but from the world.  
The world and its desires pass away,  
but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”*

1 JOHN 2:15–17

Are you suffering with low self-worth and pursuing a substitute to make up for an emotional deficit? Place a check mark (✓) by the statements below that are true about you.

### Self-Worth Substitutes Checklist

- I am impressed with status symbols and often live beyond my income.
- I am overly competitive and view losing as a reflection of my value and worth.
- I am seeking approval and am envious of “important” people.
- I am constantly striving for recognition.
- I am perfectionistic in an attempt to earn approval.
- I am addicted to substances, sex, food, and/or \_\_\_\_\_ .
- I am angry and intimidating at times in a zeal to accomplish my goals.
- I am financially extravagant in an attempt to impress others.
- I am obsessed with having certain possessions.
- I am insistent on getting my way.

If you struggle with any of these substitutes, ask yourself this question:

*“What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

MARK 8:36

## *Write from the Heart*

What are common substitutes that people look to in order to find their worth and value?

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What substitutes have you looked to in order to find *your* worth and value?

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# Sabotages of Spiritual Growth

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At the orphanage, Miss Gabriel believed that sickness was always a result of sin. Therefore, whenever Dorie became ill, the stern matron would snap, “It’s the Lord! He’s punishing you. If you weren’t so naughty, you wouldn’t be sick.” A harsh, punishing God was the only kind of heavenly Father Dorie ever heard about. She heard nothing about His love.<sup>13</sup>

Those who have a warped view of themselves often have a warped view of God. When people feel unworthy of love, respect, and approval from others, they often feel even more unworthy of God’s love, respect, and approval. Their faulty beliefs often lead them to draw faulty conclusions about God, which only serve to sabotage their relationship with God and impair their ability to feel valued by God.

Place a check mark (✓) by the statements that are true of you.

### Spiritual Sabotages Checklist

- I have difficulty feeling acceptable to God.
- I have difficulty admitting my guilt to God.
- I have difficulty trusting God.
- I have difficulty accepting the forgiveness of God.
- I have difficulty living in the grace of God.
- I have difficulty feeling loved by God.
- I have difficulty feeling wanted by God.
- I have difficulty thinking God has a special plan for me.
- I have difficulty believing the promises of God are for me.

If you are struggling spiritually, wondering about the reality and role of God in your life, you need to know that . . .

*“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*

EPHESIANS 2:4-7

## *Write from the Heart*

Substitutes fail to satisfy, but God does not. Read Isaiah 58:11; Psalm 107:8–9; John 6:35. Based on these passages, what does God promise to do when you look to Him to satisfy your deepest desires?

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## *Discussion/Application Questions*

1. A wrong view of God leads to a wrong view of ourselves. Read Psalm 86:5; 145:8–9. How is God described in these passages?

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2. You are made in the image of God. And yet, how often do you think of God in the same way you think of yourself? What thoughts do you repeatedly project on to God, believing He feels or thinks the same way you do?

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3. Read Isaiah 43:4; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Colossians 1:22. Based on these passages, how does God see you?

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4. The Creator of the heavens is mindful of you. Read about it in Psalm 8. Take a moment to write a prayer, thanking God for creating you, caring for you, and crowning you with unique value and worth among His creation.

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*“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and  
saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

Psalm 34:18



SESSION 3

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# CAUSES OF LOW SELF-WORTH

*“He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.”*

PSALM 147:3

For many reasons, people fail to perceive themselves as having value or worth to God, to themselves, or to others. Generally, negative self-perceptions develop in people as a result of being treated in ways that cause them to feel devalued by significant people in their lives. Unless these perceptions are changed, self-devaluation will worsen over time.

Negative perceptions that begin in childhood are difficult to replace with positive perceptions in adulthood. The best time to examine and evaluate self-worth is before self-perceptions become strong and solidified.

In this session, we'll look at the causes of low self-worth, including rejection, comparison, and wrong thinking.

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## **The Impact of Having Rejecting Parents**

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The roots of rejection are not always easily uncovered, especially when they reach deep into childhood. Those who are rejected from conception can have a lifelong experience of never feeling loved and accepted, of never knowing the comfort of a mother's warm, reassuring embrace or the security of a father's strong, protecting arms.

When rejection is all that has been known, identifying its origins can feel overwhelming and frightening. But if rejection is to be removed from your life, it must be fearlessly faced and dug up by the roots with the help of the Lord. His loving acceptance will replace your past rejection.

The actions and attitudes of parents toward their children send clear messages to children about their value and worth as human beings.

# MESSAGES CHILDREN RECEIVE FROM . . .

## Addicted Parents

- Chemically dependent parents: “Their alcohol/drugs are more important than I am.”
- Workaholic parents: “Their work is more important than I am.”
- Compulsive spending parents: “Their money and things are more important than I am.”
- Perfectionistic parents: “Their demand for perfection is more important than I am.”

## Abusive Parents

- Emotionally abusive parents: “I am a nobody.”
- Verbally abusive parents: “I am deserving of put-downs.”
- Physically abusive parents: “I am meant to be a punching bag.”
- Sexually abusive parents: “I am nothing more than a sex object.”

*“Fathers, do not embitter your children,  
or they will become discouraged.”*

COLOSSIANS 3:21

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## Ruled by the Rejection of Others

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Dorie writes about monthly visits to the orphanage by couples looking to adopt a child. “My dread of those ‘special days’ escalated month by month. No doubt I reflected the rejection I felt. My shoulders drooped with the agony of that lineup. I could not look up with smiling anticipation as the cute children did. I detested being inspected by people I knew would never accept me, so I would hide. I would be dragged into the room with a dirty, tear-stained face.”<sup>14</sup>

Thankfully, Dorie’s story did not end with her not being chosen by these people, for God Himself chose her.

*“Has not God chosen those  
who are poor in the eyes of the world  
to be rich in faith and to inherit  
the kingdom he promised  
those who love him?”*

JAMES 2:5

Those who repeatedly experience significant rejection by others receive the message that they deserve rejection. Then they internalize that message and begin to reject themselves. This is especially true when rejection comes from those who are in positions of authority and on whom the child depends. Such children grow up replaying their mind's recorded messages of rejection they have received until the recorded voices become their own. It is extremely difficult for children to replace the big booming voices of adults/parents with their own small, inner voices.

Only the loving, accepting voice of God is powerful enough to override and eventually silence the voices of rejection—and thus salvage the self-worth of these rejected children.

*“Though my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will receive me.”*

PSALM 27:10

Have you allowed negative circumstances shape your thinking and self-perceptions? If so, allow God to search your heart and reveal any perceptions or messages that are inconsistent with His Word. The more you allow God's Word to speak to the faulty thoughts and perceptions in your heart, the more you will see your God-given worth and walk victoriously.

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*Allow God to search your heart.*

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## *Write from the Heart*

What negative messages have you received—from a parent, mate, or coworker—that need to be replaced with the truth from God’s Word?

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What passage or promise from God’s Word speaks directly to the messages you received?

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## The Cost of Comparison

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Dorie's life was a perfect setup for comparing herself to others. Her mother constantly compared her to her sister. This resulted in her little sister receiving lavish affection and gifts from their mother and Dorie being pointedly ignored. Her mother verbally let her know that she did not measure up. Everywhere Dorie turned, Marie was the favored one.

Whether at home, at school, or later in her childhood when Dorie lived at an orphanage or foster home, other children were chosen or received decent treatment while Dorie was rejected and subjected to abuse. Dorie described the couples who came to the orphanage contemplating which child they would choose—which child they would cherish—as “well-dressed and carefully manicured. We could hear their muffled conversations, ‘She’s cute, isn’t she?’ or, ‘There’s one we might want to talk about.’ My heart beat faster. ‘Try me,’ I screamed within, hoping that someone would look at me and want me. But my day never came. I soon got the message—only cute children are chosen.”

Dorie lost out every time she was compared to the other children. She was never chosen—never— not once.<sup>15</sup> How could she *not* compare herself to others under those circumstances?

However, God had a plan for Dorie, and He would work out His purpose and His will for her life.

Has comparing yourself to others become so automatic that you hardly notice you're doing it? People often compare themselves to others in appearance, abilities, affluence, and accomplishments. Read the statements below. Have they become part of your self-talk?

## Appearance

- Physical features: "I am not as attractive as . . ."
- Clothes: "I cannot dress as nicely as . . ."
- Mannerisms: "I am not as graceful or suave as . . ."

## Abilities

- Physical abilities: "I am not as athletic as . . ."
- Mental abilities: "I am not as smart as . . ."
- Social abilities: "I am not as popular as . . ."

## Affluence

- Financial/job status: "I am not as financially secure as . . ."
- Family status: "I don't have a home as nice as . . ."
- Social status: "I am not as influential as . . ."

## Accomplishments

- Education: "I don't have as many degrees as . . ."
- Talent: "I am not as gifted as . . ."
- Recognition: "I am not as accomplished as . . ."

*"For he chose us in advance,  
and he makes everything work out  
according to his plan."*

EPHESIANS 1:11 NLT

## *Write from the Heart*

It is easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others. In what ways do you compare yourself to others?

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What are the dangers of making comparisons? How does it affect both the person making the comparison and the person who is the object of the comparison?

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Read Psalm 139:14; Romans 15:7; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. What encouragement do these passages provide when you feel like comparing yourself to others?

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# The Danger of Wrong Thinking

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Dorie had every reason to develop wrong thinking and form faulty perceptions of herself. From her earliest memories, all she was told was that she didn't do anything right, that everything was her fault, that she wasn't good enough, that no one loved her or found value in her. Besides all that, she knew she was ugly. She thought, "I must be the ugliest child that ever walked. I felt so ugly on the inside that I believed I was ugly on the outside . . . maybe it's my curly hair or my nose!"<sup>16</sup>

Do you go through life fearing what others think? Some people look in the mirror and see only an ugly duckling—a sad little bird with no self-worth. In her early years, Dorie considered herself the ugly duckling—ugly, unadoptable Dorie. Not only was she called ugly, but she also felt ugly because of the pain of repeated rejection.

In truth, many people suffer from self-rejection, thinking they possess no personal value. They look only to their outer image to determine their inner worth. If they could see what God sees, what a difference that would make!

The Bible says . . .

*"From heaven the LORD looks down  
and sees all mankind;  
from his dwelling place  
he watches all who live on earth—  
he who forms the hearts of all,  
who considers everything they do."*

PSALM 33:13–15

Low self-worth can result from how you perceive yourself and how you think others perceive you. Faulty perceptions lead to faulty conclusions.

- **Perfectionism:** “I didn’t do it right. I can’t do anything right.”
- **Overgeneralization:** “I failed, so I must be a failure.”
- **Overreacting:** “I am horrible for having failed.”
- **False guilt:** “I am the reason my dad left.”
- **Unforgiveness:** “I can’t forgive myself.”
- **Projection:** “My mother didn’t love me; therefore, no one will ever love me.”
- **Condemnation:** “God could never forgive me.”
- **Unrealistic expectations:** “I’ll never measure up to what people expect of me.”
- **Fatalism:** “No one believes I will ever amount to anything.”
- **Hopelessness:** “There isn’t anyone who believes there is hope for me.”

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## Getting to the Root Cause of Low Self-Worth

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Although she tried, Dorie never had a close friend at school. Even when she was out of the orphanage and in a foster home—she knew she looked different. One student pointed to her torn dress and jabbed, “Did that come out of the ark?” She forced a smile while the others laughed. Kids can be so cruel. Dorie confided, “How often I wished I could have spent the day in the restroom.”<sup>17</sup> She just wanted to hide. The truth is: Dorie was just trying to survive the impact of a callous, cruel world without taking on the cynicism and bitterness of the world.

The contributing factors to your low estimation of your worth are held in place by wrong beliefs that you have embraced over the years. But the low opinion of yourself can be overcome by replacing those wrong beliefs with right beliefs.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve  
what God’s will is—his good,  
pleasing and perfect will.”*

ROMANS 12:2



## *Write from the Heart*

List any “wrong beliefs” (about your appearance, your intellect, your potential, etc.) you recognize in yourself. List the “right beliefs” that need to replace them.

*Wrong Belief*

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*RIGHT BELIEF*

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*Wrong Belief*

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## You Can Have a New Self-Image

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Money, education, possessions, and beauty are all things society uses to gauge a person's worth. But it is a major mistake to try to live by this value system. Why? Because it's hopelessly flawed. The world's value system is faulty because it's not the one God designed for you when He created you in His very own image. If you try to make it in the world's system, you will never measure up, and you will never have total security.

However, you can find complete security by learning to adopt God's value system. If you trust Him, God will begin to transform you from the inside out. Through His power, He will make you more like Him. He will make you the person you were always intended to be—*His precious child of infinite worth.*

*“Even before he made the world,  
God loved us and chose us in Christ  
to be holy and without fault in his eyes.  
God decided in advance to adopt us into his own  
family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.  
This is what he wanted to do,  
and it gave him great pleasure.”*

EPHESIANS 1:4–5 NLT

## Discussion/Application Questions

1. What are the differences between what society says about where to find self-worth and what the Bible says about where to find it?

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2. In what ways might you be basing *your* value on worldly or temporary things (money, possessions, power, prestige, etc.)? What are the dangers of doing this?

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3. Read Proverbs 31:30; Luke 12:15; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Colossians 3:1–4; 1 Peter 3:3–4. What do these passages say about where you should look to find worth and value?

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4. What is one behavior in your life that needs to begin, change, or stop in order to base your value on godly or eternal things rather worldly or temporary things?

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# Notes

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SESSION 4

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**BIBLICAL STEPS  
TO SOLUTION**

PART 1

*“To all who did receive him [Jesus],  
to those who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God.”*

JOHN 1:12



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## God's Love and Your Worth

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One day at the orphanage, Dorie sat riveted at the back of a room hearing words she had never heard before—words foreign to her heart—words from a group of college students. As the students prepared to leave, one of them turned around and spoke slowly with such sincerity that Dorie was stunned. The student said, “Even if you forget everything we have told you, remember—*God loves you.*”

What Dorie heard couldn't be true! *God couldn't love her. Nobody loved her!* Though words can't explain it, she knew it was true, and she spoke directly to God. “They said you love me. Nobody else does. If you want me, you can have me!” That very instant an unexpected peace settled over her. She knew: *This must be God.* At that point, she grabbed hold of that love and held on to God—and He never let her go.<sup>18</sup>

*“I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”*

JEREMIAH 31:3

In this session, we'll look at the role forgiveness plays in self-worth, how to stop the past from determining the future, and the steps needed to move toward self-acceptance.

## *Write from the Heart*

Read Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 34:18; 68:5; Luke 5:30–32. Based on these passages, what kinds of people is God near to?

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Who in your life is in a “lowly position,” struggling with low self-worth? What can you do to lift them up?

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*“Though the LORD is exalted,  
he looks kindly on the lowly.”*

PSALM 138:6

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## Forgiveness Is Possible

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By the world's standards, Dorie had every right to hate her mother and harbor feelings of bitter unforgiveness. When her mother was charged with child neglect, Dorie had to appear in court. The judge asked her mother if Dorie was her child. After an agonizingly long pause, she answered, "Yes, but I'd have gotten rid of her before she was born if I could have!"<sup>19</sup>

The judge ordered Dorie and her sister permanently taken from their mother, and as they left the courtroom, her mother muttered to Dorie, "If I ever see you again, I'll kill you!" Dorie said that her mother's rejection was total and final and all hope was quenched. Dorie later prayed aloud that God would help her to understand why her mother had abandoned her, and she prayed that she wouldn't hate her mother.

Dorie said, "In that moment God let me forgive her. I felt sorry for her. I had no hatred. That day God performed a healing work in my life and prevented a permanent scar."<sup>20</sup>

*"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."*

EPHESIANS 4:31

People with low self-worth often struggle to get past the circumstance that was the breeding ground for their low self-esteem. However, Dorie knew that in order to put the pieces of her broken life back together, it was necessary for her to forgive those who had grievously wronged her.

## *Write from the Heart*

Could you have done what Dorie did that day in court? Explain.

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Read Colossians 3:13. Is there anyone in your life you've been angry with and bitter toward—someone you need to forgive, but can't? Or is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from for any careless words or actions done to them? What small steps can you take to move in the direction of forgiveness?

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## How to Leave Feelings of Worthlessness Behind

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Parents have a profound impact on their child's self-worth. Dorie's mother greatly influenced her sense of self-worth. The same is true for you, no matter who your parents are and the style of parenting in which you were raised.

Using the following list, identify the parenting style by which you were raised. Then take the three steps to leave your feelings of worthlessness behind:

1. Admit the past truth.
2. Address the present truth.
3. Appropriate God's truth.

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*Don't let the past determine  
your present worth.*

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# PARENTS/AUTHORITY FIGURES WERE . . .

## Overly critical

1. *Admit the past truth:* “My parents were impossible to please.”
2. *Address the present truth:* “My worth is not based on pleasing people.”
3. *Appropriate God’s truth:* “I am fully accepted by God.”

*“He made us accepted in the Beloved”*

EPHESIANS 1:6 NKJV

## Overly protective

1. *Admit the past truth:* “I was smothered by my parents.”
2. *Address the present truth:* “My worth is not based on my ability to protect myself.”
3. *Appropriate God’s truth:* “The Lord is my help in times of trouble.”

*“God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.”*

PSALM 46:1

## Overly controlling

1. *Admit the past truth:* “I was not allowed to make my own decisions.”
2. *Address the present truth:* “My worth is not based on my decision making.”
3. *Appropriate God’s truth:* “The Lord is my guide.”

*“God is our God for ever and ever;  
he will be our guide even to the end.”*

PSALM 48:14

## Overly permissive

1. *Admit the past truth:* “My parents did not set firm boundaries for me.”
2. *Address the present truth:* “My worth is not based on my ability to set boundaries in my life.”
3. *Appropriate God’s truth:* “The Lord has established my boundaries.”

*“You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.”*

PSALM 139:5

# *Write from the Heart*

What parenting style best describes your parents? What impact did your parents have on your self-worth? What was the positive impact? What was the negative impact?

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## Seven Steps of Self-Acceptance

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For years Dorie concealed a secret. She thought people would not believe her if she told the sordid truth. After Dorie left the orphanage at age 13, she went into the first of many foster homes in which she suffered merciless verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. She confided, "There was nothing I could do to stop him from violating my body. He warned me that if I ever told anyone he would kill me." Dorie believed him.<sup>21</sup>

At a later home, her rollaway bed was placed in a hallway where strange men passed by in the night. Her foster mother gave these men permission to perform immoral acts on Dorie, and she was repeatedly forced to participate in their perversions. As a result, she believed she could never be clean and whole again.

Dorie later said, "[God] gave the grace to bear my trials. It was He who chose me to belong to Him; He knew the first day of my life, as well as all the days in between. He knew that some day that dirty little girl would stand before thousands of people and tell them that God is faithful."<sup>22</sup>

Although Dorie van Stone experienced the depths of degradation and disgrace at the hands of those with the hardest of hearts, the Lord raised His choice servant up to bring hope to multitudes of people in America, on the mission field, and around the globe.

It is possible for you to acquire a positive self-image and to learn to value yourself as God values you. In order to do that, you must accept the following seven truths about yourself.

**1. I accept God's Word that I was created in His image.**

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

**2. I accept myself as acceptable to Christ.**

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

**3. I accept what I cannot change about myself.**

"Who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:20–21).

**4. I accept the fact that I will make mistakes.**

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12–14).

**5. I accept criticism and the responsibility for failure.**

“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:5).

**6. I accept the fact that I will not be liked or loved by everyone.**

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. . . . If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:18, 20).

**7. I accept the unchangeable circumstances in my life.**

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Philippians 4:11).

## *Write from the Heart*

Look back over the previous seven steps. Which one is particularly meaningful in your life right now? Why?

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Which statement(s) do you find most difficult to accept? Explain.

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*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!  
And that is what we are!”*

1 JOHN 3:1

## *Discussion/Application Questions*

1. Who in your life modeled healthy self-worth? What did they teach you—directly or indirectly—about how to value yourself and others?

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2. Do you see any indications of low self-esteem in others (your children, friends, coworkers, etc.)? In what ways can you help develop healthy self-worth in others without making them prideful about themselves? What can you say to someone struggling with low self-worth to encourage them? What should you *avoid* saying?

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- 3. Although the Bible tells us that God is our refuge (Psalm 46:1), we tend to forget that truth. Who or what do you run to when you don't feel valued? What are you hoping to find?

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- 4. Read Psalm 103:11–13; Romans 8:38–39; Galatians 2:20. Take some time to meditate on these passages from God's Word that speak of His love and grace toward you and help you understand your value in His sight. Write a prayer of gratitude for His love toward you.

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*“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

Colossians 3:13



SESSION 5

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# **BIBLICAL STEPS TO SOLUTION**

PART 2

*“There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.”*

PROVERBS 23:18



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## Believing God Is Enough

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Dorie's image of herself was shaped in part by her father, whom she met only after she became a young adult. Her time with him was limited, yet he was still a major influence on her sense of self-worth.

In Dorie's mind, she finally had the father she had longed for. When she met with him to share her conviction that the Lord had called her to go as a missionary to New Guinea, she longed for his support and affirmation. Her sense of loss was profound when he answered, "If that's what you plan to do, then don't unpack your suitcase. From this moment on, you are not my daughter! I never want to see you again!"

As she traveled back home, she cried out to the Lord, "He was the only person in the world who ever loved me. How could he do this to me?" Her father not only rejected her one last, painful time, but he rejected Christ during that visit as well. But Dorie had the presence of mind to remember God had not left her. She was not alone. She said, "When you have nothing left but God, you realize that God is enough. God has stood beside me when no one else wanted me; He was not going to abandon me now. God would have to heal the emotional pain that throbbed through my body."

At that moment, Dorie began to allow the Lord to change her image of herself that had been perpetuated by her parents. She could choose to believe what the Lord said about her, not what her parents had said.<sup>23</sup>

**In this session, we'll look at how to align our thoughts with God's Word, how to understand our God-given worth, and how to align our self-image with God's image of us.**

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# How to Correct Negative Self-Talk

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- **If you say: “I just can’t do anything right.”**

*The Lord says:* “I’ll give you My strength to do what is right.”

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”  
(Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

- **If you say: “I feel that I’m too weak.”**

*The Lord says:* “My power is perfect when you are weak.”

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

- **If you say: “I feel I’m not able to measure up.”**

*The Lord says:* “Rely on Me. I am able.”

“God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

- **If you say: “I don’t feel that anyone loves me.”**

*The Lord says:* “I love you.”

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3).

- **If you say: “I can’t forgive myself.”**

*The Lord says:* “I can forgive you.”

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isaiah 43:25).

- **If you say: “I wish I’d never been born.”**

*The Lord says:* “Since before you were born, I’ve had plans for you.”

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5).

- **If you say: “I feel my future is hopeless.”**

*The Lord says:* “I know the future I have for you.”

“‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

*“I will listen to what God the LORD says;  
he promises peace to his people.”*

PSALM 85:8

## *Write from the Heart*

What are some examples of your own negative self-talk? Find your own “biblical comeback” in God’s Word.

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## Grasp Your God-Given Worth

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When Dorie went to school, she didn't have any lunch or money to buy lunch. During lunchtime she would say, "I'm going for a walk." Dorie confessed that if she had stayed in the lunchroom, "The sight of food would have been too much."<sup>24</sup> The only clothes she owned were three tattered dresses and her scuffed shoes. To her, the thought that she was valuable was beyond comprehension. But oh, how wrong she was!

If you struggle with low self-worth, realize how God sees you and embrace these words:

*"You are precious to me.  
You are honored,  
and I love you."*

ISAIAH 43:4 NLT

The following steps will help you grasp your God-given worth.

## YOU ARE WORTHY

**W**ork on eliminating negative attitudes and beliefs.

“I will not wallow in feelings of self-pity, hide my feelings, or refuse to face them.”

“I will not project my feelings onto others and become critical.”

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

**O**btain a scriptural understanding of having love for yourself.

“I am not to love myself with conceited love (pride).”

“I am to love the truth that God loves me and has a purpose for me.”

- *Agape* love for myself: seeking God’s highest purpose for me
- *Agape* love for others: seeking the highest good of another

“The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14).

## **R**efuse to compare yourself with others.

“I will not measure myself by others.”

“I will thank God for what He has given me and what He is making of me.”

“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves” (2 Corinthians 10:12).

## **T**hank God for His unconditional love for you.

“I will choose an attitude of thanksgiving even if I do not feel thankful.”

“I will spend personal time with God, thanking Him for His unfailing love.”

“We meditate on your unfailing love” (Psalm 48:9).

## **H**ope with full assurance in God’s promise to mold you to be more like Christ.

“I know that personal growth is a process.”

“I know that God is committed to my growth.”

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

## **Y**ield your talents and abilities to helping others.

“I will be generous with my God-given gifts.”

“I will realize my God-given worth as I focus on others.”

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

## *Write from the Heart*

Look over the steps on grasping your God-given worth. Which one is particularly meaningful to your life right now? Explain.

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Which step is the most difficult to apply to your life. Why?

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# Line Up Your Self-Image with God's Image of You

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Your self-image has been greatly shaped by the messages you received and internalized from others, from your experiences, and from your own self-talk. When you were a child, you did not have control of those in authority over you. Now that you are an adult, that is no longer the case. You are now able to choose those with whom you associate, and you can certainly control your self-talk. Therefore, you can take an active part in changing the distorted view you have of yourself. You can line up your self-image with God's image of you.

The following steps show how to improve your sense of self.

## 1. Accept yourself.

- Stop striving for perfection or trying to be like someone else.
- Realize, the Lord made you for a purpose. He designed your personality and gave you the gifts and abilities He wanted you to have in order to accomplish His purpose for you.

“The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me” (Psalm 138:8 ESV).

## 2. Thank God for encouraging you.

- Acknowledge and praise God for the abilities He has given you and the things He has accomplished through you.
- Engage in biblically based, encouraging self-talk and mute the condemning critic inside your head.

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).

### 3. Accept the compliments of others.

- To discount the positive comments of those who have heartfelt appreciation for you is to discount their opinions and their desire to express their gratitude to you.
- Practice graciously accepting compliments and turning them into praise to God for the affirmation that He is at work in you and producing good *fruit* through you.

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

### 4. Release the negative past and focus on a positive future.

- Refuse to dwell on negative things said or done to you in the past and release them to God.
- Embrace the work God is doing in your life now and cooperate with Him by focusing on Him and on His character. Trust in His promise to fulfill His purposes in you.

“It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

## 5. Live in God's forgiveness.

- God has extended forgiveness to you for all of your sins (past, present, and future). Confess and repent of anything offensive to God. Do not set yourself up as a higher judge than God by refusing to forgive yourself.
- Lay harsh judgment of yourself aside and accept that you will not be made “fully perfect” and totally without sin until you stand in the presence of Christ and are fully conformed to His image.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2–3).

## 6. Benefit from your mistakes.

- Realize that you can learn from your mistakes, as well as from the mistakes of others. Decide to view your mistakes as opportunities to learn needed lessons.
- Ask God what He wants to teach you from your mistakes, listen to Him, and learn from Him. Then move forward with a positive attitude and practice actions based on the insights you have gained.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

## 7. Form positive, supportive relationships.

- Realize that critical people are hurt people who project their own feelings of inadequacy onto others in an attempt to ease their own emotional pain.
- Minimize the time you spend with negative, critical people. Seek out those who encourage and support you both emotionally and spiritually.

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20 ESV).

## 8. Formulate realistic goals and plans.

- Elicit the help of others to identify your strengths and weaknesses and the gifts God has given you, as well as the things that you are persuaded God has called you to do.
- Prayerfully set some reasonable, achievable goals that capitalize on your strengths, and make a plan as to how you will set about to accomplish those goals.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24).

## 9. Identify your heart's desires.

- Make a list of things you have dreamed of doing but have never attempted because of a fear of failure or a lack of self-assurance.
- Share each desire with the Lord, asking Him to confirm to you which ones are from Him. Then lay out the steps you need to take in order to move toward fulfilling them.

“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4 ESV).

## 10. Plan for success.

- Anticipate any obstacles to accomplishing your goals and desires and plan strategies for overcoming them.
- Think of yourself as achieving each goal and doing the things God has put on your heart to do.

“May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed” (Psalm 20:4).

## 11. Celebrate each accomplishment.

- Your feelings of self-worth and self-confidence will grow with the acknowledgment of each accomplishment.
- Rejoice with the Lord and other significant people over the things you have accomplished with God's help. Affirm and celebrate your success.

“In the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you” (Deut. 12:7).

# Write from the Heart

What can you do to change the distorted view you have of yourself?  
Of the steps mentioned in this section, which ones in particular can help you overcome your self-distortions?

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## *Discussion/Application Questions*

1. The things we expose ourselves to can influence our sense of worth and value. Books, magazines, television, Internet, and social media impact our lives in positive ways and negative ways. How do these types of media positively and negatively affect your sense of self-worth?

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2. Read Ephesians 4:15, 29; 5:4; James 3:9–10. Based on these passages, how should we speak to one another? How should we *not* speak? What are the effects that words have on a person's self-worth?

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- 3. What can you say or do to help diffuse conversations in your home, workplace, and social circles that undermine and degrade the value of others? What are some life-giving words that you could say to someone struggling with low self-worth?

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- 4. The apostle John repeatedly referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (see John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). How would your life change if you thought of yourself this way?

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SESSION 6

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# **BIBLICAL STEPS TO SOLUTION**

PART 3

*“God saw all that he had made,  
and it was very good.”*

GENESIS 1:31

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## His Promise of Hope

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Dorie's childhood rejection was a seemingly impossible obstacle to overcome. Even though she had overcome much of her childhood pain, when her father died, some of the painful feelings of rejection and worthlessness resurfaced.

Upon hearing of her father's death, Dorie and her husband drove to Tulsa for his funeral. She signed the registry as his daughter and was stunned when the funeral director informed her that he had no children! The director insisted that her presence would upset the family, and she was turned away from the funeral home. Later, her aunt called and said the obituary had read "no children" and there would be discomfort for other family members if she appeared. Her father, even in death, stung Dorie with yet another rejection—but this one delivered an even greater blow. She said, "My father's death ended all earthly ties with my relatives."<sup>25</sup>

However, Dorie did not lose her new sense of worth because of her father's rejection. She knew the Lord would always love her. The Lord had compassion toward her. The Lord would always be faithful to her. This was His promise of hope . . .

*"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.  
Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail."*

LAMENTATIONS 3:21–22

In this session, we'll look at how God can turn our mistreatment into ministry, and then wrap up with some reminders about our worth in God's eyes.

## *Write from the Heart*

Were you rejected or ostracized by someone you never forgave and who is now deceased? Is forgiveness just for the living? What benefits would forgiveness bring?

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Describe a time when God brought something good out of a hardship you faced.

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# How to Turn Mistreatment into Ministry

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At some point Dorie wrote, “I heard the voice of God—the voice that had whispered to me during those many years of loneliness, sorrow, and heartache; ‘Dorie, your end is going to be so much better than your beginning.’”<sup>26</sup> And how true! Not only did Christ accept Dorie just as she was, but He also elevated her to be His representative, His voice, His ambassador.

*“He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes,  
with the princes of his people.”*

PSALM 113:7–8

Mistreatment is no stranger to any of us. Why then, in the face of misfortune, do some victims see themselves as having little value, while others live victoriously in light of their true value? What makes the difference? The victorious Christian can learn priceless lessons through mistreatment.

- Allow your mistreatment to be the making of your ministry.

“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

- Don't be consumed with the negatives you have received from others.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:18–19).

- Be consumed with the positives you have received from God—positives He will lead you to pass on to others.

The blessing comes when you focus not on what you are getting, but on what you are giving. Jesus suffered immense mistreatment, yet He was not burdened with low self-worth. His ministry of compassion models for us the truth that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

## *Write from the Heart*

Read Romans 5:3–5; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; James 1:2–4. How can God use suffering and mistreatment for His purposes?

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No experience in life is ever wasted with God. Read Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Ephesians 4:10–11; 1 Peter 4:10–11. What gifts and abilities has God given you? How can you use them to help others?

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*“Now may the God of peace . . .  
equip you with everything good for doing his will.”*

HEBREWS 13:20–21

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# The Bible Answers Two Intriguing Questions

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## Question #1

Since the Bible says, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), am I actually supposed to love myself or is that arrogance and pride?

## Answer

When you hear the word *love*, it is common to assume it means affectionate love or passionate love. But *agape love* is the type of love referred to in this passage. The Greek word *agape* in the text means a "commitment to do what is best on behalf of others." If you truly "love your neighbor as yourself," you must comprehend the context of this love as well as understand its roots.

Jesus presents the two most important commandments: "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 12:30–31).

The apostle Paul states that love is the fulfillment of the law: "Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

We are to love with *agape* love, which is based not on feelings but on commitment. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. . . . But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:32, 35). We are to love what God loves, that is, we are to value the truth that God loves us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).



## Question #2

In Luke 14:26, does the Bible really mean that I am to hate my family and myself?

## Answer

To interpret any literary work correctly, a major principle of interpretation must be applied: context! Therefore, look at how “hatred” is used in context of the whole counsel of God’s Word.

Moses states, “Do not hate your brother in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17 *ESV*).

One of the Ten Commandments state, “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). It doesn’t say *hate* your father and mother!

The apostle John states, “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness” (1 John 2:9).

Jesus states, astonishing those who hear Him, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43–44).

Based on the whole counsel of God, we are not to carry hatred in our hearts. When referring to “hating” our father, mother, sister, brother—and even our own lives, Jesus was not promoting a lifestyle of personal hatred. Such a message is completely inconsistent with the heart of the Bible and the heart of the Lord. Jesus instead appealed to His followers to hate anything—including anything in their own lives—that stood in the way of giving their relationship with Him absolute priority. If we are to be true disciples, Jesus must be preeminent. Jesus must occupy the place of highest priority. We should not let anyone take the place that He alone should have.

“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or

authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:16–18).

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## Your Real Worth in Psalm 139

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Read all of Psalm 139. This psalm describes how to know your *real* worth. As you read this psalm, write down what you discover about how God sees you and the worth He places on you.

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Here are some reminders of your real worth from the seven sections in Psalm 139:

- 1.** Realize that God knows all about you (vv. 1–6).
- 2.** Remember that God is always with you (vv. 7–12).
- 3.** Respect the fact that God created you (vv. 13–14).
- 4.** Recognize that God uniquely designed you (vv. 15–16).
- 5.** Receive God’s loving thoughts toward you (vv. 17–18).
- 6.** Renounce God’s enemies as enemies to you (vv. 19–22).
- 7.** Respond to God as He changes you (vv. 23–24).

## *Discussion/Application Questions*

1. How has your understanding of self-worth changed over the past six sessions? What are one or two keys takeaways the Lord has revealed to you about your own self-worth?

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2. How has your view of God changed as a result of this study? How have His truths changed your view of *you*?

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3. As you look ahead, describe at least one behavior in your life that will begin, change, or stop in order to help you understand your worth in God's eyes.

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4. Who in your life struggles with low self-worth? What truths from this study would be helpful for them to know? What can you do to encourage them and help them see their value in God's eyes?

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5. Psalm 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Spend a moment praising and thanking God for creating you with great worth and for helping you better understand your value in His eyes. Write down all the reasons for which you are thankful.

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*“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store  
away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*

*Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

Matthew 6:26

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# Endnotes

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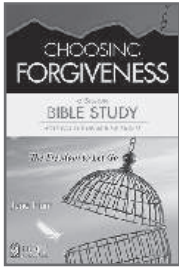
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# HOPE FOR THE HEART

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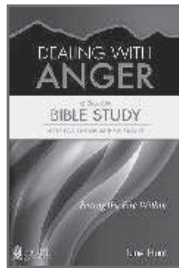
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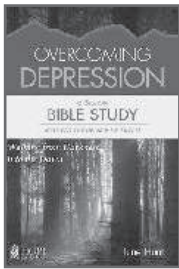
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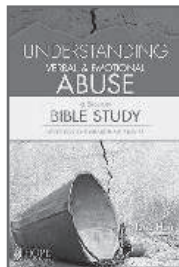
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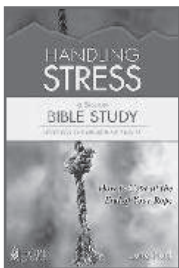
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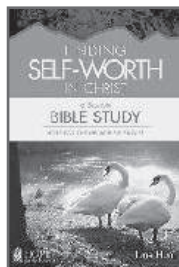
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Author and counselor June Hunt is founder of Hope For The Heart, a ministry that changes lives with resources translated into 30+ languages on 6 continents. She hosts two national radio programs, including *Hope In The Night*, featuring live call-in counseling. Her 100-topic *Biblical Counseling Library* provides *biblical hope and practical help* for today's problems.



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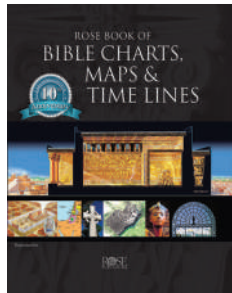
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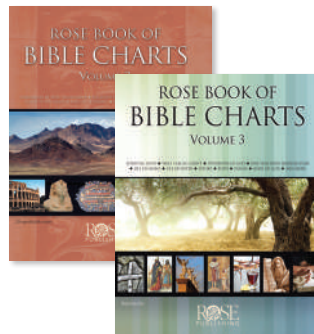
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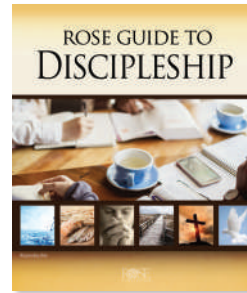
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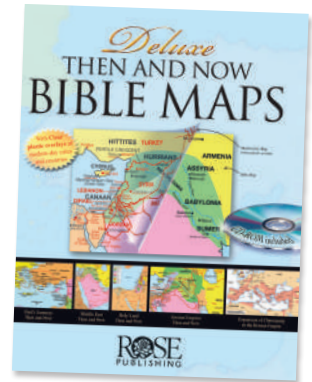
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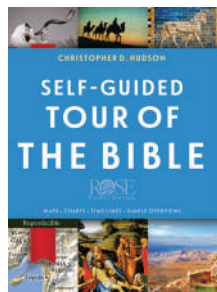
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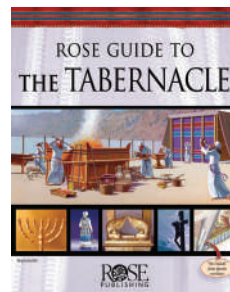
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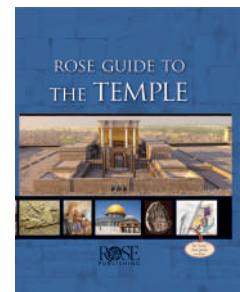
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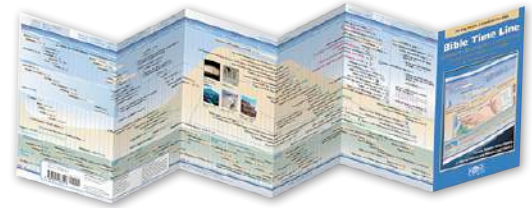
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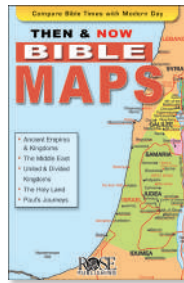


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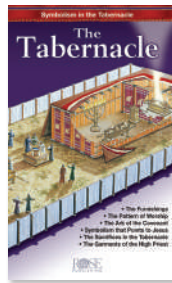
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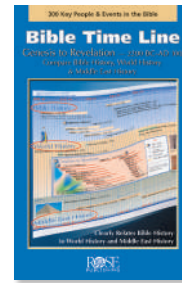
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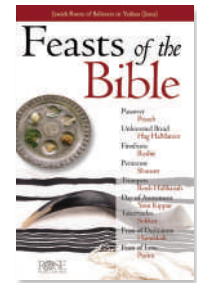
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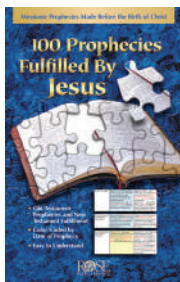
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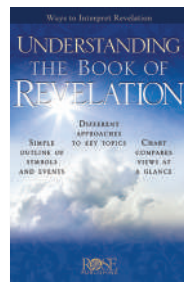
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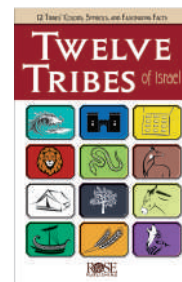
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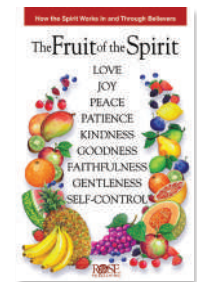
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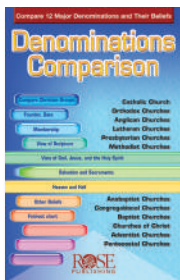
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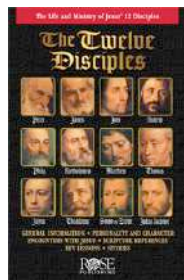
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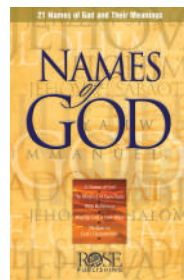
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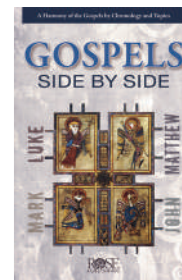
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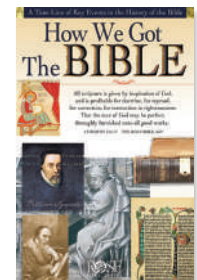
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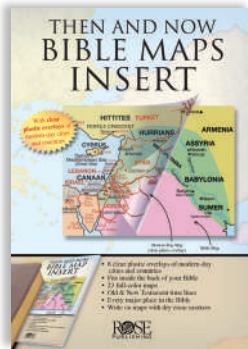
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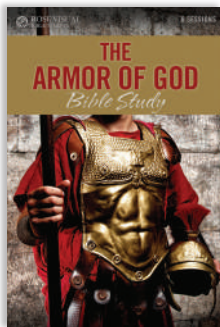


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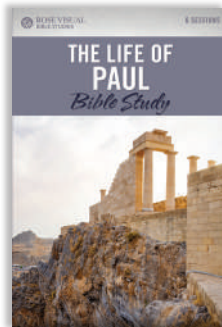
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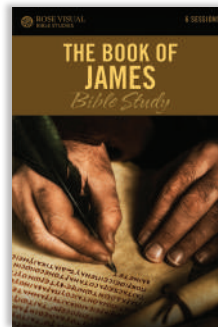
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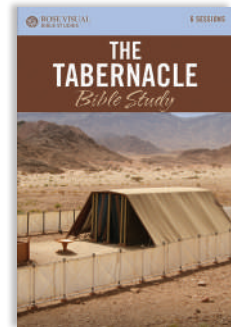
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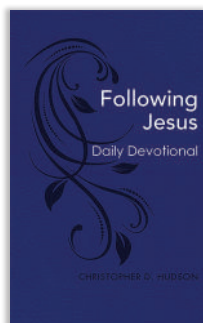
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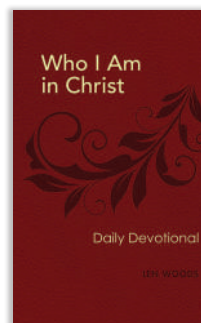
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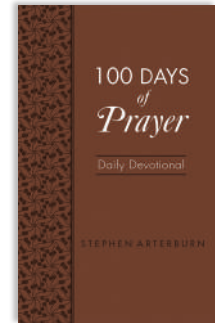
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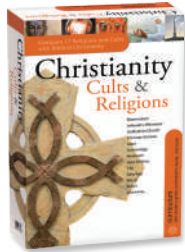
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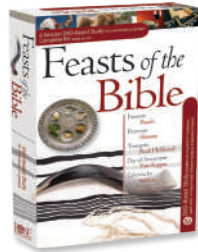


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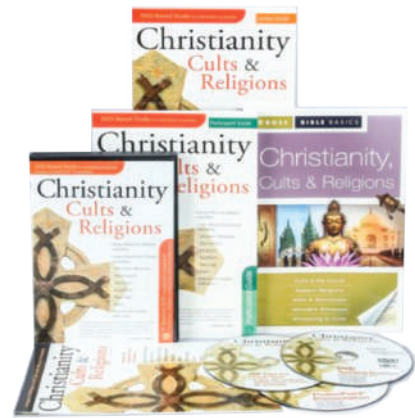
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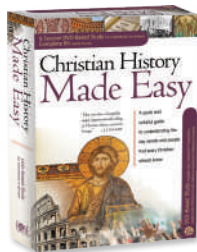


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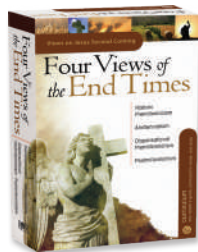


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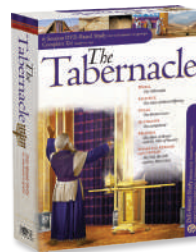
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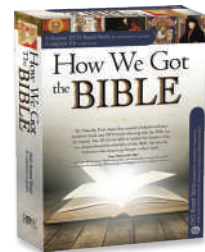
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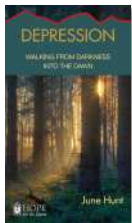
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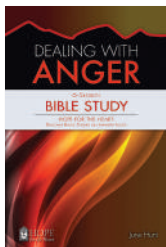


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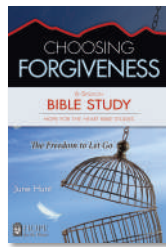
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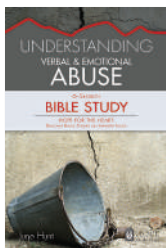
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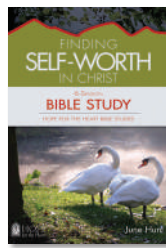
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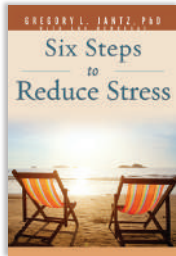




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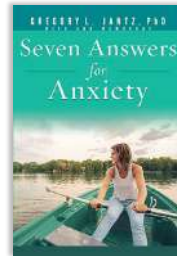
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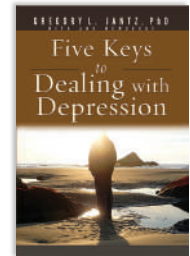
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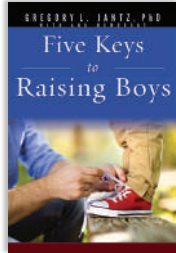
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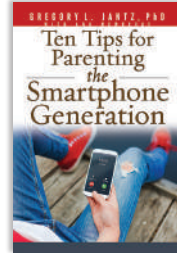
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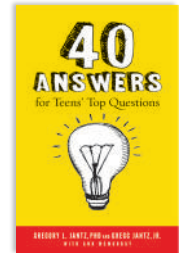
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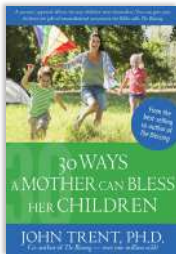
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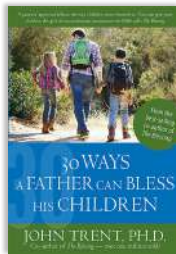
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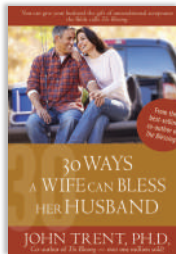
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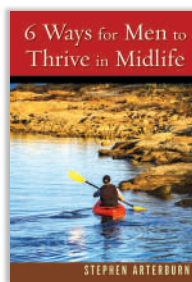
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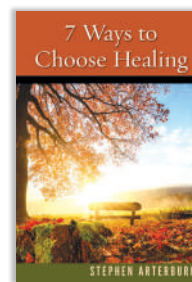
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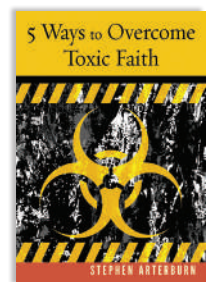
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