

THE DECEPTION OF SELF LOVE

“Can you love yourself enough?”

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1–5

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(TITLE SLIDE 1) Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us! We are so glad you are with us. Happy New Year!

INTRODUCTION:

As we move into a New Year, I would like to begin with a question? **Do you have something you would like to build or accomplish this new year?** What change would motivate you or even inspire you so that you would feel good about yourself? What would that thing be? Here are some things that are trending: Lose the holiday 30 in 30 days. Start doing yoga. Cook one new thing each week. Try a new diet plan. Drink less alcohol. Sanitize your phone weekly and start therapy.

Today, I want to show you that our goals or accomplishments can be misguided. They often fall into this category of “just love yourself,” and if you do, “you will be happy.” It’s a deception that has made its way into Christian thinking and has been broadcast as Biblical truth. **We can appear to be doing all the right things by taking care of ourselves but completely miss the power of the gospel.**

For example, a celebrity Christian named Hailey Baldwin Bieber, when she gave her testimony, said, **(SLIDE 2) “I think that every person has had that feeling that they are not enough for something, someone . . . but . . . you are, because God took his time to create [you] and put you in this place.”**

If you and I were in a room, it would be very easy to start nodding and maybe clapping in agreement to this. Because there is truth here: Yes – you were created by God – on purpose. Yes, you were made in His image. Yes, you are loved by the Creator God. But there is also deception. And it can be so subtle and dressed so prettily in Christian terminology. The deception is that “you are enough” because you were created. It’s a deception that will leave you empty and angry when it does not work. It will leave you hollow to the core when lived out. This can be a tricky concept to understand as a Christian; but I want you to track with me and see that it is about you

and I understanding who God is and who we are. We are loved by God, but we are not God.

I want to show you that this kind of thinking is advocated and believed to be the answer in our culture. Listen to the words of these celebrities. **(SLIDE 3)** The pop singer Beyonce says, **“Your self-worth is determined by you. You don’t have to depend on someone telling you who you are.”** **(SLIDE 4)** The actress Lucille Ball said, **“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”** **(SLIDE 5)** Dancer and actress, Julianne Hough (Huff) put it this way **“I think every girl needs to love herself, regardless of anything. Like, if you’re having a bad day, if you don’t like your hair, if you don’t have the best family situation, whatever, you have to love yourself and you can’t do anything until you love yourself first. All of our successes depend on self-love.”** To summarize, it all depends on whether or not you can love yourself.

This seems to be the mantra of many self-help books, celebrity speeches and has even made its way into Christian thinking. I am calling it **“the deception of self-love!”**

Here is a disclaimer. I am not saying there is anything wrong with working on yourself or having positive self-esteem. These can be good things – going to counselling, looking after your physical body, practicing gratitude – all good things. However, this “just love yourself” mentality or way of living -when foundational- is deceiving many (including Christians) and can lead you away from the very thing that you need.

Today, I want to focus on the deception of self-love. These are: (SLIDE 6)

- 1. SELF-LOVE IS UNSATISFYING**
- 2. SELF-LOVE DOESN’T TAKE UP OUR CROSS**
- 3. SELF-LOVE DOESN’T COVER OUR SIN PROBLEM**

First, self-love is unsatisfying because you can’t love yourself enough.

- 1. SELF-LOVE IS UNSATISFYING (SLIDE 7)**

In 2nd Timothy, Paul is equipping a young pastor named Timothy to prepare for difficulty. Paul is telling him that life is only going to get more difficult because of sinful behavior. Paul is saying, look to my example when things are hard. The way you live

matters. But not only that, you will be able to spot a false teacher or false teaching, so it doesn't creep into the church or your life.

(SLIDE 8) Look with me at 2 Timothy 3:1, which says, “**But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.**”

Paul begins the chapter, “Understand this.” Or literally: “Know this:” difficulty is coming. Paul gives some essential information that we will **need to discern good from evil** in the last days because “terrible times are coming!”

(SLIDE 9) What are the last days? Well, we are living in the last days. The last days started when Christ came as a baby and will continue until He returns. In this period of time, we can expect that times will be difficult because of sin and evil in the world. As we get closer to Jesus' return, there will be increasingly sinful behavior. So, what is Paul saying, “know this” awful times will come because of evil, and you need to understand this and make wise decisions.

Paul now gives Timothy a description of evils to look out for as they spring up in the hearts of others and become destructive in and out of the church. He provides a long list of things to look for.

(SLIDE 10 – leave the verse on the screen) Look with me at 2 Timothy 3:2-5, which says, **²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.**”

What are the marks of evil in Paul's description?

- a) **Lovers of self** (narcissism),
- b) **Lovers of money** (materialistic),
- c) **Proud** (loving to draw attention to their accomplishments),
- d) **Arrogant** (with an inflated view of self),
- e) **Abusive** (wanting to be verbally hurtful),
- f) **Disobedient** to their parents (having a rebellious spirit),
- g) **Ungrateful** (assuming that they have a right to the things they get),
- h) **Unholy** (indifferent to the attitudes and acts that reflect the value of Jesus),
- i) **Heartless** (unable to sympathize or empathize),
- j) **Unappeasable** (unwilling to forgive),
- k) **Slanderous** (devilishly distorting what others say and do),
- l) **Without self-control** (a slave to their appetites),

- m) **Brutal** (dead to all tenderness),
- n) **Not loving good** (unable to see and savor moral beauty),
- o) **Treacherous** (breaking promises for their own advantage),
- p) **Reckless** (craving admiration for taking risks),
- q) **Swollen with conceit** (blind to the ugliness of self-preoccupation and the beauty of admiring others),
- r) **Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God** (finding more satisfaction in physical titillation than in the divine admiration),
- s) **Having the appearance of godliness but denying its power** (using religion for personal gain without treasuring Christ above all) (2 Timothy 3:2–5).

***In essence, people will be lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God.**

(SLIDE 11) What is “Self-Love”? This can be a very vague and abstract concept that means different things to different people. To put it simply, it’s someone who prioritizes “loving themselves,” and the spotlight shifts from God to themselves. It’s a life that focuses on bettering oneself rather than prioritizing your relationship with God and loving others in your life. As a result, all these other sins spring up.

For example, self-love leads to greed, materialism, pride and kinds of other vices flow from self-love. The accumulation of things becomes a means of gratifying self. Again, Paul is warning young Timothy of the problems that had taken place in ‘false teachers’ and people hearts, where the love of God had been replaced by the love of self. Ultimately, self-love suffocates and harms the most sacred relationships between God’s people and our relationship with God.

Here, Paul is warning Timothy to watch out and avoid people who are lovers of self. **However, if we need to watch out for people who are lovers of self, we also need to watch out for the seed of self-love in our own hearts.**

APPLICATION:

Here is how this subtlety plays out in today’s culture. If don’t get “me” time... I can’t be a good friend, neighbour, disciple maker, or spend time with God. Having this me time allows me to fulfill my role as mom or pastor. **But if this becomes your source or your landmark of your wellness and functionality you are playing with self-love. Do you see the difference?** I’m not saying that going for a run or a spa day with the girls has catapulted you into idolatry. I’m saying that when these occasions become foundational and they are your source of hope, the light at the end of your tunnel – it is time to take a careful look.

We are surrounded by messages of “you do you,” do what feels right, build your ego, build your followers, build your self-esteem, build yourself, speak your truth, and all the greatness you need is within you. We give awards for participation and just showing up. This is generation self. Our culture is consumed with themselves. This is the prominent and dominant virtue of our current society.

(SLIDE 12) An author named Allie Stuckey says, “If we’ve been taught for decades that our lives will be made better just by loving ourselves more and feeling confident, why hasn’t it caught on? Why aren’t we all happier? In fact, it seems we’re less happy than ever before. Americans under forty are more depressed, anxious, lonely, and suicidal than any generation before us. We report stronger feelings of purposelessness than any other generation too. We are isolated and unsure of what we want to do with our lives. Many of us feel empty.”

ILLUSTRATION: The Willow Tree

In our last home, we had many windows that looked out into our backyard. When we first moved into our house, we enjoyed this small willow tree, which I considered cutting down because it was sad. It was worse than the Charlie Brown Christmas tree. Over time, that willow tree began to take over the yard and become a prominent feature. However, as it grew, everything around it started to die. Its large size began to block the sunlight, which kept other things from growing. The root system became invasive and started making its way into the foundation of our house. It caused our foundation to crack and water started to seep into the basement. The water caused mold to grow in the walls and in the carpet. A complete restoration process had to take place to fix the problem. It was gradual. It was slow. But it was a disaster.

Just like the willow tree, when we become so focused on loving ourselves, this way of living can slowly and subtly invade the foundation of our life. In the end it can cause disaster.

Paul is warning Timothy, and us against self-love. It leaves us unsatisfied and causes damage.

(SLIDE 13) Let me ask you this, **can you love yourself enough so that you feel permanently satisfied?** The Bible says that you are not the answer to your problems. This is one of the brilliant schemes of the enemy – we’re not talking murder

or adultery, or even gossip and white lies. Something that seems so innocent and even good, can hold a place it was not meant to hold.

As you can see, self-love is unsatisfying because you can't love yourself enough. Secondly, self-love isn't sufficient because it doesn't take up our cross.

2. SELF-LOVE DOESN'T TAKE UP OUR CROSS (SLIDE 14)

(SLIDE 15) Look with me at 2 Timothy 3:5, which says, “⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”

a) What does it mean to have the appearance of godliness? (SLIDE 16)

It is so easy to acquire “a form of godliness,” to subscribe to all the right subcultural expressions and customs and yet be “denying its power” by the way they live their lives.

Paul is telling us that self-love is one of the dominant marks of people who don't genuinely love and live for God. Unfortunately, they are imposters, and sadly probably don't even realize it, who claim to be of Christ.

Just because something appears good, it doesn't mean that it is good at all. Because someone presents as godly doesn't mean they are godly at all. Look at the marks of their life.

What does Paul say to Timothy? Flee those leaders whose lives are contradictory to the gospel. Have nothing to do with them. It doesn't say flee imperfect leaders, or you would have no leaders or pastors. But how you live matters.

b) What does it mean to follow Christ with authenticity? (SLIDE 17)

(SLIDE 18) Look with me at Matthew 16:24, which says, “²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

The word deny means to disown, disregard, forsake, renounce, reject, or refuse your agenda in place of Christ's. Very simply, it means to say “no” to that inner desire to serve self – it's saying no to that constant craving, justifying, and demand for attention.

A person who is denying self is learning to let Christ rule and reign, which is apparent through our desires and affections. In the Greek, the word “deny” means that the person enters a new state or condition. It means, “**let that person at once begin to deny self.**”

Following Jesus is a journey that comes at a high price. This is not a relationship to be entered into lightly. This decision requires the commitment of our entire life to Jesus Christ. **Coming to Christ takes priority over every other pursuit in life.** It means that he becomes the King and worship of our life. This path requires our sacrifice and, at times, even our suffering for Him. Following Christ is a free commitment that cost us our lives. It will cost us a life of ease, a life of living for this world, old habits and even old associations. It will cost us our time and treasure to spread the gospel message. It will cost us suffering for being identified as a Christ-follower. Do you see that happening in North America? It's starting. Our Christianity is not an add-on item. It's not something that compliments or justifies our traditional values and helps us fulfill our philanthropic agendas – it is not an add-on situation. It is the bottom line. Jesus demands the total commitment of the person. But in the end, we gain far more than we lose. Sometimes our feelings get in the way of denying ourselves.

ILLUSTRATION: Marriage.

What about this idea, follow your heart or follow your feelings? I don't know about you, but I've had plenty of emotions that aren't based in reality at all.

For example, when I am having a disagreement or fight with my wife and it gets heated, I don't feel love or wonderful things toward her. I don't long to buy her a bouquet of roses and clean up the kitchen for her. My feelings give me a completely different directive. My feelings direct me to assert my "rightness" and confirm her "wrongness" probably in a nasty tone. What happens when we act on our negative feeling? The temperature goes up in the room, and I get a look. The look makes her face look funny, but somehow it sends these messages. So, I give a look back, and far too often words accompany. Magically, somehow darts go back and forth!

Sometimes, we bring our other stuff into the argument, like when you had a bad day at work. If we would have followed our "feelings," our marriage would have been over a long time ago.

APPLICATION:

This is why we need to be careful about how we respond to our "feelings – to the voice of self" Following our feelings or heart can lead us away from the very thing that we need.

This is why we need to follow Christ and pick up our cross rather than focus on what makes us feel good.

So, what does it look like to deny ourselves and take up our cross?

- It's seen when someone is caring for aging parents - giving up your time and interests to help in the garden or with the housework - or just sit with them to hear their stories or do an activity they enjoy.
- It's a decision to turn off the TV or social media to spend time with God or talk to a friend going through a hard time.
- It's offering to do grocery shopping for a sick friend.
- It's cutting back on spending so that you can support a child from Compassion who has next to nothing.
- It means serving on a ministry team or attending a Community Group when you don't feel like it.

(SLIDE 19) QUESTION: Are we not allowed to take time for ourselves then? Of course, we are. God designed us all to need rest. But the mentality surrounding our "me time" matters.

John Piper tackled a question from a mom on his podcast, Ask Pastor John: **Should stay-at-home moms take a day off?** His answer was multifaceted but straightforward. This is what he said **"Yes. Moms need rejuvenation. We need a Sabbath. We need help from our husbands, parents, friends, or Sunday school class. Because as much as is expected of us, we're not superhuman. In the episode, he reminds us all that it's not selfish to ask the question: "How do you find the pace to finish the race?" Life is a marathon, not a sprint, which means all of us need to find the rhythms and patterns of activity and rest that allow us to live out the work God has called us to do efficiently and effectively."**

(SLIDE 20) Allie Stuckey says, **"When our reason behind our rest is to ensure better service to the Lord and others, we don't have to worry whether or not taking needed breaks is self-centred. It's not."** In contrast we say things like, "I deserve me time, I'm worth it, I have to have it, or I won't serve Christ!"

An unbiblical view of self-love not only leaves you unsatisfied; it can leave you unsanctified or even lost to the gospel.

You are going to see these marks of evil. If you are not careful, you will be marked by evil if you let it into your life. A lover of God sees evil for what it is because they pursue a life of Christlikeness. This is why Paul is telling us to use godly discernment in a culture that embraces evil. Think deeply about what you watch and see. About what you do. Mourn. Pray. Be Alert. We must know the marks of evil. So that we can guard the door of our lives and ministry. This can be such a subtle problem.... we are far too easily distracted by ourselves and without realizing it, we drop our cross. Lastly, self-love doesn't cover your sin.

3. SELF-LOVE DOESN'T COVER OUR SIN PROBLEM (SLIDE 21)

(SLIDE 22) Look with me at the second part of 2 Timothy 3:5, which says, “⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”

What does it mean to deny God's power? (SLIDE 23)

There is a “power” in the living, active presence of God through the gospel message that transformed Paul from a self-serving tormentor to a worshiper of Christ (1 Tim 1:16). Paul has already spoken of it earlier, as God's Spirit was said to give “power, love, and self-discipline” (1:7), and as Timothy is called to join Paul “in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God” (1:8). Paul and Timothy both know that they would not have been redeemed if it wasn't for the power of the gospel.

Here is the problem: Our culture tells us that self-love will solve our problems, but it's not enough. **As a result, many look inward for power rather than to God. The world says: that all you need lies within you – cultivate your inner beauty. The Bible tells us that when you look deeply into yourself, you are deeply flawed and in need of a Saviour. The world tells you that your truth is enough and should not be bent for others. The Bible says you may even be blind to it at times – and there is only one Truth.** A self-love philosophy promises that if you look inward and find a way to love what you see; you will find peace. But due to our massive shortcomings, we cannot find satisfaction in ourselves. Do you see the way in which love of self can take the rightful place of God in our hearts, and why it doesn't work?

(SLIDE 24) QUESTION: If we are made in the image of God, should we not love ourselves? I mean, we are indeed God's creation!

The answer to this question depends on what you mean by loving ourselves. The key to working this truth out is that we can't overlook the fact that our sin has robbed us of our goodness. **Therefore, we can't ignore that we are sinful humans and embracing ourselves in a sinful state simply leaves us in a sinful state.** Neglecting this biblical reality leaves the truly regenerate heart even more dissatisfied and confused.

Secondly, love is meaningless without a relationship. **Our very first love needs to be God.** We can be in a safe relationship with God because of what Jesus did on the cross. The Bible tells us that the way to God follows a pattern. **It never starts with you loving you more.** It's a pattern of acknowledging that you and I fall short (and that is okay), and you need God's love so that you can be fulfilled and transformed. It starts with the gospel, which gives you a firm foundation to stand on and informs your view of self.

To borrow some thoughts from a writer named Rebecca Davis. She says there are two kinds of "love of self." One type of "self-love" sees oneself in a safe and mutual relationship with God, who loves you with an overwhelming, glorious, fully gracious love. He whispers to you that you are valuable as His precious son or daughter.

For example, if you were to come up to a well-loved child of good and kind and wise parents and ask, "Do you love yourself?" the child might look quizzical as if to say, "What in the world are you talking about?" It very likely could be a question that wouldn't compute.

But if you were to ask the same child, "Do you see yourself as valuable?" the child would know, immediately, deeply, innately, "Yes! I'm well-loved! I'm valuable." That is a view of self that God would want His children to have, a healthy view of self in relationship. Who we are in Christ because he died on the cross for your sin? It's who you are because of what Christ did for you.

The second kind of "self-love" sees no relationship. It's what Paul is talking about in 2 Timothy 3 as it's narcissistic and it's only concerned with self. There is no meaningful relationship."

We need to look outside of ourselves to find relationship.

ILLUSTRATION:

A couple of years ago my sister-in-law was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a very difficult time for the family. Cancer is when bad cells grow out of control and crowd out normal cells. This causes other problems in parts of the body when cancer spreads. Sarah, our sister-in-law, had to look outside of herself for treatment. Just like we need to look outside of ourselves to the right remedy to deal with our sin.

When we look outside of ourselves and look to Christ, we can find the power of the gospel.

CONCLUSION:

The good news is that what Jesus did on the cross is for those who are in love with themselves, seek to fulfill every whim, every desire, every ambition, every dream, and every hope. It's for those who seek to be everything that they can be by trusting in themselves.

The gospel says that simply loving yourself is deficient and that there is a better way. It's the way of following Jesus and denying yourself. The created cannot love the way that their Creator can. That is why we guard what is good and true! We can't just learn about it. We must enter into the Kingdom of Heaven by finding His truth and build our life on it. The gospel bring hope, joy, love, peace, kindness, forgiveness, and a future beyond this world. Because of what Christ did on the cross, evil is limited in every way!

(SLIDE 25) Allie Stuckey says, **"Do you love yourself enough to stop denying that your sins, your faults, your inadequacies are as real as your virtues? Do you love yourself enough to stop scraping together self-worth from broken, sinful pieces of self and instead to embrace the free gift of the Father's love for Christ's sake? If the world really cared about helping us love ourselves, it would simply preach the gospel. (SLIDE 26)** Only the good news of Christ offers true hope. The message of the gospel is a message of *freedom* from efforts to love our broken selves by providing a worth that comes from outside of our brokenness — a worth that comes from Christ. The good news is that you're not enough is not just okay—it's great. You aren't meant to be enough, and neither am I."

Have you been looking to the wrong things in 2020? I hope Christians can say more than we just survived the past year. I hope we can say we did more than bake some bread and cut our own hair. **What are you going to do in 2021?** How do you plan on spending your time? How do you plan on spending your money? What are your priorities? Who or what are you looking to for help?

For a generation obsessed with personal happiness and self-discovery, we're startlingly unhappy and lost? Most of the world has been left to themselves this year. We keep hearing that if we just love ourselves a little more and check a few more things off our personal list of goals, we'll finally be okay. This tactic isn't working, and it's keeping us miserable. Self-love is unreliable, conditional, and limited. Chasing after it always brings us to a dead end.

What will you build your life on this year?

Close in Prayer