

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 1-14-18

January 14 we continue a topical series on relationships. Today's message focuses on having a healthy relationship with yourself. Discussion questions are:

1. Jesus compared lack of self-awareness to blindness. Which of the following statements would be characteristics of a person who is spiritually blind and which of a person who has good spiritual sight:
  - a. "This is a terrible day."
  - b. "This is sadness I am feeling."
  - c. "You make me so mad."
  - d. "This is anger I am feeling."
  - e. "They just drive a car like that to impress people."
  - f. "This is jealousy I am feeling."
2. When Martha says, *Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?*, what is the emotion that is blinding her?
  - a. How would an emotionally healthy Martha have handled the situation?
3. When a man asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him, why does Jesus' reply, "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed...*"?
4. How would you define hypocrisy based on Matthew 7:3-5?
  - a. Why would Jesus include this warning in his inaugural address?
5. How valuable was Nathan to David's spiritual health?
  - a. If you wanted a "Nathan" in your life how would you get one?
6. We want to know the truth about our cars or our physical health. Why are we sometimes hesitant to learn the truth about our inner self?
  - a. How would a person go about overcoming their fear of being known for who they are on the inside?
7. How have you experienced the truth of II Corinthians 3:18 in your own life?

### RELATIONSHIP SERMON 2:

#### *On Having a Healthy Relationship with Yourself*

We started last week talking about healthy relationships in the church. It should go without saying that before you begin trying to develop relationships with others you must have a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with yourself. Let's start this morning by trying to understand the significance of having a healthy relationship with yourself.

There is a world of difference between being caught up in an emotion or a mood and being aware of the presence of the emotion or mood. When I think, "This is a terrible day," my sadness increases. When I think, "This is sadness I'm feeling," it actually creates a small but critical distance between me and the feeling of sadness. Likewise, when I think, "You make me so mad!" my anger increases. When I think, "This is anger I'm feeling," I actually begin to calm down.

Awareness of what I'm feeling generally brings the awareness that I am not my feelings. And then I can begin to see you more clearly and relate to you more intimately. It's a little like shifting my focus from looking through a window to looking at the window and noticing the streaks and dust that are distorting my vision.

In the Bible, a lack of awareness is often compared to blindness. Jesus spent a lot of time trying to help people with their blindness – both physical and spiritual.

When Martha complained to Jesus that she was doing all the work while her sister just sat around listening to him, Jesus responded by refocusing her attention: "*Martha, Martha, ...you are worried and upset about many things.*" Why did he say that? Because Martha wasn't aware that she was worried and upset about many things.

When a man tried to get Jesus involved in a dispute over a family inheritance, Jesus responded by saying: "*Beware! Guard against every kind of greed.*" Why did he say that? Because the man was unaware of the greed he was feeling.

After a lifetime of watching judgmental people criticize other peoples' minor flaws while remaining blind to their own major character defects, Jesus asked them, "*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*" Why did Jesus say that? Because he was surrounded by speck-removers who didn't know they were plank eyed hypocrites.

Martha was frustrated with Jesus because to her way of thinking, he wasn't appropriately chastising Mary. The greedy man was probably frustrated with Jesus because Jesus wouldn't tell the man's brother to split his inheritance. People walking around with planks in their eyes often try to remove specks from the eyes of others because they think God isn't doing enough speck-removal on his own.

Sin has a way of blinding us from knowing ourselves. The Bible calls that "*thinking more highly of yourself than you ought.*" Most people are average on most traits but most people rate themselves as "above average." For instance, most people rate themselves as above-average drivers (including people in the hospital recovering from car accidents that occurred when they were driving.) Only 2% of college professors rate themselves as below average; 63% say they're above average, and 25% say they're truly exceptional.

We live in an age in which self-aware truth tellers like the prophet Nathan would have a hard time getting a job. You remember Nathan, that fearless prophet who stood toe to toe with King David and accused him of murder and adultery with the strong words, "*Thou art the man!*" How long do you think Nathan would last in the President's cabinet with that kind for honest critique to a person in power?

Our capacity for self-deception knows no bounds, and it's a serious problem where relationships are concerned. Why? Because relationships are based on shared experiences and we can't share experiences with others if we're not aware of what we're experiencing in our own soul and spirit.

A healthy relationship with others has to be preceded by a healthy relationship with yourself. And a healthy relationship with others has to be preceded by a healthy relationship with God. Lack of self-awareness will keep you from knowing God. All great spiritual thinkers understand the deep connection between knowledge of self and knowledge of God.

In one of Augustine's famous prayers he asks for what is often referred to as double knowledge: "God, always the same, let me know myself, let me know Thee!"

John Calvin said: "The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie."

Bernard of Clairvaux, a 12<sup>th</sup> century French abbot, said, "Know yourself and you will have a wholesome fear of God; know him and you will also love him."

When we lack self-awareness, we may project onto God and others the fear, anger, greed, and complaints that fester blindly beneath the surface of our lives. In Jesus' story about the talents, the "wicked, lazy servant" blamed his own poor choices on the character of his master; *"I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed."*

Self-awareness is not an easy hill to climb. King David said, *"Who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults."* Guess who the faults are hidden from? From yourself! One of the weirdest things about sin is I am very aware of yours but I'm rarely as aware of my own. It's painful to recognize your own sin but you will never become self-aware until your desire to face reality is stronger than your desire to avoid pain.

God often uses other people to help us become self-aware. I love the way Frederick Buechner retells the story of King David and the prophet Nathan. (Disclaimer – Buechner mentions alcohol consumption in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. For those who came to church this morning without a sense of humor please understand this in no way is intended to condone the consumption of alcoholic beverages.)

*Just about every king seems to have had a prophet to help keep him honest....The best example is, of course, the most famous.*

*David had successfully gotten rid of Uriah the Hittite by assigning him to frontline duty, where he was soon picked off by enemy snipers. After a suitable period of mourning, David then proceeded to marry Uriah's gorgeous young widow, Bathsheba. The honeymoon had hardly started rolling before Nathan came around to describe a hardship case he thought David might want to do something about.*

*There were these two men, Nathan said, one of them a big-time rancher with flocks and herds of just about everything that has four legs and a tail and the other the owner of just one lamb he was too soft-hearted even to think about in terms of chops and mint jelly. He had it living at home with himself and the family, and he got to the point where he even let it lap milk out of his own bowl and sleep at the foot of his bed. The one day the rancher had a friend drop in unexpectedly for a meal and, instead of taking something out of his own overstuffed freezer, he*

*got somebody to go over and commandeer the poor man's lamb, which he and his friend consumed with a garnish of roast potatoes and new peas.*

*When Nathan finished telling him the story, David hit the roof. He said anybody who'd pull a stunt like that ought to be take out and shot. At the very least he ought to be made to give back e four times what the lamb was worth. And who was the greedy, thieving slob anyway, he wanted to know.*

*"Take a look in the mirror the next time you're near one," Nathan said. It was only the opening thrust. By the time Nathan was through, it was all David could do just to pick up the receiver and tell room service to get a stiff drink up to the bridal suite.*

When you look at your relationships with others in the church it's really important to ask yourself, "How does my connection with this person impact the person I'm becoming?" Nathan had a way of eliciting David's true self, even at great risk to his own life.

The master of eliciting our best selves is, of course, Jesus. When a little tax collector named Zacchaeus got close to Jesus, he did a turnaround like Scrooge on Christmas morning. When the Samaritan woman got close to Jesus she went from a scandalous loner to a spiritual leader in her town. When Simon Bar Jonah got close to Jesus he went from an impulse-control case to Peter, the Rock of Galilee. When a Samaritan leper got close to Jesus he became a poster boy for the attitude of gratitude. When a thief on a cross got close to Jesus he exhibited a repentant heart by sticking up for his newfound Savior. People who got close to Jesus just generally found they were better when Jesus was around. They called it "being in Christ." The more intimate we are with Jesus, the more we become like him – and the more we can become him to others.

Let me ask you a gut-check question. Would you describe yourself as a "good" person? Keep in mind we all have a *public* me visible to all and a *private* me not visible to others. We all live with that inconsistency.

The good person is the person whose heart is pervaded by divine love. The good person is not simply one who does good things; it is someone who genuinely *wants* to do good things. Jesus introduced a word to describe the person who is not "good". The word was "hypocrite". The word *hypocrite* is used 17 times in the New Testament. Every time it is used, it is used by Jesus. Contrasts between hypocrisy and genuine goodness are laced through much of Jesus' teaching. One entire speech given just a few days before Jesus' death, is devoted to this single topic.

Remember in that speech when he illustrated hypocrisy by describing a person who washes only the outside of a cup or dish while the inside is grossly filthy? All people have an inside and an outside. And it is the inside that most concerns God. According to Jesus, hypocrisy is not just the failure to live up to what we aspire to. Everybody does that. The core of hypocrisy is deception. In that same speech Jesus painted a picture of the futility of such deception as being like the futility of whitewashing a tomb. Why would someone whitewash a tomb? To make people think there's life in it, not death. I hide my dislike for you behind a polite smile. I pretend to help you when I'm hoping you fail. I portray myself as loving when inside I'm full of judgment of selfishness.

Because of Jesus' emphasis on the heart, goodness does not begin with right behavior. It begins with openness to the truth about the mess in my inner being. Jesus said the truth will set you free and it will. When you face the truth about yourself it will set you free but first it will make you miserable. You will initially feel like Isaiah who moaned, *"Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."*

Let's try a little thought experiment. Imagine picking up your car from a tune-up. The technician says: "This car is in great shape. Clearly you have an automotive genius to take great care of your car." Later that day your brakes don't work. You find out you were out of brake fluid. You could have been killed. You go back to the shop and ask, "Why didn't you tell me?" The answer is, "I didn't want you to feel bad. And I was afraid you might get upset with me. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted." I think you would be furious. You would likely tell the technician, "When it comes to my car I don't want a fantasy-based ego boost. I want the truth!"

You go to the doctor for a checkup. He says, "You are a magnificent physical specimen. You have the body of an Olympian. You are to be congratulated. You should be in the medical journals as the ideal of how a person stays in good health. Later that day while walking up a set of stairs, your heart gives out. You find out later your arteries were so clogged, you were one jelly doughnut away from the grim reaper. You go back to the doctor and say, "Why didn't you tell me?" "Well, I knew your body is in worse shape than the Pillsbury doughboy, but if I tell people stuff like that, they get kind of offended. It's kind of bad for business. They don't come back. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted." Again, you'd be furious! You'd let it be known loud and clear that when it comes to your body, you want the truth!

Before we leave this topic this morning I want you to know something very important. If you seriously enter into a covenant with God to develop a new pattern of living and developing healthy relationships He can and will bring about that transformation. It's not all on your shoulders to do the changing!

There's a great story by Max Beerbohm called, "The Happy Hypocrite: A Fairy Tale for Tired Gentlemen." George Lord has led a wasted life: greed, gambling, superficial relationships, broken promises to women, too much alcohol. He is having a lavish meal with his lover when he sees a young, innocent woman and promptly falls in love. He desperately wants to marry her, but she has vowed only to marry a man with the face of a saint. Not long after, he passed by a mask shop and has the owner crated a lifelike wax mask that creates precisely the image he is hoping for. He returns to the woman who has won his heart; he proposes and she accepts.

That moment marks the beginning of a moral conversion. He sings the wedding certificate George Heaven. He donates much of his money to the poor. He repays everyone he has cheated. He is humble before people whom he had never noticed before. He enters into the way of life of a saint.

Sometime later his old lover sees him and comes to unmask him before his wife. A struggle ensues, his mask is tossed to the ground, and his old lover laughs in triumph. He must turn and face his wife.

But when he does, he is shocked by her question: “Why did you have a mask created that looks precisely like your own countenance?” While he had entered into the way of a saint, an unknown unseen power had been at work. He had grown into his face.

With your commitment and God’s help you can do precisely that – grow into your face, actually become what you’ve been longing to become. “...the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. – II Corinthians 3:18