



LESSON 4: SPIRIT OF LOVE: Loving Self.

If love for God is always linked with love for others and if we are to love others as we love ourselves, what does it mean to love ourselves.

Could the Spirit of God teach us a holy and healthy kind of self-love?

Today's society tempts us to become more selfish or self-centred – our doing is so often in our self-interest, But the Spirit teaches us a profoundly different way of loving ourselves – a way of maturity that involves self-examination, self-control, self-development and self-giving. These practices of mature self-care enable us to love God and others more fully and joyfully.

Read: Romans 12:3-27

Pleasure was originally the Creator's idea. By giving us taste, smell, sound, sight and touch, God was making possible an amazing array of pleasures, from eating to sex, from music to sport, from painting to gardening, from dance to travel.

Human pleasure is a good and beautiful creation, mirroring, it would seem, a great capacity for enjoyment that exists in God. We are told that God takes pleasure in creation and in us, something all of us need to embrace. So again and again we are reminded that God has given up all things to enjoy richly, and that in God's presence is fullness of joy.

God is definitely pro-pleasure!!

Read: James 1:2-8.

Rules about pleasure have an important place however. The desire centre within us demands "what I want, when I want it, as much as I want" and this can all too easily become an addictive dictator. We all need to learn to say "No, that's not right" or "No, this isn't the right time" or "No, that's enough for now." The Spirit gives us wise rules. This is wisdom.

Read: James 3:13-18

Wisdom helps us see how a hasty purchase of a desired indulgence can lead to the long-term pressure of debt.

Wisdom remembers that habitual overindulgence in alcohol, drugs, tobacco or even food can greatly shorten your life.

Wisdom guides us to see beyond life's immediate pleasures to potential consequences that are less obvious and less pleasant.

Wisdom also helps us see how excessively denying ourselves pleasure can itself become unwise. A wise person learns that he or she must find pleasures outside of their work or demands so their life can remain pleasurable.

By pursuing wisdom, you get out of your own way. You learn to be a friend to yourself instead of your own enemy. You learn self-examination, self-control, self-development and self-care – so you can better practice true self-giving toward God and others.

God is not a divine killjoy.

God wants you to love you the way He loves you, so you can join God in the one self-giving love that upholds you and all creation. If you trust yourself to that love, you will become the best self you can be – thriving in aliveness, full of deep joy, part of the beautiful whole. That's the kind of self-care and love of self that is good, right, wise and necessary.

That is one more reason we walk this road together: to journey ever deeper into the beautiful mystery of the Spirit's love. There we find God. There we find our neighbour. And there we find ourselves.

Engage: What one thought or idea from today's lesson intrigued, provoked, disturbed or challenged you?

Can you identify any story, rules or wise saying that has helped you?

How do you respond to the idea that if we love ourselves, we will practice self-examination, self-control, self-development, self-care and self-giving rather than self-indulgence?

Activate: This week, where possible, share privately with someone how you are doing with self-love.

Meditate: Imagine those who love you most. Now imagine standing with them as they see and love you. In silence and in God's presence, hold yourself in that kind of love. **Page | 2**