

Why are we here?

1. To affirm whether you are called to be married or not.

2. To allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what needs to change or be adjusted in your life so that you have the greatest success at marriage or remarriage.

3. To heal from the past, confront your fears and concerns of the present and future.

4. To learn more about yourself and the Lord’s best for you versus your best.

5. To build an accountable group of friends all on the same journey.

Prayer Structure

1. Form groups of no more than 4 people

2. Discuss your answers as a group, allowing everyone to share; take notes to use during the prayer portion

3. Pray out loud *options*

• You can read each other answers you wrote down in the form of prayer

• You can pray for each other in whatever direction

• Everyone can pray for themselves

• One person can pray for everyone

Pray for a Mate guidelines:

• Be on time to end on time.

• Respect privacy and/or boundaries

• If your group finishes praying early, please remain quiet until everyone is done.



SELF-ACCEPTANCE

* **ICEBREAKER**: Find someone you don't know well and share a time when you've had problems accepting something about yourself. [10 minutes]
* **BIG BOARD**: Write on a big board or have folks share out loud their answers. [10 minutes]
* **BIG GROUP DISCUSSION/Devotion on the Topic of Self-Acceptance** [10 minutes]
* **SMALL GROUP 1: Accepting Yourself** [10 minutes]

**Read/Discuss:** Everyone has struggled with something about themselves that they wish they could change. For some, it may be a poor body image. For others, they may want to change their facial features, maybe there has been an accident or a physical trauma and as a result, there are scars from burns or stitches. Some are challenged by unhealthy habits. We struggle most with accepting ourselves during the teenage years, but issues with acceptance stemming from low self-esteem can plague us well into adulthood. Paul refers to a “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 12:7 and although we don't know what he was referring to, more popular theories interpret this as being a serious eye problem, temptation, epilepsy, or a speech problem. So we are not alone, if Paul, one of the greatest teachers in building the early church, even had something that he wanted to change about himself.

***Read 2 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV):*** *or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.****8****Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.****9****But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.****10****That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

**Q: Share again some of the areas you have a hard time accepting about yourself. What is God telling you to pray about in regards to those areas?**

[Pray using the guidelines.] [15 minutes]

* **SMALL GROUP 2: Loving and Accepting Yourself** [10 minutes]?

**Read/Discuss:** Now that we have identified some areas that we have trouble accepting, how can we go about learning to fully love and accept ourselves. There was a famous saying years ago that appeared on posters: “*I know I am somebody special because God doesn't make junk!”* God made us unique individuals, no one else in the world has our combination of physical attributes, personality, gifts and abilities, and experiences. You are one of a kind, fearfully and wonderfully made by God! God can use the things we like as well as the things we don't like about ourselves to bring Him glory. He wants us to revel in being ourselves and not compare ourselves to others. He loves us, He has our best interest at heart and when we don't learn to accept and love ourselves, it is like we are questioning God and not trusting that He knew what He was doing when He created us as we are. Let's get back to Paul and see what happened with him. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, we see that Paul asked God three times to remove the affliction, but God replied, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* Paul determined that he would rather “boast” in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him. He learned to accept himself fully and allow God to work through even the afflictions and the pain. However, it needs to be stated here that if you or someone you know is dealing with addictions or more harmful habits, there are resources available for help and support, such as Celebrate Recovery, a Christ centered 12 step recovery program (available at various locations nationwide), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (also nationwide), Al-Anon (for families and friends of alcoholics), Gamblers Anonymous, Drug Abuse Hotline (available 24/7), Christian counselors and many more.

***Read: 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV):*** *But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

***Romans 9:20 (Good News Translation):*** *But who are you, my friend, to talk back to God? A clay pot does not ask the man who made it, “Why did you make me like this?”*

**Q: So what is God saying now? What is he revealing about how to love and accept yourself? How can he use you, where you are right now, as you are?**

[Pray using the guidelines.] [15 minutes]

* **SMALL GROUP 3: Impacting Others** [10 minutes]?

**Read/Discuss:** If I don't learn to love and accept myself, how could this impact the relationships that I may be in now or in the future (like marriage? I have learned that if I cannot accept the things that I want to change about myself, how can I fully accept another person? I don't want to go into a relationship, much less a marriage, trying to change the things in another person that I need to learn to accept about myself. In an interview with a couple who had been married many decades (not years!), the interviewer asked the secret to staying happily married for so long: the couple replied that when they had entered marriage, they determined that they would not try to change the other, that they would accept their spouse exactly as they were on day one! Fully accepting yourself is a freeing feeling and allows you to be the person God meant for you to be, your true self, as He created you!

***Read Ephesians 2:10 (NIV):*** *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

**Q: What are some of the challenges of accepting others? What do you need to pray about now, in relation to others?**

[Pray using the guidelines.] [15 minutes]

**WHAT TO DO?**

* When we go through a period in which we don't feel accepting of something about ourselves, we can go back and read the scriptures contained in this segment to remind us that we really are an original masterpiece—His one-of-a-kind work of art!
* Continue to pray, asking God to reveal those areas that you have a hard time accepting about yourself. If those areas involve sin, then confess and turn, asking the Lord for help. But if they are how God made you, continue to surrender it to the Lord, and know he loves you the way he created you. Remember, don’t compare yourself to anyone else..keep your focus on the Lord.

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