



## Self, Self, Self

### Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Today's technology culture has forced me (kicking and screaming) into the realm of smartphones! However, one of the benefits of possessing my new phone is the multi-featured-mega-pixel (handy-dandy in my vocabulary) camera that can instantly capture the important events of life and transport these photos to my Facebook page. One problem – I have not yet learned to record these special moments in a manner that is sharp and distinct! Yes, it is called **FOCUS**; that is what keeps the lines of the objects in the photo from blurring; focus keeps the eyes of the beholder pinpointed and concentrated on the highlighted and clear image of the photo.

But what if my focus turns from capturing the clarity of the picture to **my** adept and skillful ability to push the correct button on the phone? More than likely, the resulting photo will be a vague image of the ground, my shoes, my hand, or the sky! Where should the focus be – on me or the photo? Our study will address the harmful focus we place on “**self**.” This is the emphasis we are told to put on ourselves by the world **versus** what the Holy Word of God tells us our focus **should be** in order to please God in our relationship with Him. We will discuss why it is difficult to take the focus off ourselves; that we are uniquely created by God for Godly purposes, not self-purposes; how we should truly be grateful to God for His mercy, love, forgiveness, grace, and sacrifice; and the ways the Word tells us to show this gratitude in self-less ways.

**Opening prayer:** Heavenly Father, we ask that You would open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts to let Your Word fill us with Your wisdom. Lord, let Your Holy Spirit teach us to be passionate in our desire to want to know You through Your Word and through Your one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Focus on Self

Today's worldly culture tells us the solution to all of our physical and emotional problems is the well-being of, and continuous concentration on, self. The original sin recorded in Genesis was the focus of Eve on herself – to be as all-knowing as God. *But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4-5). Satan was urging, to the perfect humans God had created, the outright rejection of God's Word in order to be in a right relationship with Him. Instead of loving and worshiping God, Adam and Eve were now doubting His integrity and holiness. By eating the forbidden fruit, they would now take the focus off the Creator and put the focus on **self**-importance.

Take a minute to write in the space below several of the “self” words or phrases that come to mind, for example, self-pity or put-yourself-first.

Now, take turns and read your answers aloud. How many of you wrote self-esteem or selfish? There are **many** examples of the focus on self, aren't there? Truly, the focus on self begins early in our lives. For example, recall the behavior of toddlers and children. Left untaught and

unguided about sharing with others and denying selfish tendencies, children have the attitude that everything within their reach is “mine, mine, mine!” It is all on my terms – my toys, my food, my blanket. Self-focus only grows from our early age. The First Commandment is “You shall have no other gods.” Self-focus puts us in a battle with that commandment, doesn’t it?

### **Can We Reverse the Focus on Self?**

What might be the reasons we find it so difficult to take the focus off self? Take a moment to write down a couple of reasons why you think it is so difficult to take the focus off our-SELVES. Then discuss with your group.

What does God’s Word tell us about focus on self? Find the following Bible verses, read, and write down the warnings in the following Scripture. Then discuss with your group.

### **2 Timothy 3:1-4**

### **Mark 8:36**

God warns us to recognize the signs of self-focus: unloving of others, malicious gossip, conceited, lover of pleasure rather than lover of God, and then He tells us there is no profit to gain the whole world and forfeit our souls. His inspired and infallible Word also guides us in living a life for Christ rather than for self. But where do we start? How do we re-focus our minds, hearts, and souls to make God the center of our attention? Perhaps if we first understand why God created us, with His help we can see His foundation (Ephesians 2:19-21) building in our lives. Find the following Bible verses, read, and write down the reasons God created us. Then discuss with your group.

### **Genesis 1:26-27**

### **Psalms 50:23**

### **Psalms 95:6-7a**

### **Isaiah 42:10**

### **John 3:16**

### **How Can We Focus on God?**

Along with recognizing why our Triune God created us (e.g., to receive His blessings; to be in a right relationship with Him; to offer thanks that He first loved us; to worship and bow down to His holiness; and to sing songs of praise to Him), we are exhorted to love the Lord with our entire being and to be thankful for His faithfulness and blessings. When we focus on ourselves, it is difficult to focus on our merciful God, isn't it?

One major reason to turn our attention to God is gratitude or thanksgiving. Gratitude, it's an overused and under-appreciated word in many ways. But let's do a reality check! How grateful would I be to the person, who saw me fall overboard from a boat into the cold and dark ocean, threw me a life-saving float, pulled me back onto the boat, gave me a warm blanket, and then got me back to the safe shore – in other words, saved my life? Very grateful? Extremely grateful? Yes, I think the person who did this for me would be shown a great deal of my gratitude. In fact, I would probably express to everyone I knew how precious was the person who saved me from that watery grave! How much more gratitude then should I have for the One who saved my soul so I can spend a blessed eternity with Him? Here are some key points for learning to place our focus on God:

- **Have a heartfelt gratitude and humility to God for creating us;**
- **Have a heartfelt gratitude that God loves us beyond measure; and**
- **Have a heartfelt gratitude to God for sending His one and only Son Jesus Christ to die on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins which put Him there.**

Would you agree that the response of a repentant, forgiven, loved, and thankful person is the humble focus on and worship of God? In the Word, we thankfully find that God's love is a commitment (a covenant); it is not an emotion that changes with the wind. His love for us is for time everlasting, and it does not depend on our actions!

Find the following Bible verses, read, and write down what God says about forgiveness and love in the following Scripture. Then discuss with your group.

**Psalm 136:1-3**

**Romans 5:8**

**Colossians 3:12-14**

**1 John 2:15-17**

**1 John 4:7-12**

## **Summary**

God is the great I Am; God is love; focus on Him and put Him at the center of everything in life! *The Lutheran Study Bible's* commentary and overview of Martin Luther's position on the epistles of St. John summarizes for us: "For although people do not now publically deny with their lips that Christ has come in the flesh, they do deny it with their hearts, by their teaching and life. For he who would be righteous and saved by his own works and deeds is as much as denying Christ, since Christ has come in the flesh for the very purpose making us righteous and saving us without our works, by his blood alone." (Concordia Publishing House, 2009, p. 2169)

It is simple; it is eye-opening. When we make ourselves the center of the universe, we deny all the blessings of God; we deny Christ and Him crucified; we deny God's love; and we deny our relationship as His children. God uses His love to work His sanctification in us – be thankful, grateful, and open your mind, heart, and soul to the Holy Spirit's leading. Focus on God! Let's read together selected verses from John's first epistle:

*...God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him* (1 John 4:16).  
*By this we know love, that he [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers* (1 John 3:16).

*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (1 John 4:11).

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, please forgive us for taking our focus off You, for only in You do we find purpose. Send Your Holy Spirit into our lives so that we may grow in love and grace, and fill us with the faith to show Your love to the lost and least around us. Amen.

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