

# How to Love Oneself

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 18, 2024



He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27 NIV84).

Most of us are familiar with this Bible passage. We know we are to love God and our neighbors, and the measure of how we are to love our neighbor is as we love ourselves.

But what does it mean to love ourselves, and how do we do that?

Over the years, I’ve received many questions about the meaning of this passage from people struggling with how they are to love others like themselves. Some question whether loving oneself is the same as being selfish and wonder if it is not then what is the difference?

Answering this question requires that we define what love is and what selfishness is.

Love is the principle of giving—but not giving just anything, only giving that which is in harmony with God’s designs for life, giving what is right, good, noble, true, pure, holy—giving what heals, restores, recreates, builds up, refreshes, nurtures. In other words, love is giving what is necessary to fulfill God’s

purposes. Love is motivated by a desire to bless others, whether God or other people.

Selfishness is rooted in fear, jealousy, and competition with others and is the principle of taking for the purpose of dominating others, rising above others, exploiting others. It is the pursuit of power for self, not for the purpose of blessing others but elevating self.

Some activities of a person who loves self biblically and one who is selfish may look the same on the surface, such as both types of people eating healthily. But the person who is motivated by love does this for the purpose of maintaining the health of their spirit temple in order to fulfill God's purposes and be a blessing to others, while the selfish person does it either out of fear of breaking a dietary law and getting in legal trouble with God, or so they can glorify themselves with, for instance, their bodybuilding.

Loving oneself as God designed means we care about ourselves, valuing ourselves as children of God, enough so that we do not poison our bodies with substances that damage the brain, impair thinking, destroy our health, and enslave us to some addiction.

Loving ourselves means we give ourselves healthy foods, reasonable exercise, adequate sleep, hydration, and mental and spiritual rest—keeping ourselves in the best condition possible to be able to fulfill God's purpose in our lives.

When we love ourselves, we nurture our souls by ingesting the Word of God into our minds through regular Bible study. We spend time with God—talking with Him, meditating on His Word, character, creation, and blessings—seeking to worship (model) ourselves to be like Him.

To love ourselves means that we are true to ourselves—we don't betray ourselves by choosing to do that which we **already know** is not right for us to do. When we love ourselves, we don't give in to peer pressure or emotional manipulation from others who try to get us to do something that we know is wrong for us to do. Whether a moral issue, such as taking illicit drugs, or a non-moral issue, such as adopting someone's pet, if we love ourselves, we only do that which we believe is right for us in harmony with God's will for our lives.

What does it mean to love God with all one's heart, soul, strength, and mind?

It means we are dedicated to God completely, our entire selves, and, thus, we seek with all our abilities to glorify God and advance His kingdom in all that we do.

Does that mean we don't take a vacation because it would be selfish to do so? No—it means we **do** take vacations because we want to love ourselves in a godly way. We want to have rest, time to rejuvenate, to keep ourselves healthy in order to stay useful for God's cause.

One of Satan's traps, if he cannot get good people to choose evil, is to overwhelm them with so many worthy and good projects, responsibilities, and duties that they forget to love themselves; they stop resting and overwork themselves doing good to the point that they burn out and are no longer useful in God's cause. Thus, they have not loved themselves by giving what they need in order to stay healthy.

We are to live lives of love for God and others, but that requires we love ourselves in a God-designed way.

This brings us to the first rule of caregiving.

If you are a caregiver—whether a parent caring for a child, a doctor or nurse caring for a patient, or an adult child caring for an elderly parent—the first rule of caregiving is the health of the caregiver because if you don't maintain your health, then you cannot provide care to others and will need others to care for you. Thus, it is important to step back and establish the baseline requirements in your life that are necessary to maintain your health—such things as 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night, regular healthy meals, exercise, personal meditation and prayer, and Sabbath rest, relaxation, and recreation. And we compromise these routines only for true emergencies, for brief periods of time.

Even Jesus, our Savior and model, regularly took time away from needy people to sleep, eat, and spend time with His Father and friends.

So I encourage you to live lives of love for God and others as you love yourself.