

As Yourself

A Seven-Week Journey into the Surprising Holiness of Loving Yourself

Dr. Geoffrey D. Lentz • First United Methodist Church of Pensacola

Wednesdays: Aug 19, 2026 – Sep 30, 2026 • Time: 6:00PM • Primary text: As Yourself

Course Description

Jesus tells us to love our neighbors “as yourself,” yet Christians often hurry past those final two words. This course explores holy self-love as the practice of receiving—not worshipping, excusing, or inventing—the person God created, Christ claims, and the Spirit is healing. Following the movement of *As Yourself*, we will travel from awakening and honest diagnosis through baptism, growth in grace, friendship, vocation, and the love that returns the healed self to self and to the world as gift.

The self is created by God, wounded by sin, contracted by fear and pride, healed by grace, made spacious for God, and returned to you so that it may be given to the world in love.

Course Goals

- Describe holy self-love as a Christian practice rooted in creation, grace, and communion.
- Distinguish it from narcissism, self-justification, and religious self-erasure.
- Connect baptismal identity and Christ-sufficiency with honest self-knowledge and freedom for love.
- Practice receiving the self truthfully and offering the self freely for the life of the world.

Participation and Covenant

Read the assigned chapters when possible, mark one passage that stays with you, and bring one honest question. If you fall behind, come anyway. No prior theological study is required, and there are no grades or written assignments.

- Speak from your own experience; listen with curiosity rather than trying to fix or interpret another person.
- Honor confidentiality. You may pass on any question or practice.
- This course offers theological formation, not group therapy; pastoral or clinical support may be a helpful companion.

Course Schedule

The course follows the book’s theological movement: awaken • diagnose • receive • belong • grow • give • integrate.

Week 1 — Wake Up: The Gospel’s Missing Half • Aug 19, 2026

Reading: Preface, Introduction, and Chapter One, “As Yourself” | **Scripture:** Mark 12:28–34

Focus: Why has the church taught neighbor-love more confidently than truthful love of self? We will distinguish holy self-love from narcissism and understand it as receiving one of God’s creatures with truth, gratitude, repentance, and care.

For conversation: What might it mean to receive yourself as a creature entrusted to your care?

Practice: Before usefulness begins, pause and ask, “How are you?”

Week 2 — The Wounded Self: How Fear Makes Us Small • Aug 26, 2026

Reading: Chapter Two, “The Wounded Human Condition” | **Scripture:** Genesis 3:1–13

Focus: Fear can remain in body and soul after danger has passed. We will consider sin as guilt, woundedness, captivity, and blindness; love bent inward; and metanoia as a grace-given change of vision rather than self-condemnation.

For conversation: Where does fear make your world—and your sense of yourself—smaller?

Practice: Step back, notice the larger story, and ask what becomes visible in the light of Christ.

Week 3 — Receiving the Self as God's Creature • Sep 2, 2026

Reading: Chapters Three and Four, “Capable” and “The Redeemed Vineyard” | **Scripture:** Hebrews 2:5–11; Song of Songs 1:6; 8:12
If time is limited, begin with Chapter Four, the theological heart of the book.

Focus: Humanity is *capax Dei*—made for communion with God. Bernard’s vineyard helps us see how we may tend everyone else’s life while neglecting our own, and why loving the self for God’s sake makes us more fruitful for our neighbors.

For conversation: Which vineyard have you neglected while tending the lives and expectations of others?

Practice: Name one part of your life that needs truthful attention, care, or gratitude.

Week 4 — Claimed by Christ • Sep 9, 2026

Reading: Chapters Five and Six, “Hidden with Christ” and “Washed by the Water” | **Scripture:** Colossians 3:1–4; Romans 6:3–11

Focus: The deepest life of the self is not manufactured by performance but held with Christ in God. Christ-sufficiency frees us from securing our own worth, while baptism names us beloved before achievement without pretending growth is finished.

For conversation: What would change if you lived from baptismal belovedness rather than working toward worth?

Practice: Touch water, remember your baptism, and receive the unfinished life God has claimed.

Week 5 — The Spiral of Grace • Sep 16, 2026

Reading: Chapter Seven, “The Spiral of Grace” | **Scripture:** Philippians 3:12–16; 2 Corinthians 3:18

Focus: Grace gathers the scattered self, transforms it over time, and directs it outward in love. Wesleyan perfection means perfect love, not flawless performance; recurring struggles do not always mean nothing has changed.

For conversation: What evidence suggests that you may be meeting an old struggle differently?

Practice: Name one recurring struggle, notice what grace has changed, and identify the next faithful step.

Week 6 — Becoming Gift • Sep 23, 2026

Reading: Chapters Eight and Nine, “The Gift of Friends” and “Put Your Whole Self In” | **Scripture:** Luke 24:13–35; Romans 12:1–2

Focus: We do not become ourselves alone. Friendship and communion gather the self, and holiness makes us wholly present—taken, blessed, broken open, given, and gathered again—without confusing love with erasure or harm.

For conversation: Where are you invited to put your whole self in, and where might love require a faithful boundary or no?

Practice: Offer the actual life God has given you, then release the result to resurrection.

Week 7 — The Love That Includes Everything • Sep 30, 2026

Reading: Chapter Ten, “The Holy Mountain,” and the Epilogue; Coda optional | **Scripture:** 1 John 4:7–21; Psalm 125:1–2

Focus: Bernard’s final degree of love includes the self, neighbor, and creation. The mountain and its changing weather help us distinguish identity from emotion, circumstance, shame, success, and approval.

For conversation: What are you being given back to carry down the mountain and offer for the life of the world?

Practice: Name what is present, remember what remains true in Christ, and pray, “I receive myself for God’s sake. I offer myself in love.”

The Course in One Movement

We awaken to the self inside Jesus’ commandment, tell the truth about what contracts us, receive ourselves as creatures made capable of God and claimed in Christ, and let grace enlarge us through baptism, practice, failure, repentance, friendship, sacrament, and time. The self is returned—not as an idol or possession, but as a gift freely offered in love.

The purpose of holy self-love is not the self alone. It is love.