

Knowing my Value

Respect Life Week – October 2021

Made in the Image of God

Grades 7-9

Goal: To recognize our unique dignity as human beings, made in the image and likeness of God. To learn to reverence ourselves and to use the human capacities of emotion, intellect and will for good.

Lesson: God has made us in His image and likeness, the *imago Dei*. Being “*imago Dei*” means we possess a dignity that is unique from all other creatures. We have the power to **think** (intellect) and to **choose** (will), so we can know the truth and choose to love. There are times, however, when difficult situations bring up thoughts, feelings, and actions from us that get in our way of being truly free and living as we were meant to live. This lesson will explore the gift of being made in God’s image and how to use the capacities God has given us.

“We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. **Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us** is willed. **Each of us** is loved. **Each of us** is necessary.” – Pope Benedict XVI

We don’t always feel necessary, do we? But you are one of God’s thoughts. Before you came to be, God dreamed of you: a totally unique reflection of Himself. You reveal something about God that no one else can. You are irreplaceable and unrepeatable. Think about it. Each of us has a completely unique fingerprint. Fingerprint! If God took the time and care to make the invisible lines on the end of your finger totally unique, how much more care did He put into designing your love and His plan for your life...to be completely unique and necessary. Sometimes, we place our worth on what we can do or achieve (*the grades we get, the sports games we win, how we look, how many friends we have...you name it*) but, in reality, you are good, sacred and infinitely valuable simply because God created you in His image. And nothing can change that.

Watch: [In the Image of God](#)

Like God and the Angels, we have an intellect and a will, so we can know the truth, and choose the good. That separates us from all the rest of God’s creation, including the animals.

Let’s learn more about our intellect and will:

- **Intellect:** the faculty (power) of “knowing”. You must continue to develop your intellect. This is your reasoning power, and it should be informed by your faith.
- **Will:** the faculty (power) of determining one’s actions (moral strength). This can be strengthened through Prayer and Sacraments.

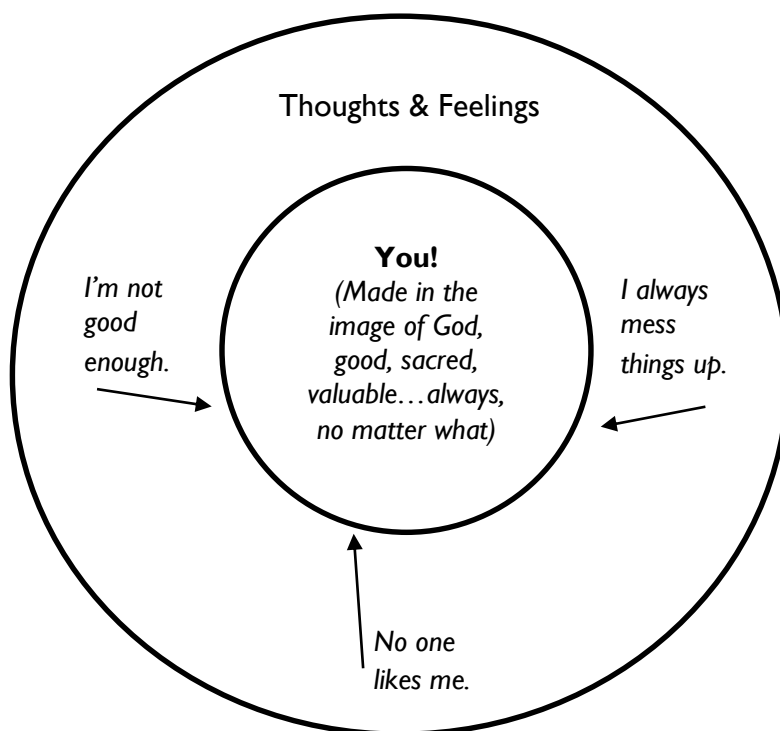
What about our feelings and emotions? Feelings and emotions are also gifts from God. They can actually act as good ‘signs’ that help us become aware of “what’s happening inside of us.” Anxiety, sadness, love, anger, joy, frustration etc. are normal emotions that all people experience. In many ways, they help to protect us from harm, to give us pause for reflection, to alert us to take care of ourselves, and to make us aware of how others may be experiencing situations (e.g. empathy). Emotions are neither right nor wrong...they are morally neutral.

Sometimes people are more vulnerable to experiencing emotions strongly or emotions become more fixed for the person (e.g. seeing the glass as half empty instead of full, seeing situations as more dangerous than they objectively are, or giving up in seeking help).

Every emotion has 3 parts:

1. What I feel (physical sensations of depression, anxiety, anger, joy)
2. What I think (how I interpret situations---how I question the world, my experience, my life),
3. What I do (my reactions and actions that are taken in response to feelings---withdraw, act out, sleep, etc.).

With any situation that prompts an emotion (e.g., failing on an exam; getting elected to student council; being embarrassed in front of friends; not getting invited to a party by someone you thought was a friend, having a good time with your family, etc), the 3 components are activated and will interact with one another. Our emotions can affect not only what we think about particular situations but also how we think and feel about ourselves. Our faith teaches us that we are infinitely valuable, made by God and possessing of dignity. This is often not how we *think* or *feel* about ourselves (see diagram below). Our thoughts and feelings about ourselves can never change our true value. We always have dignity because we are made in God's image. But we want to come to see ourselves and others as we truly are.



Let's learn more about how to navigate our emotions and guide our thinking so that we can know our own value as sons and daughters of God even in difficult circumstances.

Activity: [Common Thinking Traps](#)

Go through the list of common thinking traps with the students, asking them for examples of each type of thinking.

Activity: [Questioning the Evidence](#)

Practice using the questions provided to challenge each type of negative thinking. Use examples given in the last activity to explore how these questions can open up new avenues explanations and ways of thinking.

Activity: Break into pairs or groups. Each pair/group is given 2 common problem situations to examine for how one might feel (physical sensations of emotion); what one might think in the situation, and what one might do in response to the situation.

- a. Your good friend sent out invitations to his/her birthday (or graduation, etc) and you did not receive one. How do you feel? What are you thinking? What would you do?
- b. You are called on in class to respond to questions about last night's assignment, but you are not prepared because you were unable to get this work done. The teacher pulls you aside after class and lets you know that she or he is disappointed and expects more effort from you. How do you feel? What are you thinking? What would you do?
- c. You started a new school and don't have lunch at the same time as anyone you know. You go up to a table and join some students who are making plans to get together for the weekend. How do you feel? What are you thinking? What would you do?
- d. You learn that you did not get admitted to the summer camp/job/internship that you applied for, but several other students that are in your class did get asked to join this position for the summer. How do you feel? What are you thinking? What would you do?

Using these situations, bring the class together again and go through the common reactions within each component (think, feel, do) to illustrate the range of reactions within each. There are no right or wrong reactions---all folks have the capacity and will have physical sensations when emotional (flushing, shaking, muscle tension, stomach upset, heart racing, etc). The thoughts associated with emotions are also quite common and can range from very negative to neutral to positive, depending on the situation. And, everyone reacts in some way---they may avoid or escape uncomfortable situations, withdraw and hide, react in anger, laugh, cry, and do any number of things.

Ask the class to look at each situation again, and examine what are the more or less *helpful* thoughts and actions that occur? This is the first step in addressing what may help us to what to do when we find ourselves in difficult situations.

Activity: [Steps to Better Thinking](#)

Have the students take this sheet home with them and use it throughout the week when they encounter a challenging or emotional situation. Have them note their thoughts, question the evidence, and come up with a rational response. Follow up with a discussion at the end of the week.

Watch: [Irreplaceable](#)

Discussion:

What events in our lives can make us *feel* “replaceable”?

What is the truth about each person?

How do the thinking tools we've learned today help us to believe in our value as human beings?

It's normal to struggle with how we think about ourselves and our value. Everybody experiences challenging emotions at times and must learn how to navigate these emotions. Sometimes these emotions become too much for us to handle on our own. It's so important to ask for help from others. This can be scary and takes courage but it is worth it. In January, we will talk more specifically about the fear of reaching out and ways to overcome that fear. Our Heavenly Father wants us to see ourselves as He sees us, as His beloved daughters and sons.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of life. Thank you for the gift of being created in your image and likeness, capable of knowing and loving. Help me to recognize my dignity and the dignity of every person. Give me the courage to use my powers of intellect and will for good. I believe in Your love for me. Help me to love You, others, and myself. Amen.

Resources for Teachers and Parents

Helpguide.org information on [Teen Depression and Suicide](#). Good resource for parents and educators to understand symptoms and warning signs and know how to help.

Suicide can be a challenging topic for everyone, but please remember that help is always available (24/7) for anyone suffering from depression or having thoughts of suicide. For confidential guidance for your child, or anyone:

- Text the **Crisis Text Line (741-741)**

NOTE: This number is easy to remember: It's the first column of numbers on a phone.

- Call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK [8255])**

NOTE: *In the summer of 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK [8255]) will be able to be accessed by simply dialing 988.*

While 911 is geared toward a law enforcement response, 988 connects a caller in a mental health crisis to a trained counselor who can address their immediate needs (and even help connect them to ongoing care if they desire).

Lesson adapted from the plans on the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Life, Justice and Peace website