

From Pastor Ed: The 21 Day Wesley Challenge

This is day 14! Tomorrow following service we will be having OT...I hope you will stay!

Daylight Savings Time returns! Now is the day to spring forward your clock before going to bed tonight!

Day Fourteen Question Fourteen

Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?

Philippians 2:3-4

It is healthy to be self-aware. However, being too aware of self can make us self-absorbed if we're not careful. Wesley wanted us to reflect on the question, **"Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?"** He wanted us to reflect on this question so that we could confront our human weakness to be so concerned with "self" that we lose sight of the "others" in our lives. Do yourself a favor. Reflect carefully and act swiftly on the core of what Wesley was getting at in today's question. Watch it change the way you see the world and also the way others see you.

- How often do you attempt something you will be "bad" at? If your answer is "rarely," why do you think that is? Are you afraid of being embarrassed or looking foolish to others? Are you worried about criticism, or is it because you have an excessive need to always be the "best"? Has anyone ever told you that you are self-absorbed, self-pitying, or self-justifying? What were the circumstances of that encounter? What, if anything, did you learn about yourself as a result?

Prayer: God, teach me to serve you first and to seek your kingdom. Help me to be less concerned about myself and more about you and your mission for this world. Help me not to be so concerned with myself that I forget your purpose for me. Amen.

Day 14 devotional 14:

"Lay aside the sin of self-pity" (Thanks to Jon Bloom desiringGod.org)

I love Jonah not just because of the whole fish episode, but because Jonah is a self-pitying sulker. I don't endorse his self-pity, but I do identify with it since I'm given to similar kinds of sulking. And I'm thankful that in the Bible God shows the warts of his servants, because I have many warts too. And Jonah reminds me of God's mercy toward self-pitying sulkers like me and encourages me to lay aside this sinful weight.

A Self-Pitying Prophet

You probably know the story well. God commissioned Jonah to warn the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, that his judgment was about to fall. Jonah suspected God's gracious motives and jumped on a ship headed in the opposite direction. So God sent a big fish taxi to intercept him and vomit him back out on the beach. Then a repentant Jonah wisely obeyed God, prophesied to the great city, and repentance broke out.

This result "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (Jonah 4:1). He knew the Assyrians: they were brutal to their enemies, and in the future they were going to attack Israel; they deserved God's judgment. And he knew God: he was merciful to his enemies, forgiving undeserving repentant sinners, even brutal Assyrians. Sure enough, just as Jonah feared, the Assyrians repented and God relented. Jonah got so angry he wanted to die (Jonah 4:3). And here's where we see the all-too familiar marks of self-pity.

Jonah then went outside the city to sulk and watch. Perhaps God would have the good sense to destroy Nineveh after all, but it didn't look good. God kindly cheered the prophet by causing a plant to grow over his little booth and shade him from the blazing sun. Then God sent a worm to kill the plant and thus the prophet's shade. This also made Jonah so angry he wanted to die. God responded:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10-11)

Jonah pitied the plant because it shaded him. When the plant died the sun made him feel faint (Jonah 4:8). Everything felt so unjust: undeserving Nineveh repenting and the plant perishing. God wasn't giving Jonah his way in anything. Jonah turned bitter and he even lashed out at God (Jonah 4:9).

The Heart-Hardening Power of Self-Pity

Self-pity wasn't the only thing Jonah was feeling, but its presence and effect was unmistakable. We know how he felt because of our own experience. We know that anger, shutting us down emotionally and spiritually. We know that desire to just sulk or lash out against anyone who crosses us.

Self-pity is our sinful, selfish response to something not going the way we think it should. And it's a subtle sin; we often don't recognize it right away because it wears the disguise of righteous indignation. We feel justified to indulge it after the injustice we suffered, even if all that happened was we didn't get our way.

But self-pity is a dangerous, deceitful, heart-hardening sin ([Hebrews 3:13](#)). It's a spiritual deadener, choking faith, draining hope, killing joy, smothering love, fueling anger, and robbing any desire to serve others. And it is a feeder-sin, encouraging us to comfort our poor selves with all manner of sinful indulgence like gossip, slander, gluttony, substance abuse, pornography, and binge entertainment, just to name a few. Self-pity poisons our relationships and is often an underlying cause of our "burnout."

Self-pity does us no good whatsoever, even if we've suffered a true injustice or bereavement or other evil. It is a closely clinging sin that only weighs us down like an anchor ([Hebrews 12:1](#)), so we must jettison it as soon as we recognize it.

Laying Aside the Weight of Self-Pity

There's no magic formula for laying aside the weight of self-pity. Fighting sin is a martial art. Every response to every attack is at least slightly different. Our best defense is always to be saturated with the Bible, and in particular to keep ourselves refreshed in God's promises. But as an example, here's how I recently battled self-pity:

1. *Ask God for help* ([Luke 11:9](#)). Self-pity, like most sins, is an expression of pride. It is typically hard to let go of because we must admit our wrong when we have felt in the right. My self-pity almost always affects someone else and it is surprisingly hard to admit my wrong to them. I need God's help.
2. *Give yourself some gospel straight-talk*. When I feel self-pity I need to remind myself what I really deserve and what Christ has done for me ([Matthew 18:21–35](#)), to be content with what I receive from the Lord ([Philippians 4:12–19](#)). Essentially, I graciously tell myself to stop being a big, selfish baby.
3. *Repent to God for the sin of self-pity* ([Matthew 3:2](#); [Revelation 2:5](#)). It's a sin, not merely a "struggle." It's to be killed, tossed away.
4. *Repent to those affected by your sin of self-pity* ([James 5:16](#)). Frequently this step of self-humbling is where the hold of self-pity is broken.
5. *In faith take the next step God gives you to face what you don't want to face* ([Philippians 4:6–7, 9, 19](#)). If you feel self-pity over facing a frightening or unpleasant situation and you feel overwhelmed, do the *next thing*. God will give you grace to see and take the next step. If self-pity has become an ingrained habit over a long time, freedom can be yours in Christ, but only through the constant practice of laying aside this sin ([Hebrews 5:14](#)). God will help you develop habits of faith to replace habits of sin. It will take a while, and that's okay. Persevere. And involve those around you who are spiritually mature. They are experienced in this fight and will know how to lovingly exhort and encourage you.