

Image of God
Independent Bible Study Rationale
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Goal:

- To engage critically and internalize what it means to be the image of God

Objectives:

- The image-bearer will have the opportunity to do “mirror work” (looking in the mirror while making personal claims and affirmations)
- The image-bearer will engage various scriptures that reference being made in the image of God
- The image-bearer will engage in group discussion based on the provided reflection questions
- The image-bearer will look in the mirror and write down five things he or she dislikes about him and how God might see them differently
- The image-bearer will look in the mirror and write down twenty things he or she likes

Rationale:

Opening: This is a time of gathering. In this introduction to the lesson, it is important to let people know where they are going in this study. For some, this can be a very emotional experience. Letting them know early on can help them prepare mentally and minimize anxiety.

In my research, “mirror work” is a powerful tool used most notably by motivational speaker, Louise Hay. It enables them to look deeper within by physically looking at themselves. Many times, for me, I look in the mirror to make sure my hair looks okay, my face is clean, my outfit looks presentable. Rarely, however do I stare into my own eyes and do a self-check to see what is really going on with me. Yes, one can look internally without looking into the mirror, but there is a greater connection when you not only see the internal but also the physical image. There is a duality, which takes place, where you are creating a loop. Not only are you looking out of your eye gates into the world but you are also looking back into your eyes gates in the mirror to see something you could never see outside of the mirror. Although it would take a long time to explain fully this concept fully (Hay wrote an entire book on it¹), the purpose is to use this technique to invite the image-bearers into this process. For some, it will be uncomfortable at first but hopefully, the group practice will encourage the individuals to utilize this practice on an ongoing basis in his or her personal life.

¹ Louise L. Hay, *Mirror work: 21 days to heal your life* (Carlsbad: Hay House, Inc., 2016).

Additionally, looking in the mirror and expressing ones thoughts in a group can also be challenging. This can be a place of real vulnerability. It is important for the Moderator to do his or her best to encourage an atmosphere of comfort for the group. As well, if the Moderator goes first, he or she creates an example, which could make the others feel more comfortable.

The practice of saying, "I am (NAME) and I feel (STATE THE EMOTION YOU CURRENTLY FEEL)" is a light introduction to some of the more in-depth work the group will do together during this time. I experienced it during my CPE at Covenant Community, a transitional home for people getting off of drugs and alcohol addiction. Similar to AA or NA, beginning each group session, people would start by saying these words. Particularly but not exclusively for men, it can be challenging to voice their feelings. This forces the person to actually think about and vocally express their feelings. THIS IS NOT A COUNSELING SESSION. There is no conversation that happens after the expressed feelings so the person can feel free to share whatever he or she feels without the scrutiny of having to explain the said feeling. With that said, this activity can also help the Moderator gauge the atmosphere of the group based on the expressed feelings. It helps to know what emotions people are bringing with them on that particular day so the Moderator can be sensitive to the needs of the group. For example, if most of the people are sad, one would engage the group differently if everyone was joyful. The Moderator has to make sure to pay attention to the dynamics and energy of the group.

The Moderator praying at this time can help to comfort the people. The first exercise might have caused mixed emotions. This prayer should invite the Holy Spirit to be with the group as they embark upon this journey together.

Presenting:

The Introductory Reflection is to find out what people's perceptions are of God. It is easy to assume everyone has a positive perception but this is not always the case. This question defines people's image of God.

These particular passages all speak to the image of God in relationship to humanity. While the Genesis passages are standard ones people might think of, the Apocrypha passages are not as recognizable. Thus, they can cause the image-bearers to look at them with a new lens and engage the text more critically. Whether the group members accept the Apocrypha as "scripture" or not, it can still present ideas and give insight to what it might mean to be "made in the image of God."

Encourage others to read the different passages, to invite group participation. For those who are kinesthetic learners, it might help them to highlight, underline, and write on the Scripture sheet. There is room intentionally provided on the left margin if individuals would like to make notes or draw images in this area.

The Follow-up Reflection serves as a way of bringing all the ideas presented in the individual scriptures together to form a new working definition of what it means to be in the image of God.

Exploring:

This time provides a place for participants to apply the “image of God” motif into their own lives. The Follow-up Reflection can provide deeper insights to each person of the group as they move from theory to practice; from external scriptures (what other people said) to what the individual says and thinks.

The second part within this section should point to the idea that the image is not the real thing. It serves as a segue into later discussion within the EXTRA ACTIVITY.

Responding:

Whereas the Exploring section invited people verbally to apply what it means to be in the “image of God” into their lives, this section provides tactile exercises to drive the concept home.

The music creates a peaceful atmosphere. It can calm those who are feeling emotional and creates a space for people to think without being afraid of the silence.

The EXTRA ACTIVITY is a space for people to see differently. We all have things that we do not like about ourselves. This exercise invites the participant to not stop but go a step further and think of ways his or her “thorn” can bring God glory.

Closing

This section gives closure to the group work by validating and thanking people for engaging in the difficult work of “mirror work.” It also serves to reiterate the point that each person is “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

The last statement serves as a way of closing on a positive note through self-affirmation aloud.

The purpose for asking someone to do the closing praying for the group is purely to get greater participation. The more people are invited to participate, the more connected they feel. As well, it shows that it is a group effort and not just the LEADER doing everything while the people watch.

AFTER LESSON REFLECTION

I had four participants in my study. Being seminary students, they provided rich discussion, particularly around the Old Testament Scriptures. While the Apocrypha text did provide different insights, people were not familiar with this text so it took longer to engage. I see it is particularly helpful to have pre-planned insights of what these texts might offer concerning the “image of God,” in case people are stuck on these.

Whereas I intentionally made an effort to go through most of the exercises in order to get feedback, if I am to do it again, I will spend more time on particular sections. Overall, I think everyone enjoyed the lesson. It is intentionally introspective. There were obviously times when people were quieter and thoughtful, which is the intention of this lesson. One person said he would like to do this lesson with his youth group. This let me know that is something that is applicable and also something that has relevance to today.