

## Expressive Individualism

Intro.

We live in a world that is not as God intended for it to be. You remember God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a beautiful garden. A place where their needs were provided for by God and they enjoyed a relationship with God.

Question: Did Adam and Eve need revelation outside of themselves to understand who they were and how they were to live? (Yes)

Did God download into their brains everything they needed to know so it didn't matter if they had a relationship with God? (No)

Adam and Eve, before the Fall and the curse, needed outside input from God. This helped them understand who they were, who God is, what their purpose in life was, and what they were to do.

If you remember, Satan showed up and gave them an alternate way of looking at the world apart from God and as a result of Adam and Eve believing Satan's lies, the world experienced the Fall, a curse, and destruction. We now experience death, bondage, fear, shame, despair, and guilt to name a few. All because they believed a lie.

Satan knows that if he can get you to believe and reject the truth, he can wreak havoc in your life.

That's why Paul says in Col. 2:6-8

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy; which depends on the human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

One of the lies that is very popular in our culture today is called "Expressive Individualism". It is so prevalent in our culture that when I give you its definition your first response may be to think, "what's wrong with that?"

- I. Expressive Individualism defined
  - A. It is the belief that identity comes through self-expression, through discovering your most authentic desires and then being free to be one's true self.
  - B. This belief says that the goal of your life is to discover and express your unique self, no matter what others say or do to challenge you.

True happiness only comes by following your heart, expressing your true self, and fighting against anyone who might oppose you-even those in your society, your family, your past, or your church.
  - C. It is often expressed in phrases like: "follow your heart, believe in yourself, chase your dreams, you gotta be true to yourself."

- D. You are the creator of your identity. You are free, even obligated to be whomever or whatever makes you feel good, no matter what anyone else says.
- E. This ideology is very pervasive in our culture
  - 1. The movie “Frozen” teaches kids they must look within to find their true identity and purpose, even if people tell them not to, even if they are “breaking the rules,” as Elsa so proudly declares.
  - 2. These ideas are at the heart of the same sex and transgender movement. Students are told “you are allowed to think and feel whatever you need or want to feel. You don’t have to explain yourself, since your opinion is the only one that matters.”
  - 3. These ideas are also expressed in the self-esteem movement.
    - This teaches that your problem is that you don’t love yourself enough. It teaches that you are beautiful and of great worth, therefore you shouldn’t just love yourself, you should worship yourself.

As Christians, we would agree that we people are of great value and worth because we are made in God’s image. But instead of acknowledging that our worth comes from God and that we should worship Him, they would say that their worth comes from within and the reason that God loves them so much is because they are so great.

Sometimes we Christianize the ideas of expressive individualism and we make it seem like God is here to serve us and help us to become better. When we do this, sin becomes failing to reach your potential, guilt is what happens when you fail to accept yourself instead of failing to keep God’s holy standards. This makes Christianity all about us, instead of all about God.

## II. The Christian Response

### A. All truths are not equal

1. Expressive Individualism tells us to live out what is true for us and not to betray ourselves. We don’t need others permission, the worse thing we can do is not be true to ourselves.
2. But truth is not relative. All values are not equal. Just because you want it to be true, doesn’t make it true.
3. And we all know this. IF someone’s truth is to be racist and hateful, we wouldn’t tell them to follow that truth.
4. If another’s truth is to starve the poor and steal to make money, we would encourage them to stop.
5. Following personal truths is cheap, seeking revealed truth is costly. It requires hard work.
6. Truth exists and wisdom is available. But it doesn’t start with pursuing our own truths.

Prov. 16:25 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

7. Truth and wisdom start with fearing God

Prov. 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

8. When I started, I said that we were all created by God as creatures that need outside input to make sense of life. That is what I am talking about.

When we seek after God and wisdom that is not within, but outside of us, then we are on the path to true freedom. When we find the wisdom of God, it is worth more than jewels.

Prov. 3:15 "She (wisdom) is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her."

This is where truth and freedom are found.

B. The answer to finding approval and worth

1. All of us are looking for the stamp of approval that says we are okay. Because we are all broken and bruised and have all messed up, we are all longing for acceptance.

2. But our approval can't come from other people. They aren't the authors of our worth and dignity. Our identity can't be tied to their verdicts and evaluations. All it takes is one person to tell us we are worthless and we feel horrible.

3. Expressive Individualism would say, since it can't come from others, then it has to come from your own approval of yourself. "You are allowed to think and feel whatever you need or want to feel. You don't need to explain yourself, since your opinion is the only one that matters."

But what's the problem with that?

Most people are harder on themselves than even others. We readily know all our mistakes and all the ways we don't think we measure up. Trying to embrace your selfish desires doesn't work either.

4. No, we need someone outside of us, who isn't fickle or deceptive to tell us who we are. We need God. His stamp of approval is the most affirming, since it is the most accurate.

5. Paul talks about this very issue in 1 Cor. 4:3-5

a. He says he doesn't look to what others say about him. 4:3

b. He says she doesn't even look to what he thinks about himself. 4:3b

c. No, Paul says that it is God's evaluation of Him that matters 4:4-5. It is before God that one day HE will have to stand and answer. What does God say is true about him? What does God say is true about us?

6. Adam and Eve believed the lie of Satan that they didn't need God- that they could live lives independent of God- that when they ate of the forbidden fruit that they would be like God.

Expressive Individualism is an expression of same lie. But we cannot live our lives on our own. We need God.

7. The gospel says that we are more wicked, depraved, and lost than we want to believe is true. This is step #1 against expressive individualism- to look to your own heart is foolishness because it is deceitfully wicked. (Jer. 17:9)
8. That is why Christ came. He came to save us from ourselves. He lived a sinless life and died in our place, taking the punishment that our sin deserved so that we can be loved, valued, and accepted by God more than we dreamed was possible.
9. When we allow Christ and the gospel truth to be the foundation of our lives, it changes everything.
10. We learn to stop looking to ourselves to make sense of life and look to our Creator God instead.
11. Instead of thinking that meeting our sinful desires will bring meaning to life, we learn that the height of love is not selfish love but selfless love. We find happiness in relationships with others through love that counts others above ourselves.
12. We learn that God isn't here to serve us but we were created for a loving relationship with Him and we serve Him because we want to not because we have to. And even though following God is costly, it brings meaning and purpose to life, for that is what we were created for-to live our lives to the glory of God.

#### Application

- So what about you? Have you been believing the lies of expressive individualism?
1. Have you been believing that real significance is found in following your own selfish desires?
  2. Have you believed the lie that freedom comes from doing what you want to do and fighting against those who would get in your way including your parents or even God?
  3. Have you been believing that your problem is that you need to learn to love yourself more instead of learning to love God and others more?
  4. If that is you, why not acknowledge that you have been believing lies and repent- ask God and others to forgive you.
  5. Then commit to spending time with God to hear what He has to say about living the kind of life that brings true freedom and significance.

Questions for small group

1. How would you define expressive individualism?
2. Would you say that you have been believing like this? If so, in what ways?
3. What stuck out most to you from the lesson? Why?
4. What changes do you need to make?