

Understanding

Myself

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WELCOME!

A mirror reflects the way you strike a pose, how you smile, frown, or make a silly face. A mirror shows you how you look the minute before you walk out the door into the world.

But a mirror can only give you a tiny hint about who you are deep down inside. It can only give you a small clue about your dreams. Your inner self is something for you to discover day by day as you look within yourself and as you look around you. This course, *Understanding Myself*, offers the following ideas to help you reflect on your wonderful, surprising self:



IMAGINE . . .



- ◆ You are one person, but you find yourself among others who are somewhat like you and somewhat different.
- ◆ You belong to a family, whose love gives to you and asks something of you.
- ◆ You are a child of God, and you are made in God's image.
- ◆ You are called to grow as a follower of Jesus, whose love for you matches God's love for you.
- ◆ You are a good and capable person who can contribute to your world right now.
- ◆ You are a person who dreams great dreams, and you can make some of them come true.



Over three hundred years ago, an unknown person wrote down his or her ideas about what it means to be a good and whole person. The writing was found years later in Old Saint Paul's Church in Baltimore, Maryland. It is called "Desiderata," or "Things to Be Desired." The author of "Desiderata" offers wisdom you might want to consider for your own life. These insights might help you understand and love yourself, God's creation, and all God's people.

DESIDERATA



Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. . . . Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass. . . . Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune, but do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

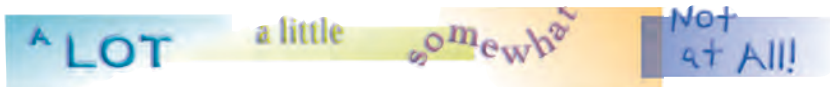
Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should, therefore, be at peace with God, whatever you conceive [God] to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Many and One

In many ways you are similar to others your age. In some ways you are different. After you read each statement below, circle whether the statement describes you a lot, a little, somewhat, or not at all. Remember, no answer is more correct than any other.

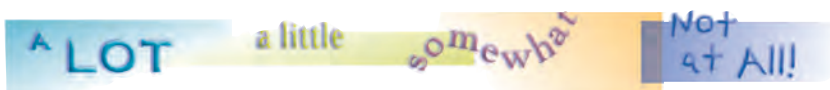
1. People my age like to make their own decisions.

This statement describes me



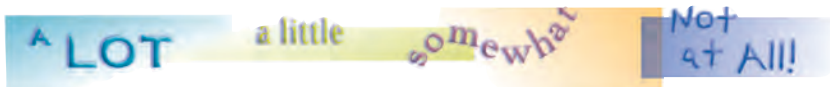
2. People my age like television, rock music, and video games.

This statement describes me

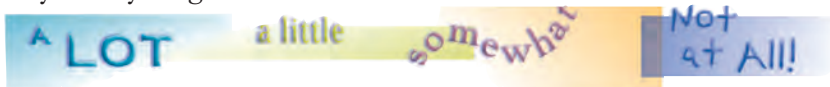


3. People my age have changed in the way they feel about the church.

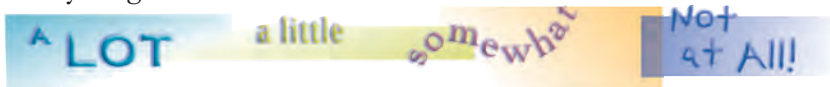
This statement describes me



4. People my age have more friends of the other sex than they did when they were younger. *This statement describes me*



5. People my age are more influenced by peers than they were when they were younger. *This statement describes me*



6. People my age value a happy family life.

This statement describes me



7. People my age have more conflicts with their parents than they did when they were younger. *This statement describes me*



People often say that this or that person has not yet found himself [or herself]. But the self is not something one finds, it is something one creates.

(Thomas Szasz)

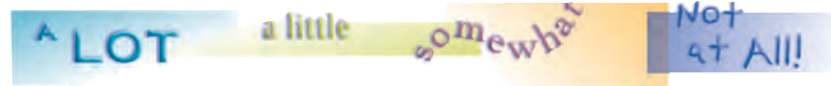
8. People my age can care about and share in other people's feelings better than they could when they were younger.

This statement describes me



9. People my age have better friend-making skills than they did when they were younger.

This statement describes me



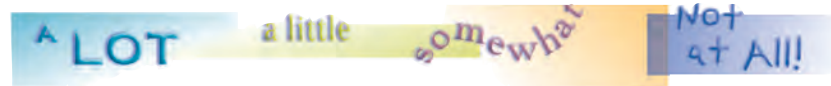
10. People my age have three or more friends.

This statement describes me



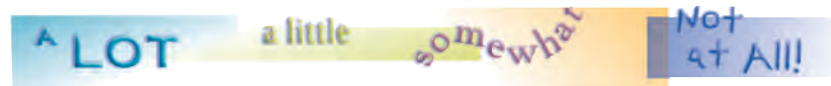
11. People my age think more about sex than they did when they were younger.

This statement describes me



12. People my age worry about their looks.

This statement describes me



13. People my age worry about how they are doing in school.

This statement describes me



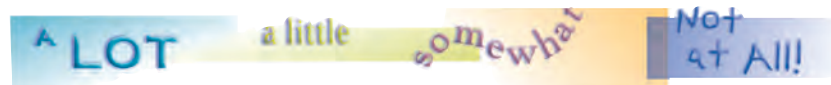
14. People my age worry about how their friends will treat them.

This statement describes me



15. People my age are less influenced by family than they were when they were younger.

This statement describes me



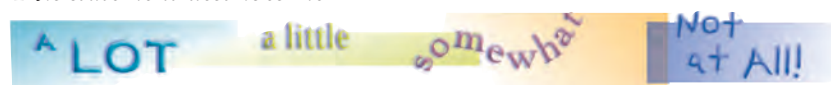
16. People my age value being able to get a job when they are older.

This statement describes me



17. People my age cheat more at school than they did when they were younger.

This statement describes me



Think about the values your family has passed on to you. You could say that you inherited these values. You could also say that you learned them from your family. Whether learned or inherited, they are all *your* values.

Create your own family-values tree. In the leaves at the end of each of these branches, write a **family value**. On the line near each leaf, write the name of the **family member** who best exemplifies that value.



My Family-Values Tree

For the

Future

The people of Israel have a tradition of studying the Scriptures and of telling stories to help one another appreciate and understand the ways of God. Here is one of those stories:

When the people of Israel were called to receive the Torah from the Lord God, the Holy One, they stood at prayerful attention.



Finally, God said: "I am giving you my Torah. But you must first bring forth good guarantors who will guard it forever."

The people of Israel said: "O Holy One, we give you our ancestors who are great in age and deep in faith. They will guarantee that the Torah will be forever valued by us and honored among us."

But the Lord God responded, "No, the ancestors are not acceptable to me."

The people of Israel were startled and puzzled, but they tried again. They said: "We offer you our prophets. They will be loyal guarantors of your gift of the Torah."

Again the Lord God responded, "The prophets are unacceptable to me."

And again the people of Israel were startled. There followed a long silence. They looked at one another. They looked at their children, and suddenly they all understood. With one voice they said: "Behold, our children. They are our guarantors."

And the Lord God said, "Yes, they are acceptable to me. For their sake I give you the gift of Torah."

And so it is for the sake of the new, young generation that the Lord gave the Torah to the people. And the people sought to remain faithful to God's covenant. And so they continue. And so they continue.



A New Generation

The people of Israel learned that the ancestors and prophets had been faithful in the past, but God looked to the future generations to guarantee that the Torah would be kept and honored. The same is true of families. Older members have carried family values. Young family members are the new generation who are called to keep the family values alive.

Think about a time when you proudly stood up for one of your family's values.
In this space write about that time:

*O God, make the door of this house wide enough
to receive all who need human love and fellowship,
narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife.*

*Make its threshold smooth enough to be no
stumbling block to children, nor to straying feet,
but rugged and strong enough
to turn back the oppressor's power.*

*God, make the door of this house
the gateway to Thine eternal Kingdom.*

(Adapted from an
inscription on the door of
Saint Stephen's in London)





God and My self



Every relationship includes at least two parties. When you think about your relationship with another person or group, matching words come to mind. For example, *son* or *daughter* matches up with *parent*; *coach* matches up with *players* or *team*.

If asked to describe your relationship with God, various images of both yourself and God may come to mind. What is God like for you? How do you picture God? Who is the God you relate to when you pray? And what do your answers to such questions say about *you*?

The Old and New Testaments offer numerous images, or pictures, of God. Read each passage below, and on the first line, write down a word or two that describes the picture of God found in the passage. On the second line, write down what that image of God suggests about the believer. To help you understand the activity, the first one has been done for you.



a

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine. . . .
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, Your Savior.

(Isaiah 43:1,3 NRSV)

a In this passage God is pictured as
Redeemer, Lord, Holy One, and Savior.

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as
people who are saved or redeemed.

c

The Lord created the heavens; our God did this.
The Lord created and shaped the earth
and made it firm and lasting.
The Lord did not create a lonely wasteland.
The Lord made a place for people to live.

(Adapted from
Isaiah 45:18)

b

In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

b

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
say: "My Refuge and my Strength,
my God in whom I trust."
. . . .
. . . . Under God's wings you shall find refuge;
God's faithfulness is a guard and a shield.

(Psalm 91:1-4)

d The Lord says, "How can a mother forget her own baby and not love the infant she gave birth to?"
"And even if a mother would forget her child, I will never forget you."
"Jerusalem, I cannot ever forget you. Already I have written your name on the palms of my hands."

(Adapted from Isaiah 49:15-16)



d In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

f You brought me safely through birth
and placed me at my mother's breast.
You kept me safe
when I was a baby.
Since the day of my birth,
I have depended on you.

(Adapted from Psalm 22:9-10)

f In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as



e Just as an eagle teaches her young eaglets to fly
by catching them safely on her widespread wings,
Just so the Lord God keeps Israel from falling.
The Lord God alone is leader of the people.

(Adapted from Deuteronomy 32:11-12)

e In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

g Let the rivers clap their hands
and the mountains ring out their joy
at the presence of the Just Judge who comes,
who comes to rule the earth.
Yahweh will rule the world with justice
and the peoples with fairness.

(Psalm 98:8-9)

g In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as



h Yahweh, you are my shepherd;
I shall not want.
In verdant pastures you give me repose.
Beside restful waters you lead me;
you refresh my soul.
You guide me in right paths
for your name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil;
for you are at my side.

(Psalm 23:1-4)

h In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

i I love you, God, my strength.
You are my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God, my protector in whom I take refuge, my shield,
and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

(Psalm 18:1-2)

i In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

j Jesus rejoiced in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he prayed: "Father and Lord of heaven and earth, you have shown those who are open and simple all that remains hidden to the so-called wise ones. Yes, Father, this is your will and way. All has been handed over to me by my Father."

j In this passage God is pictured as

People who say this prayer might picture themselves as

(Adapted from Luke 10:21-22)

For me the picture or image of God that is most helpful is

When I think of God in this way, I picture myself as a