



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

## SELF-ACTUALIZATION (& MANIFESTING)

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*Every day our children are compelled by a host of cultural influences to look within themselves to find true and authentic identity and purpose. They witness the constant celebration of others who seem to be discovering happiness and freedom through their own self-expression. Self-actualization is among the chief virtues, and heavily guarded by our culture's own code of ethics. How can parents engage their teenage children concerning this, being careful to expose the crafty lies of our enemy and point them to the beautiful truth of God's Word?*

### What is Happening?

- Our culture has become hyper-focused on self. Young people are increasingly inundated with exhortations to “follow your heart” and to “live your truth.” As our world has increasingly come to view truth as a relative concept, that natural progression culminates in an inward search for meaning and truth within each individual person, often measured by feeling, intuition, and experience.
- The cumulative vision of “the good life” has become less a collective vision that encompasses all people and more about the self-exploration of the individual within. As each person discovers who they really are they then become capable of pursuing their own vision of happiness and fulfillment by aligning their outward expression to what they discover inwardly. This is a process known as self-actualization.
- Although it may seem like a relatively new idea, self-actualization is not a new concept. The terminology itself comes from Abraham Maslow, who defined it as “the desire to become more and more of what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.” According to Maslow, the achievement of self-actualization results in “profound happiness, serenity, and richness of the inner-life.”
- Because truth ought to be respected as equally validated per each individual's own self-interpretation, any attempt to hinder, discourage, criticize, or objectively evaluate any individual's subjective pursuit of self-actualization is considered to be “evil,” per our cultural ethical framework.
- There is a relatively new push by cultural influencers for young people to adopt the practice of “manifesting” as a key aspect to striving for self-actualization. “To put it simply,” as summarized by *ELLE* Magazine, “manifesting aims to put the individual in the driver's seat of their own life and makes them responsible for the positive and negative effects in their lives” (O'Malley, 2023).<sup>1</sup>



WORLD



<sup>1</sup>O'Malley, K. (2023 June 20). How to Manifest: A Guide to Willing Your Goals into Existence in 2023. *ELLE*. <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/a38802302/how-to-manifest/>



WORD



## What Does God's Word Say?

**As created beings we must look to our Creator alone for right understanding of identity, truth, and meaning.** (Genesis 1:27ff) If God is the One who created us, then any identity or purpose that we may think we find outside of him is vanity. He alone, as Creator, sets forth the intended purpose of the design for what he has created.

**We must understand the true state of our hearts and the reality of our flesh in light of the devastating reality of sin and the fall.** (Ephesians 2:1-2; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:11-12; Judges 21:25; Genesis 6:8) Every one of us have been born into a state of spiritual death. In this state we are rebellious enemies of God and his creative purposes. That rebellion turns us into ourselves, believing that we ought to find life through self-determination as the rightful authorities over our own individual identities, purposes, and outcomes. But the Bible clearly teaches that our hearts are desperately sick with sin, and therefore deceitful above all things, and that the wages of sin is death. Throughout the story the Bible reveals, every time humanity is presented as choosing its own way or charting its own course, the results are only devastatingly tragic.

**Jesus is clear that the path that leads to life is not through actualizing self, but by denying self.** (Luke 9:23; John 10:10; Matthew 10:39) Jesus came to set sinful humanity free from its bondage to sin and its resulting wage. As the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life so that his sheep would be rescued from the clutches of the one who steals, kills, and destroys, so that they might have the abundant life that can only be experienced in right relationship with its source, the Creator of life. The consistent witness of Jesus affirms that he himself is the exclusive Way, Truth, and Life, and that the only way to follow him as such is to deny self.

**There is only one sufficient measure for truth, and it is found outside of us, not within us.** (Colossians 2:2-4, 6-8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Scriptures do not present Jesus as a source, but *the* source of *all* wisdom and knowledge. We must be aware of the great danger of being taken captive by any form of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, etc. that does not measure up to him as the eternal Word of God.

**God alone is omniscient, omnipotent, and therefore, sovereign.** (Psalm 115:3; Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 3:5-7) God is all-knowing and all-powerful to do all that he wills to do. In contrast, we are finite, enormously limited in our knowledge and understanding, and virtually powerless over life and the course of history.



WALK

## Conversation Starters and Questions:

Parents, we are all heavily influenced by our culture to look within ourselves to find answers for life's biggest questions. One of the most celebrated virtues in our culture is the stubborn determination to be true to one's self and not allow anything other than the heart to guide one's life. The collective vision of the good life, or ideal life, is the actualization of what each person finds when they turn inward and look to the heart for insights into identity and purpose. As postmodernism has destroyed the idea that we all share a collective story, every person is to be celebrated as they discover their own narrative and mold themselves to whatever truth their desires and emotions reveal. Because of this, we are in constant need of calibration to the truth when it comes to our hearts and minds. Here are some questions that parents can use with their children to that end:

- Do you agree that our culture influences us toward embracing self-actualization? In what ways do you see/feel that in your own experience?
- How have you heard this message in our culture (media, advertisements, friends, etc.)?
- Have you heard of manifesting? If yes, then where and by whom? Do you believe that it is a valid idea? Why or why not?
- Why does it feel so natural for us to want to look within ourselves in order to determine identity and/or purpose for our lives?
- How can we connect our answers from the above question to what Jesus means when he calls us to deny self? Why is it difficult to do that?
- Is it possible to follow our hearts and follow Jesus at the same time? Why or why not?
- In light of this conversation, why is it important to practice a pattern of repentance? Why might it be easier for us to drift in the direction of self-actualization if we fail to walk in repentance?
- Why is accountability of other Christian brothers/sisters important for helping us to not drift in this direction? What might be a first step in making sure we have that kind of accountability in our lives?
- When thinking about the danger of self-actualization, why is it important for us to abide daily in God's Word?
- **Homework:** Over the next week, both parents and teens make a commitment to intentionally watch and listen for ways that cultural influences promote self-actualization. Keep a running list of examples and set a time to debrief together and compare notes. Finish that discussion by talking about how to be more aware of how what we consume affects our minds and hearts.

*"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"*

*(Matthew 16:24)*



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