

- Speaker 1: [00:17](#) Welcome to this episode of the St Andrews Enfield Podcast, with me Steve Griffiths. And today we're going to be thinking about one of the hardest topics of all and actually one of the most difficult of all spiritual disciplines, which is to develop the ability to love ourselves. Um, we can all claim some success, I suppose, in loving other people, but to actually love ourselves for who we are, for what we are, can be extremely difficult for many of us. I know it is for me, to be absolutely honest, and to help us think about this issue today we're going to be using a very famous passage from the Bible from John Chapter Eight verses 12 to 20, where Jesus is referred to as the light of the world. Now, it might not seem like the most obvious passage to look at when thinking about loving ourselves, but I hope that as we work through this podcast we'll get some real insights that will be helpful for us as we try to develop this spiritual discipline in our own lives.
- Speaker 1: [01:38](#) The truth is that there are so many contradictions within ourselves. It seems to me that we are constantly seeking to find out who we are as we exist in a sort of middle ground between the spirit and the flesh and we know what we should be but we seem somehow unable to fulfill that. We know what we should do, but so often we find ourselves taking another path. And Paul speaks about this tension of contradictions in his letter to the Romans in chapter seven where he writes this, he says, "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want. I see in my body a law at war with the law of my mind". And that it seems to me is the very heart of our contradictions. This battle between the body and the mind. Uh, we know what we should be, but more often than not, we pursue another way of living, another way of behaving.
- Speaker 1: [02:47](#) And of course we very often then beat ourselves up about our weaknesses and our frailties. And that does seem to me to be the experience of so many people of church as well, doesn't it? Too many people know that the church is supposed to be a place of grace, but in reality, it too often becomes a place where we are made to feel even worse about ourselves, uh, perhaps even learn, sadly to hate ourselves. I heard that again recently when someone mentioned a friend who doesn't come to church because they said they already feel bad enough about themselves and they don't need the church to make them feel any worse. And it seems to me that that is a, a damning indictment of what is supposed to be a community of grace. Now, of course, the Christian Gospel calls us to be realistic about ourselves and we don't sit lightly to our weaknesses.

- Speaker 1: [03:48](#) We don't sit lightly to our failings, but at the heart of the Christian Gospel is the message that each one of you is very beautiful and I am very beautiful and God loves each one of us for who we are. He doesn't withhold his love until all our contradictions are reconciled and how much better it would be if we could love ourselves as God loves us. Because it's certainly my own personal experience, and perhaps for some of you as well, that I withhold loving myself because I hate my contradictions and therefore I don't feel worthy of love. And then worst of all, I project my sense of self loathing onto God and I assume that he loathes me too because of my contradictions. It is for me and perhaps it is for some of you as well, a real battle to feel truly loved by God. Not because I don't believe that God loves me, but because I project my own negative emotions onto him.
- Speaker 1: [05:08](#) If I see myself in one particular way, then I think that he must see me like that as well. But the truth of course is so different. It is so, so different. And the journey that we make through life is in no small part a journey out of the darkness of self criticism and into the light of knowing that we are acceptable to God. And in a sense that's what brings us to this story from John's Gospel about Jesus' self declaration as the light of the world. It's a very well known saying it's possibly one of the most well known sayings of Jesus in the whole Bible, but we don't often think about the context of it, so we're going to start this podcast today by doing just that.
- Speaker 1: [06:18](#) Well, it's not immediately obvious where Jesus was when this dialogue happened because the passage that immediately precedes it, John Chapter eight verses one to eight, actually wasn't in the original manuscripts of the Bible and it seems to have been somewhat randomly plonked in there and it's a shame really because that does break up a longer conversation that runs through the whole of John Chapter Seven and John Chapter Eight. So if we bear in mind that that is sort of one conversation going on across the two chapters, then we can locate this conversation to the temple in Jerusalem and if it was taking place there, then it wasn't any ordinary day either because Jesus we're told was visiting the temple for the Feast of Tabernacles. Now, this was a major feast of celebration that lasted for seven days and it was a really noisy festival. It was seven days of music and dancing and eating and singing, so don't have the idea that Jesus is whispering this, 'I am' saying in serious hushed tones in the quiet of an upper room somewhere.
- Speaker 1: [07:41](#) He was probably in the Court of the Women in the temple, in the midst of the celebrations, and he probably had to shout

above all the noise to be heard. Uh, on the first day of the festival, late in the evening, everybody descended on the court of the women where huge golden lamps were hanging. And um, these lamps were so huge that the wicks to burn them were made from the old trousers of the priests of the temple. We're talking big lamps here, shedding a lot of light. And as the cymbals crashed and the Psalms were sung and the dancing continued, the lamps were lit. And it said in the historical documents that the whole temple and beyond was lit up by the light of the lamps. So here is Jesus sitting in the blazing light, surrounded by literally hundreds of partying, people a cacophany of noise, the smell of oil, dancing, shouting and laughing all around him, and in the midst of all this human activity, Jesus goes over to the religious leaders and he shouts in their ear in the same way that you have to shout to be heard at a party.

- Speaker 1: [09:12](#) And he shouts at them and he says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And the religious leaders undoubtedly think to themselves, "this crazy Galilean carpenter is at it again. Doesn't he have any respect for the festival? Is he just completely delusional?" But no, Jesus was deadly serious. "I am the light of the world.
- Speaker 2: [09:52](#) He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". And the metaphor of light was deeply
- Speaker 1: [10:11](#) embedded in the Jewish spiritual tradition and not just through the Feast of Tabernacles. Now, I'm not going to bore you by going through all the references in the Old Testament to the idea of God being the one who shines light into the lives of believers, but there are two particular verses that are of specific importance for us today and the first is Exodus chapter 13 verses 21 and 22. Now, this is from the story of the exodus from Egypt. As the people of Israel were journeying out of captivity and slavery and heading into the Promised Land and as we know only too well ourselves, the journey from spiritual captivity into freedom in God is not one that we can make ourselves without the guidance of God himself. And so we read in Exodus chapter 13 that the Lord went before them by day and a pillar of cloud to lead them along that way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night.
- Speaker 1: [11:23](#) And here is a beautiful metaphor of God leading us as we journey through life. As the people of God wrestled with their own contradictions, being the chosen people of God yet

experiencing the bitterness of captivity, God by His light will lead them into a new and a better future. The light of God leading us gives us hope for this life as we struggle with our contradictions. But there's another verse of particular importance as well, which is from Zechariah chapter 14 verse seven, and here the prophet describes what it'll be like on the Day of the Lord when all things are drawn to him. And in beautifully poetic language, we read this: "And there shall be continuous day, not day and night, for at evening time there shall be light". And again, this is a beautiful metaphor describing the reality that God's light will never be put out of our lives. His guiding care is an eternal reality, just as much as a temporal reality in the here and now. And in eternity, the light of God shines so powerfully in us that there all our contradictions will finally be resolved.

Speaker 1: [13:12](#)

Well the Pharisees who were listening to Jesus just didn't get the point of what he was saying and, and they challenge him on his claim. In verse 13, they say to him, "You are bearing witness to yourself. Your testimony is not true." And here they're referring to the law of Moses where two witnesses were required to make any claim, have a legitimate legal base. Uh, but Jesus replies with such a beautiful phrase that I want us to hang onto in this podcast. In the midst of all the struggles that we have with our own contradictions, Jesus says this, he says, "You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one."

Speaker 1: [14:04](#)

Isn't that so beautiful? "You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one." The Pharisees had heard the words of Jesus and they looked at this Galilean carpenter, who it seemed to them, had developed some sort of Messiah complex and they judged what they saw. They looked at all the contradictions that stood before them. A carpenter come religious teacher, a man building a spiritual family yet himself of uncertain birth, a gentle and kind man, but one who wasn't afraid to challenge politicians and religious leaders. They looked at Jesus Christ and they saw a bundle of contradictions and they judged him. They judged what they saw, they judged him according to the flesh. And I think that we so quickly fall into that pharisaical position when we look at our own lives and we consider our own contradictions. We know that there is within us the desire to be holy, but we are only too aware of the weakness of the flesh. We know that we should love a certain person, but we can't help resenting them instead and within most of us, there is a longing to be able to forgive that person who hurt us so badly in the past, and yet we are fully aware that we just can't seem to let go of the anger, the hurt, or even the hate.

- Speaker 1: [16:01](#) And we consider our own contradictions and we judge ourselves according to the flesh. We take on that pharisaical position against ourselves and we come to one conclusion, which is, "I am false". In the light of all my contradictions, I judge myself and I say, "I am a bad person. I'm a fraud. I'm a fake as a human being and I am a fake Christian." But that that is the way of the Pharisees who judged by the flesh and judge by the contradictions. That is not the way of Christ. Jesus looks at the Pharisees and he simply says to them, "You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one." Christ sees their contradictions and he doesn't judge. Christ sees his own contradictions and he doesn't judge. Christ sees my contradictions. He sees your contradictions and he does not judge. He knows you for who you are, and he sees you as beautiful and he loves you so much. He does not judge. He knows that for every one of your weaknesses, you have a strength and a desire to succeed. He knows that for every wrong thing you've done, you have a spirit of regret. And he knows that for all the guilt that you carry,
- Speaker 1: [18:31](#) for the burden of self-loathing, you have a really deep need for peace and for healing.
- Speaker 2: [18:44](#) Jesus knows you and he does not judge. So rather than carrying in our being
- Speaker 1: [19:00](#) the judgemental nature of the Pharisees through which we give ourselves such a hard time, perhaps we need to try to chill out a bit and to give ourselves a break and to develop more of the grace and compassion of Jesus towards ourselves. He doesn't judge us according to the flesh, so let's not judge ourselves according to the flesh. It's often easier, isn't it, For us to have compassion on others than it is to have compassion on ourselves. But Jesus, the light of the world,
- Speaker 1: [19:51](#) meets us with compassion and grace, even when we feel lost in our own contradictions and he sees you as beautiful and he does not judge. So if we want to mirror Christ in our own lives, we could do a lot worse than starting by not judging ourselves, by trying to love ourselves a little bit more, by giving ourselves a bit of a break, and not condemning ourselves for our failings. The truth is that all of us are on a journey. I'm on a journey. You're on a journey. We're on a journey into the light of the world. We are somewhere between the exodus from captivity and the eternal light of the Day of the Lord, and so because we're on this journey, we haven't yet arrived. Contradiction and tension are part of the sign of the times in which we live and since we have not yet reached the eternal light of the Day of the

Lord, it's not surprising that on occasion we move out of the light. Now that's not to somehow excuse our contradictions or to give ourselves permission to feed them, but only to say that when we find ourselves lost in these contradictions, we should recognize them for what they are.

- Speaker 1: [21:37](#) They are part and parcel of the journey towards the light. And don't let us judge ourselves or condemn ourselves because even Jesus doesn't do that. And as we journey into God's future together, we are guided by the light of the world who doesn't judge but loves us with an everlasting love. Soon enough, the Day the Lord will come and all of our contradictions will be resolved into God. But until then, we live with the tensions we experience between body and mind and to the best of our frail ability, we fix our eyes on the light of the world and we follow where he leads. Of course we're going to stumble, of course we are going to fall, but the light of the world has strong arms and he will pick us up and he will take us forward at the pace we can handle. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Uh, my hope and prayer for you is that as each day passes, you will grow into the knowledge of that truth, that you are a beautiful person.
- Speaker 1: [23:25](#) You are loved by God. You are not judged by God as a result of your contradictions and failings. You are a child of the light, not a child of the darkness.
- Speaker 2: [23:47](#) And as we move deeper into that kind of self awareness, our lives become transformed, and then we are more able to live out the truth of who we are rather than live some sort of semi existence under the dominion of a lie. So thank you for listening to this podcast today. I hope that it has given you some encouragement in your spiritual journey into the light of the world.
- Speaker 2: [24:27](#) If you've got any questions or any comments that have arisen from it, please feel free to email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Please check out the church website, standrewsenfield.com and the Facebook page St Andrew's Enfield. Please do subscribe to this podcast series and please do tell other people about it too, because we need to grow together as a community of people who love one another and love ourselves and know what it is to be loved by God. So thanks for taking the time to be with me today. Really appreciate it, and I hope that you have a blessed and a peaceful rest of the day. Bye.