

Week Two

The Value of Self-awareness | Jeremiah 17:1-13; Mark 7:14-23; Matthew 7:1-5

Are you aware of your nervous system? The nervous system is a communication system and allows your brain to receive information from your senses (like sight, smells or sounds) and then send signals to the rest of your body to respond. This happens very quickly, often faster than your conscious thoughts. And in the midst of all this, your nervous system is also the source of your feelings.

Over time, your nervous system can play a major role in shaping the very person you are. It informs the things that you are scared of and the patterns you use to confront danger. It also causes adrenaline to activate when you are excited.

Learning to listen to our nervous system is the beginning of greater self-control, because the more we listen, the more the unconscious becomes conscious. The more we are aware of why we do what we don't want to do. And in Scripture, the Bible often refers to the importance of self-control because it aids us in a sometimes conflicting relationship to our hearts.

You see, our nervous system is designed to protect us, but it can at times unintentionally reinforce destructive habits, false fears, or unhealthy attachments to people. These behaviours reinforce false narratives that you may unconsciously believe about yourself, others, or the world around you. That is why the heart may be deceitful at times, or what feels true conflicts with what we know to be true.

By developing greater awareness and understanding of our minds and hearts, we gain the opportunity to rewire harmful impulses and beliefs. This can take time, but with patience you can learn to change unhealthy habits, overcome limiting fears, and cultivate more nourishing connections. Self-awareness can truly be the starting place towards profound transformation.

Opening Questions

- 1 / When was the last time you changed your opinion/belief about something major?
What was it about and how did you come to a different conclusion?
- 2 / Do you think the quote, "Let your heart guide you...it whispers so listen closely." by Walt Disney is good advice? If so, why?
If not, why not?

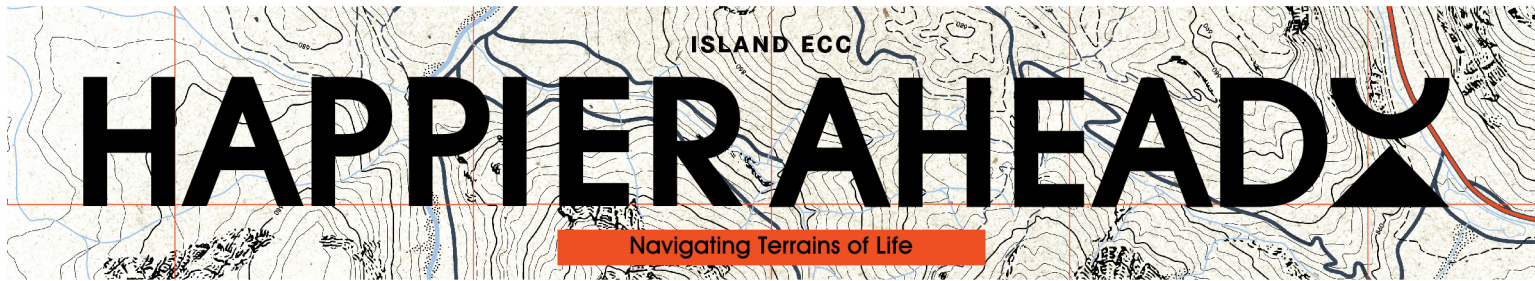
Bible Study & Questions

Read Jeremiah 17:1-13, Mark 7:14-23, and Matthew 7:1-5, and discuss the following questions:

Jeremiah 17:1-13 was written to the people of Judah in the late 7th century BCE, highlighting their spiritual and moral decline due to idolatry, the impending judgement of the Babylonian conquest, and their reliance on human strength instead of faith in God.

- 1 / Based on Jeremiah 17:1-4, what was the spiritual condition of the people of Judah and how was it evident in their actions?
Note: The hearts of the people of Judah were ingrained in sin. They engaged in idolatrous practices without questioning their origins. This blind loyalty to pagan worship led to their punishment, as God would abandon them to their enemies and exile them from the land He had given them.

- 2 / Jeremiah 17:5-13 contrasts those who trust in man and their own hearts with those who trust in the Lord.
What does this passage tell us about the human heart?
Note: The heart is deceitful above all things (v.9). This passage highlights the need for self-awareness regarding the true condition of our hearts and encourages reliance on God for guidance and strength.



3/ Do you think the people of Judah were aware of the sinfulness of their hearts? Why or why not? In what specific areas are you prone to trust in your own heart more than trusting in God?

4/ How is the description of the human heart in Jeremiah 17:1-13 consistent with what Jesus says about the heart in Mark 7:14-23? How does this condition manifest differently according to these passages?

Note: Jeremiah 17:1-13 and Jesus' teachings in Mark 7:14-23 both highlight the deceitful and corrupt nature of the human heart due to sin. In Jeremiah, this condition is evident through pagan rituals and self-reliance, which damaged the people's relationship with God. In Mark, it manifests as sinful actions and behaviors that impact one's thoughts and relationships with themselves and others.

5/ In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus commands us not to judge others. Considering Jeremiah 17:9-13 and Matthew 7:1-5, why did Jesus warn against judging one another? Why is having self-awareness important in our judgement of others?

Note: Jesus emphasised that our judgments may stem from pride or hypocrisy and are often influenced by our own biases and the deceitfulness of our hearts. Only God knows the true intentions and complexities of each person. This warning encourages humility and reminds us to leave room for God to judge at the appointed time.

6/ Why is having self-awareness and acknowledging the deceitfulness of our hearts important to foster more compassionate relationships in our communities?

7/ What is one action that you can take today to cultivate greater self-awareness in your own life to improve your relationship with God and others?

Prayer Activity

Our study today emphasizes that our hearts are deceitful, urging us to recognize our weaknesses and motives before judging others. This awareness helps us lead a life fully dependent on God and helps foster a compassionate, grace-filled community, rather than one marked by shame.

When we reflect on our shortcomings and recognize the deceitfulness of our hearts, it can be disheartening. However, God offers a way to restore our relationship with Him and overcome this guilt through confession.

The Greek word for "confession," *homologeō*, means to agree with God, essentially saying, "You are right, God; I was wrong." Confession expresses our desire for forgiveness and repentance, restoring our connection with God. Engaging in confession prayers deepens our love for Jesus and empowers us to break free from old patterns of sin.

• **Group idea:** Break into smaller groups of 2 or 3. Have each person share about how they unfairly judged someone this week. Then pray a prayer of confession together.

Helpful Tips

- The next time you get the urge to judge others, use it as a cue to go to God with a humble and contrite heart.
- Acknowledge these instincts, confess them to God, and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal the reasons behind your judgements.
- Humbly admit that you may be wrong and that your motivations for judging others might be flawed; apologise to God for these weaknesses.
- Declare God's character to remind you of His grace and mercy. Ask God to help you relinquish judgement and allow Him to be the judge.
- Recall God's promises and His assurance of forgiveness.