



“I” BEFORE “WE”

Using your gifts from God

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GENERALLY, FOCUSING ON “I” — *I want, I need, I deserve* — is a selfish attitude that is best eliminated from your personality as much as possible. But in this article, “I” means your truest self. *That* “I” is your essence that was created by God and will never die. *That* “I” needs attentive care and development. You have both the freedom and the responsibility to shape your “I.”

You are the *imago Dei*, the *image of God*! God created you in love, giving you the ability to think and the free will to choose. Your task on earth is to grow into the image that God has of you, to become your best self. Each time you make loving choices, you reveal more of God to the world.

Adolescence is a time to discover and to develop the “I.” As a young child it was normal to think that the world revolved around you, or to work from an attitude of “me, myself, and I” or “What’s in it for me?” Those attitudes are typical for children, but they are immature attitudes for middle-school students.

Social approval becomes the goal in middle school. Most teens are motivated by wanting to live up to the expectations of people that they know and care about, especially their peers.

This can be a powerful positive motivator if it leads to identifying your strengths and weaknesses so you can “put your best foot forward,” building relational skills, and developing the ability to name, claim, and tame your emotions. However, this same attitude can be a negative influence if it leads you to care more about pleasing the crowd or another person than developing your *imago Dei*.

Though the desire to be loved and liked, to be

Student Questions

- Why do you think people care more about pleasing the crowd or pleasing themselves? Have you ever done this before? If so, why?
- How might teens develop their “I” while also blending into the “we” with peers?
- “What you are is God’s gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God.” How can you use your gifts from God to strengthen your “I”?

included, and to be popular and respected is natural, do not pursue this desire at the expense of your truest self. Be yourself. Think for yourself. Love your true self and others. Use God’s gifts according to God’s plan. When you do, goodness follows.

Use the middle-school years to develop your independent “I” while blending into the “we” with peers. Keep in mind: “What you are is God’s gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God.” **T**

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