

OTHERS FIRST
Phil. 2:1-8

Christmas is the season of giving. We wrap presents, throw special parties, sing carols and share with those less fortunate than ourselves. In all the hustle and bustle and shopping and pretty sights of the holidays, it's fun to think about what we can do for others.

But what about when the lights come down and the wreaths get packed up in boxes? Our thoughts begin to turn inward once again as the daily grind of the new year becomes a reality. Somehow it's much harder to maintain an outward focus and put the needs of someone else ahead our own.

The truth is we're all by nature selfish. Have you ever seen two preschool children fighting over the same toy? No one had to teach those kids how to demand their own way; they were born with an innate desire to take care of self above all else.

In case you don't think this is true, look at what goes on in the overland terminal at Ecoland especially around the holidays. Many travelers are in too much of a hurry to worry about watching where they walk. People push, shove, climb the windows and break in line just to be the first ones on the plane.

As bad as this physical assertion of oneself, the place where selfishness does the worst damage is in relationship. When self-oriented people get together, trouble is on the way in the form of "my way" versus "your way."

If you want to build meaningful, positive relationship with those around you, you have to learn to deal with basic selfishness, however disguised or sugar coated with justification. What is the solution? How should you handle "me first" feelings when they come?

An important first step is developing ~~is-developing~~ a new mindset. Philippians 2:3 says: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others."

Notice that in writing to the believers at Philippi, who were in a states of disagreement, Paul tells them first how not to behave. In the original Greek, the word SELFISH AMBITION refer to any kind of hidden agenda. Doing the right thing with the wrong motivation is a subtle form of selfishness. VAIN CONCEIT is the belief that you deserve good things, like justice, fairness, or respect. This thinking says: when someone violates my rights, he owes me something to make up for it, and therefore I have the right to respond to him anyway I want in return.

Admit it; you've caught yourself thinking a thought like this before. Someone whips into parking place that you waited

patiently. A co-worker takes your project idea and puts his name on it. Your neighbor blows his leaves into your yard every weekend. Suddenly it's very hard to keep from demanding your fair treatment.

The cure for this destructive self-focus is an attitude of humility, or considering others better than yourself. "Now wait a minute," you might say, "I can admit that someone is better at something than I am, but just plain better? " What does the Bible say about this?

Yes, it is true that before the Lord everyone is equal. You are not better than others and they are not better than you in the sense of your standing with God. But when it comes to the way you deal with others, your heart's attitude determines how you act.

The word CONSIDER is actually an accounting term in the Greek which means "to place a value on." In other words, you are to consciously determine that the other person is valuable. It's not a matter of what he is actually worth; it's a matter of consideration. You see him as a worthy, special person, not on the basis of personal merit, but as a result of Christ's love for each of us. In every encounter, you are to count the other person as deserving of your utmost respect and love.

Look at the next verses in this passage: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Out of the deepest love and desire for fellowship with us, Jesus gave up everything to come to earth and live as a human being. He laid aside his rights to respect, worship, adoration, and obedience. He never demanded that anyone love Him in return the way that anyone He deserves. His very presence with us is a living example of what it means to give up rights for relationship.

The root cause of our selfishness is really pride. We don't want to give up certain privileges and perks because such yielding is often humbling. So what does it mean to have an attitude of Humility? It does not mean being a pushover or giving in to everyone else's wishes all of the time. You are unique as an individual in Christ with ideas and desires of your own. What it does mean is accepting yourself as God made and concentrating on using your gifts to benefit others.

Remember, your love for God is what motivates you to give. People may not reward you or thank you for your actions, but when Christ is your reason for loving, then you receive an ever greater blessing.

Our job as a believer is to communicate to others how special

they are, in the Lord's eyes and in yours, that sounds like a big task, and it is, but there are practical ways to demonstrate genuine interest in those around us.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK:

Letting someone else talk about personal concerns says that you care about what is happening in his or her life. Make it your goal to learn as much as you can about person. As you listen, avoid thinking about what you will say in response so your full attention is on the speaker, and be sure to maintain good eye contact during the whole conversation.

REMEMBER WHAT YOU HEAR:

You know how much it hurts when you tell someone about an event or problem in your life and then he does not remember the next time you see him. If you have trouble keeping details straight, get a little notebook and jot down key points. (Of course do this after the person has left.)

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS:

If you have made a real effort to listen and remember, this step should be no problem, ~~this step should be no problem~~. You'll discover that you're genuinely interested in getting an "update" when you see your friend. You can't wait to ask what's going on or how you can help. Even if you are not close to this person, asking specific questions tell him that he's valuable and worth talking to. (Illust. Ric Lozano's lively and friendly contact with people in all our visitations).

PRAY FOR OTHERS:

Prayer time can become a self-centered activity if you are not careful. As you pray for others' need, the Lord begins to involve your heart in their lives. He may even use you as a part of His answer, and the experience is exciting and rewarding.

BE COURTEOUS:

This tip may seem obvious, but the rules of everyday politeness are not emphasized the way they used to be. Common courtesy never goes out of style- holding a door open, letting an older person go through the door first, carrying someone's bag, saying "please" and "thank you." Good table manners are plus as well. When you do these things, you show that care about the comfort and well-being of others.

Don't worry about the impression you make. You might even be ridiculed for being unassertive. When the pressure is on to take matters into your own hands or demand what you feel you deserve, remember Jesus' words: "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"(John 16:33) These aren't the words of a spiritual weakling; this is a promise from the Lord who defends you in every situation.

CONCLUSION:

Now remember this: Focusing on those around you means much more than just avoiding selfishness; it means following Jesus' example and actively looking for ways to show love.

Selflessness is a lifestyle of putting others first. You don't have to wait for Thanksgiving and Christmas to spread His good will. YOU CAN START RIGHT NOW! MAKE IT LAST ALL YEAR! I will assure you its a GIFT WORTH GIVING. Do it, and you'll never regret giving and living it.