

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 12, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



AUTHENTIC SERVANTHOOD “A Case for Unselfishness” *Genesis 2-3, Mark 10, Philippians 2*

As strange as it may seem, your worst enemy is with you wherever you go. Even when you go to church, he/she follows. He/she has sung hymns, read the Scriptures – even bowed his/her head and prayed right along with you. Yet he/she hasn’t sat in front of you or behind you or beside you... instead, he/she has sat in your very seat! His/her name is “Self,” and “Self” can become the greatest enemy of authentic Christ-like servanthood that a believer will face. The Apostle Paul called him the “old man.” Chances are you have probably cursed and hated him often, while at other times you have sought to please, exalt, and even protect him. He/she is afflicted with a disease called “selfishness,” which demands to be satisfied and is the opposite of “selflessness”... required for a genuine servant. Let’s be honest, most of us would say and perhaps correctly “I am not a selfish person.” Yet, given the human propensity and right opportunity each one of us has the potential to act selfishly and probably will. The disease that plagues us is not incurable. However, as a doctor must study sickness in order to learn how to treat it, so we need to examine certain manifestations of selfishness before we can adequately appropriate its cure – authentic, selfless servanthood.

I. RELATIONSHIP OF ADAM AND EVE: Absence of Selfishness (Genesis 2:15-25)

In Genesis 2 we find the first picture of human life devoid of selfishness given in Scripture. There we read about the Garden of Eden – a place of unimaginable beauty and perfect innocence. In such an environment, God created a man and a woman and brought them together in an ideal marriage. The relationship they enjoyed is simply expressed in **verse 25, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”** The Hebrew word for “naked” in this context means “to be laid bare” or

“poured out completely.” Their relationship with one another was fully transparent; they were open and unguarded in every way toward each other. The Hebrew term translated “no shame” or “not ashamed” carries a reciprocal idea here which means “they were not ashamed before one another” or not “self-conscious.” Adam and Eve experienced an innocent, non-defensive relationship. Between them there were no hidden areas; all forms of resistance were lacking. Selfishness was not yet born into human life. There were selfless and other-conscious rather than selfish and self-conscious... each was completely engrossed in the other rather than in themselves... how beautiful that God created us that way... to be other-conscious rather than self-conscious. So where did “self-consciousness” come from? Hum!

3 Observations on Selflessness:

1. **God cares about our needs, there is no need for us to be selfish** – Becoming self-concerned and self-conscious can come on us when we think “no one cares,” “no one understand,” but that is simply not true according to the overwhelming record we have in God’s Word. The one who created it all and created it all by His mere spoken word does care and He sees. **1 Peter 5:7**... great verse, *“Cast all your care upon him because He cares for you.”* Every care... He really does!
2. **God provides for our needs, there is no need for us to be self-consumed** – God will provide all that we need. We don’t really have to look out for our own best interests. God already that that in mind. **Philippians 4:19** says, *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*
3. **We are free to focus others, because God cares about our needs and provides for our needs** - Being used by God to care for and provide for their needs through us and to His glory because He is taking care of and providing for us.

II. RESULTS OF SIN: Enter Selfishness (Genesis 3:1-12)

Then came sin, an event that radically affected all of human history. In direct opposition to God’s command, Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:1-6, see Gen. 2:16-17). And when they did according to **verse 7**, *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”*

3 Results of Sin in Man:

1. **Preoccupation with self** - The first result of their sin was not rebellion or hostility but a sudden preoccupation with themselves, as shown by their shame over their nakedness. Each immediately began to look out for number one... for “themselves.” **verse 7**, *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”* Put another way, they became self-centered rather than other-centered. Consequently, they tried to cover up their unclothed bodies.
2. **Pulling-away of self** – Particularly a “pulling-away of self” from God and from others. If Adam and Eve’s sudden preoccupation with self was not enough, they also tried to hide themselves from God. **Verse 8** says, *“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”* The

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very garden that was created by God for their good pleasure, they turned into a sinner's hideout! Then the all-knowing God called out to Adam *"Where are you?"* (v.9), that is *"Why are you trying to conceal yourself?"* And Adam responded in verse 10 by saying, *"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."* God's penetrating reply/question to Adam was, *"Who told you that you were naked?"* (v.11a). Until sin shattered paradise, Adam and Eve were so other-conscious that they were completely unaware of their own physical condition. But now that had changed. That leads to the third result of sin.

3. **Preservation/Protection of self** - When God confronted Adam about his newly acquired self-centeredness, Adam hurled the blame toward Eve and even the Lord Himself in verse 12, *"The man (Adam) said, 'The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.'"*

What we see in this account of the first human sin has since been reenacted in countless ways throughout human history. Sin brings with it a preoccupation with self and a withdrawal from a concern for others and from God. Self-centeredness, self-protection, and self-exaltation pervade a life characterized by sin. We all exhibit these traits because we are all sinners. But God has provided a path for change.

III. REALM OF SERVANT: Unselfishness Restored (Mark 10:35-45, Philippians 2:3-4)

(READ: Mark 10:35-45) After innumerable generations of sinners, a virgin named Mary miraculously conceived and gave birth to a unique individual – Jesus Christ. He was entirely without sin, thus, completely unselfish... selfless in fact and self-giving. He gathered around Himself twelve sinners whom He chose to personally disciple. Two of these followers, James and John, were brothers and former fishermen.

3 Contrasts Between Selfishness and Unselfishness:

1. **Selfishness will demand its own way (its own agenda)... Unselfishness restored has no agenda but serving Him** - One day James and John came to Jesus in all of their self-centeredness and made a request of Him, found in Mark 10:37, *"They (James and John) replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other are your life in your glory.'"* Jesus first told them that they did not know what they were asking (v.38a). They came with a "selfish agenda." Give us a place of prominence and authority over others. Make us look good and more important than all the others. We want success, power, prestige, prominence. Does our service ever require prominence? Yes, we want to be noticed, patted on the back, given prominence because we serve. Lord, make me important because I serve. John the Baptist said of Jesus, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* (John 3:30) (NIV *"He must become greater; I must become less."*)
2. **Selfishness will come with a faulty, skewed vision... Unselfishness restored has an accurate perspective and vision of God and who He is** – Selfishness always has a skewed vision because its motive is based on self and what will promote self. Genuine servanthood operates with no motive but His with the

What happens in a church when individuals are "agenda" driven?

What happens in a church when individuals have their eyes on themselves rather than on God?

understanding that it's all about Him. Jesus directly answered the request of James and John by saying in verse 40, *"But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."* In other words, "Guys, you aren't seeing clearly here! God owes us nothing and what He does in His Kingdom is His Sovereign business not ours. Servants serve with God in mind... the one they are serving.

3. Selfishness will create disharmony and division... Unselfishness restored creates unity and harmony – Selfishness and looking out for our own self-interest will almost always create division and disharmony... jealousy and envy follow. It has at its core the creation of such, because self wants to be exalted above others. Genuine... authentic servanthood should open the doors of service to others not close them. When the other disciples heard this dialogue between Jesus and James and John it created a divisive problem **verse 41** says they *"became indignant with James and John."*

So Jesus called the twelve disciples to come closer to Him, and he began to give them some illuminating counsel on authentic servanthood. Listen close to his instruction in **Mark 10:42-45**, *"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be first must be slave (bond servant) of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for man.'" The world system works through intimidation, abusive power, and self-centered drive. But God people are not to operate this way. They are to live the lives of servants, sacrificing themselves and their possessions for others just as Christ, the Son of God who became the son of Man, did. The Apostle summarized this timeless teaching well when he wrote in **Philippians 2:3-4**, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

SELF-LESS-NESS – that's the cure for the disease of selfishness.

And we can only begin to appropriate it through personal trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

IV. ROAD OF AUTHENTIC SERVANTHOOD: Traits of Selflessness

At least three things characterize a servant of the Lord:

3 Traits of Authentic Selfless Servanthood:

1. **Giving** – A servant unveils himself or herself rather than conceals, releases rather than keeps, and views the needs of others as opportunities to give rather than as interruptions to avoid.
2. **Forgiving** – Understanding, acceptance, and adjustment replace blame and rejection in the life of the Christian servant.
3. **Forgetting** – When true forgiveness occurs, forgetting the wrong done will naturally follow.