

Selfishness and Selflessness

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Philippians 2:4

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

As I analyze the major themes in my life philosophy, I tend to run into two major thoughts: choice and service.

Everything we do, think and say is a choice. Everything we have and our current situation is a result of the choices that we have made.

The relationship we have with others, and the reason we are here on earth, I believe is a function of service: giving to others in some regard. How that plays out is a result of what, how, and why we give.

I believe one of our primary purposes here on earth is to remember that we are a child of God – that we are spirit beings, living out a human existence. Our primary objective is to somehow dredge this up from our memories and live through that spirit, and therefore having Spirit move through us, act through us, and co-create through us in this Universe.

I see service to others as the way that the Holy Spirit uses each of us to express into this world. Collectively, then, we are fulfilling God's purpose here on earth. Individually, we make a difference: we are a piece in the mosaic of life, a cog in the wheel of Creation.

Perhaps our highest calling is to simply let God move through us in whatever way God chooses to use us.

This is selflessness – the large “I AM”. Abandoning the self, and letting God express in our actions, thoughts and words.

The opposite is selfishness - the ego, the small “I am”. This is the insistence that we as a human are more important, that our thoughts and ideas are more valuable than someone else’s.

We are asked this question in the Bible from: 1 John 3:17 --
...if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Selfishness blocks the expression of Spirit, and is exhibited in many different forms. I have identified all of these in me.

One way that selfishness manifests, is the idea that “it’s all about me”. If there is a problem, I interpret it in relationship to myself, how it will effect me. If there are whispers, they must be talking about me.

Another way selfishness is exhibited is through the statement: A person can be so heaven-oriented that they are of no earthly good. We can turn our thoughts inward in two ways: towards God and towards our selves.

I have read of people who turned their thoughts inwardly towards God so greatly, that they had little to do with what was happening around them. There was no service-oriented behavior or energy applied at all. This was not the way of Jesus, who was serving

through his speaking, miracle working, and teaching. “Do unto others” implies action, behavior, or service. It doesn’t say pray unto others, or think unto others.

When we withhold our service, our talents, and our energies – we are clouding that transmission of God through us.

When we turn our thoughts inwards towards ourselves, focusing on our own problems, and how a certain circumstance will affect us, without thought of anyone else, we short-circuit the God flow. Some people call this inward behavior being shy. I am basically a shy individual. And after looking at myself fairly objectively, the reason I am shy is because I am selfish. I struggle with the “it’s all about me” syndrome.

I am getting better, because I am making an effort to change. The only way for a person to change is to find a new source of input. Whatever you are feeding yourself, over and over, from your old sources of data, is keeping you where you are.

The Bible teaches in James 4:17: *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.* Selfishness is resisting, denying, and withholding. Sometimes we withhold our smiles, or kind words. I heard a story of a man who made a practice of taking out his daughter to breakfast occasionally, just to share time with her. They had another daughter and as she approached the age of three, he took her out for their first “date”. As they were waiting for their meal, he began to tell her how much he appreciated her. How they had prayed for another daughter, and how God had blessed them with just who they wanted. He told her how much he loved her, and then he picked up his fork to

take a bit of his meal. As he did, a little hand stretched across the table and touched his, and his daughter said, “Longer Daddy. Longer.” So he began to tell her more about how he and his wife loved the little girl and how she was growing into a wonderful little lady. As he went back to his meal, again his little daughter said, “Longer, Daddy. Longer.” They didn’t eat a lot at this meal, but his daughter received the emotional nourishment she needed.

By withholding our positive thoughts, sincere words of encouragement and appreciation, we deprive others of nourishment and we starve ourselves and gain nothing in return.

Pure, obvious selfishness cuts off communication – not only with God, but with other people. This is seen in how people converse. We all know that individual who talks incessantly without breathing. They never ask a question, and when you do say something, they are not listening because they are thinking of what they are going to say next. This is a form of selfishness. God gave us two ears and one mouth, and I suspect that He intended for us them in that proportion.

Selfishness may stem from a poor self-image, or poor etiquette, feelings of loss, or many other sources. But it is a behavior, and behavior is a choice. Once we are aware of a behavior, then we can beware of that behavior. We are aware, we can choose; we can change.

I remember a time many years back when I had to run an errand that I didn’t want to run. I was ticked off and resentful. These feeling continued, until I became aware of them. As soon as I was aware of what I was feeling, I saw them for what they were –

selfish, self-centered, allaboutme-ness. Once I was aware of those feelings and why, they softened. I started thinking about the person I was running the errand for, and how much I loved them; how fortunate I was to have them in my life and be able to serve them in this way. My feelings changed, because I chose to change them.

I focused the same energy differently and received different results. Selfishness and selflessness are the same thought energy, but focused differently. It's like faith and doubt. They are the same energy, just focused differently. We call it faith when we believe that a certain thing will happen without our knowledge or certainty of it actually going to happen. If we take that same mental energy and focus on something not happening, we call it doubt. But really, it is faith still – faith that the event will not happen to a happy conclusion.

The same principle applies to selflessness. If we refocus the negative selfish thoughts, moving them from us to another place, we move into selflessness.

Through selflessness, we abandon the ego and allow our thought to dwell on helping others. We open our hearts so that the God within can express. We become fluent in the language of God: of love, peace, joy and giving. We become the hands of God on earth, through which He works wonders. We become His feet on earth. Through our selflessness, we enter in the Kingdom of God. We can experience the peace, prosperity and joy that God promises us as His children.

But we must be wary of the ego driving us toward confusion. As Gretchen Rubin has written in her book; *The Happiness Project* -- “The belief that unhappiness is selfless and happiness is selfish is misguided. It's more selfless to act happy. It takes energy, generosity, and discipline to be unfailingly lighthearted, yet everyone takes the happy person for granted. No one is careful of his feelings or tries to keep his spirits high. He seems self-sufficient; he becomes a cushion for others. And because happiness seems unforced, that person usually gets no credit.”

We must love our self and others; that is the commandment. So, it is my prayer that we can release any temptation to hold back good for others – whether it be in words, thoughts, attitudes or actions. I pray that we allow the Christ within to show us that selfless acts are only small self-denying acts, and are behaviors that expand the large Self of us.

Let us pray....