

OTHERS FIRST:

Considering Others Before Yourself

Principle: When you make yourself nothing, you're really something.

Intro:

Monica wants God to be in control of every area of her life. She is consistent in her spiritual disciplines and is growing in her faith. One area that she knows she still needs to grow in is in being less selfish. She battles with the tendency to think of herself first and overlook the needs of others.

One day, she is standing at her locker at school and she can tell that Brandi, whose locker is next to her, has her face in her locker, crying. She looks toward Brandi and can see her smeared makeup from her tears.

Monica realizes in that moment that she has a choice. She can ask Brandi what is wrong and offer to help, or she can act like she didn't notice. While Monica is having this argument inside herself, Brandi slams her locker shut, covers her face with her books, and runs down the hall to her next class.

Monica is upset with herself - she really wanted to help Brandi - but was too focused on herself, and she knows it.

If that had been you, how would you have responded? Do you consider others before yourself?

I. The Root of Conflict (James 4:1-3)

A. When we are born, we are born with a selfish heart. We want life to revolve around us.

B. READ James 4:1-3

- 1) According to James 4, why do we have conflict with other people? (We aren't getting what we want.)
- 2) All relational conflict is because someone is not getting their own way.
- 3) Putting yourself first sets you up for all kinds of conflict with others. When this happens, we tend to blame others and the circumstances, but James says the root problem is that we aren't getting what we want.

II. God is Calling Us to a New Standard

- A. In Phil. 2:3-8, we are told to put the interests of others ahead of our own.
- B. In these verses, we see four overlapping commands:
 - 1) Don't allow ambition and conceit to drive your decisions (2:3)
 - (a) "vain conceit" is the mistaken notion that we deserve special Consideration because of something inherently special about us.
 - (b) Are all students unique and special in the eyes of God? (Yes)
 - (c) Does that uniqueness entitle them to special treatment at the Expense of others? (No)
 - 2) View others as more important than yourself (2:3b)
 - (a) Paul doesn't say some are better than others. He says we are to treat others as if they were better or more important than ourselves.
 - (b) In others words, we are to treat our parents, teachers, friends, and even our siblings as if they were actually in a league that demanded better-than-average treatment.
 - (c) Everyone close your eyes and picture someone you really admire and look up to. How would you treat them if they came to your house for dinner? If they asked you to do something for them, how would you respond? Would you treat them differently?
 - (d) That's how God wants us to treat others.
 - 3) Look out for the interests of others (2:4)
 - (a) We shouldn't be consumed with our own interests; instead we must take an interest in the interests of others.
 - (b) It's not that your interests are unimportant, but when it comes to how you treat others, we are to make others the priority.
 - (c) Instead of talking about ourselves and our needs and our accomplishments, we need to learn to focus on the needs and accomplishments of others.
 - (d) Volunteer to let your brother ride shotgun in the front seat of the car.
 - (e) When we were in Brazil, we had conflict with the guys, because they wanted to use the shower first.

4) Follow Christ's example of humility (2:5-8)

- (a) We all make excuses as to why we should be first and it usually centers on the "unworthiness" of others. "My Dad never has time for me, why should I put him first?" "None of my friends express much interest in how I feel; why should I care about their feelings?"
- (b) Paul points us to the example of Christ's selflessness when he tells us to do this. How did Christ treat people?
 - (1) We are to have the same attitude He had (2:5). Ask yourself, "Who am I thinking about right now?"
 - (2) Jesus never said, "Since I'm God, you need to treat me as such."
 - (3) Jesus constantly laid aside His rights. He was God and became a man. As a man, He became a servant. As a servant, He humbled Himself and allowed Himself to be killed.
 - (4) Throughout Jesus' life, He constantly served people. He never allowed the rejection of others to dilute His love and concern for them. Everything He did was always for the benefit of the people around Him.
 - (5) He was willing to set aside what He deserved, because having a relationship with people was more important.
- (c) For us to have a selfless attitude like Christ is supernatural. We are not like that on our own. On our own, we are selfish and proud.
- (d) So how can we have an attitude like that? It is only found and empowered in our relationship with Christ.
- (e) Christ came and lived and died, not just to give us an example of selfless living. Christ came and died to rescue us from our sinful, wicked hearts. He died and took our wicked, selfish hearts and, in their place, He gave us a new heart.

He took our unworthiness and, in its place, gave us His worthiness, so we no longer need to try to run to relationships to get something so we can feel good about ourselves. No, now we can enter into relationships and love and serve and give because Christ loved us unconditionally, and served us on the cross, and gave us all we need.

III. Living It Out

- A. Phil. 2:7 says that Jesus "made Himself nothing". Jesus did what we have to do if we are going to serve others. We need to humble ourselves and make ourselves nothing - put ourselves on the same level ground as all people.
- B. To say you are nothing doesn't mean you are not worth anything. It means that your worth is not for you, but it is for others. The attitude of a servant is the perspective of a heart and mind that says, "My life exists for others."
- C. The wonderful paradox is that when you live your life as if you are nothing, that you become something. Greatness in this world comes from power, prestige, wealth, and fame. But God says if you want to be great in this kingdom, become a servant of all.

Greatness from God's perspective comes when we humble ourselves and consider the needs of others before our own.

- D. Somebody's got to go first
 - 1) In every situation, only one person can go first. When standing in line, speaking, ordering lunch, etc.
 - 2) Either you can go first, or you allow the other person to go first. If I go first, there is the potential for conflict. But if I let you go first, there is the potential for relationship. And in God's economy, relationship is what is most important and selfishness is the enemy of relationship.

APPLICATION

So, how can we begin to put others first.

- 1) LISTEN!! Talk less and listen more. Listening is an effective way to express to others that you think they are important.
- 2) REMEMBER!! When someone remembers what you said, it expresses that you care and you value them.

- 3) **ASK!!** Express interest in others by asking questions about their lives. Imagine what might happen in your relationship with your parents if you asked them how they were doing and what is going on in their lives.
- 4) **PRAY!!** Who do you spend the most time praying for - yourself or others?
- 5) **SERVE!!** Serving only happens when you make the intentional choice to serve. When will you make the intentional choice to get involved in someone's life or a ministry to put others first?