

Stinginess / Selfishness

A few months ago when I received an email from Pastor Stratton asking if I would be willing to co-teach an Elective class with Josh and Meg Luffman my first reaction was - you bet! And then I saw the topic that was being suggested, "Live to Give!" Well, I truly am ashamed to say that my initial thought was – this is awesome! I love that topic. After all I am a pretty generous person 😊 Then as we discussed how to structure the 6 weeks of teaching I wish you could have seen the look on my face when they suggested that I lead the discussion on STINGINESS and SELFISHNESS which is the antitheses of a grace filled and generous heart for God. How many people do you see lining up wanting to teach a lesson on that subject? And then as the weeks have passed and as The Word of God has been ricocheting from my mind to my heart and as I have been praying – "Lord reveal to me the atrophy in my walk with you on this topic" – well, as you can imagine you know what happened next. God has been doing exactly what I asked Him to do! Revealing to me the ways in which the "weeds" of **stinginess** and **selfishness** are choking my relationship with Him and with others that He brings into and has placed in my life. It's been enlightening to watch how the flood light of God's conviction has been exposing my own sinfulness. The hypocrite within me wants to deceive all of you and declare me as being free from selfish thoughts, acts, and words – but I cannot offer that to you today. I can only confess before you that this is an area of struggle for me every day. When one steps back and reflects on the course of even an hour in a day and takes an inventory of each act of self absorbing behavior and thought – a bitter after taste begins to wrinkle the nose as unrighteousness permeates the cracks and crevices of the heart. For more than 2 months God has kindly placed people and circumstances in my path meant to expose my sin for what it is. And so while you could have been eating at the buffet tables of other elective classes being offered during this current cycle – God in His kindness has directed you and I to walk together at least for today. My challenge to you is that you will do exactly what I did and ask our Father to utilize His spirit to **poke**, **prod**, and **probe** into your heart as deeply as He wants for His ultimate glory!

So let's jump in! Today I hope to cover:

What is stinginess or selfishness?

Where does this stinginess or selfishness come from? _____!
What are some ways that stinginess or selfishness are manifested/displayed?
How does selfishness affect you/me personally?
How does selfishness affect my relationships with God and others?
What does God say about Selfishness?
How do I avoid or overcome selfishness?
For me the most logical place to start a topic like this is to define what we're talking about...

What is stinginess or selfishness? Give me your own definitions of what it means to be stingy or selfish!

- Concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself: seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others
- Concern with one's own welfare or advantage in disregard of others; a selfish act
- Taking care of and for one's own self while also taking from others

When you hear these definitions what seems to be the primary emphasis? **These are thoughts and actions centered only on what pleases or satisfies ME!!!! In addition, these are personal choices of rebellion.** Now who or what is clearly absent from these definitions? **There is no appreciable concern for others including what pleases or satisfies God as our Father nor Christ as our Savior.**

Where does stinginess or selfishness come from? In other words, what is at the root of this kind of thinking, action, or verbal response? There is a one word answer for that and it is P R I D E!

Jonathan Edwards - "Remember that pride is the worst viper that is in the heart, the greatest disturber of the soul's peace and sweet communion with Christ; **it was the first sin that ever was, and lies lowest in the foundation of Satan's whole building, and is the most difficultly rooted out, and is the most hidden, secret and deceitful of all lusts.**" What an indictment! Have you ever considered your own stinginess and selfishness to have this degree of evil intent at its core?

C.S. Lewis - in Mere Christianity - "pride is the anti-God state, the position in which the ego and the self are directly opposed to God..."

Upon further reflection of the statements quoted by Mr. Edwards and Mr. Lewis, I'll admit that I've never thought about the fact that Satan was the angelic groundbreaker and pattern provider for PRIDE setting an ugly course for all of

human history! The text in Ezekiel 28 tells us that Satan was a created being and was in a perfect state and remained perfect in his ways until iniquity was found in him (verse 15). What was this iniquity? We read in verse 17, “Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.” Lucifer apparently became so impressed with his own beauty, intelligence, power, and position as an angel in heaven that he began to desire for himself the honor and glory that belonged supremely to God. The sin that corrupted Lucifer was self-generated pride. In Isaiah 14:13-14 God describes the fall of his angel Lucifer (which means bright morning star) by recounting Satan’s (meaning adversary) 5 “I will” statements – ***“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit on the mount of the congregation [as king], I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, and I will be like the most high.”***

Sin originated in the free will of Lucifer who with full understanding of the issues involved chose to rebel against the almighty and all powerful Creator. Wow, doesn’t that picture of what PRIDE is and did to one of the angels bring you to your knees in shame as we review the countless acts of selfishness we’ve committed not only this very morning but throughout our lifetime?

What are some ways that stinginess or selfishness are manifested/displayed?

Give me some examples

- Miserly – characterized by a lack of generosity (one who hoards for themselves)
- Uncharitable –Lacking love
- Cheap – embarrassingly insulting
- Anger - strong feelings of displeasure and hostility
- Irritability - annoyance, crabby, grumpy, testiness, prickliness, cantankerous
- Impatience - snappy, edgy, quick tempered
- Arrogance – inflated opinion of oneself
- Resentment of or toward others
- Criticism of others

The truth is that this list could go on and on couldn’t it? I suspect you may be doing what I did as I created this short list – OUCH! Hay, quit stepping on my toes. Because this **describes me** at times.

How does selfishness affect you and me personally?

- The burden of relational conflict is created - Generally speaking, the relational conflict that I create or contribute to is usually all about me! The chance that I will humble myself, serve the other person, confess my sin against them and seek forgiveness thereby creating RESTITUTION is as likely as my becoming the next quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers!
- Our irritability never has its roots in the soil of righteousness. It springs out of the soil of selfishness and springs up fast, like the **sin-weed** that it is. We often get irritated or easily provoked, not because God's righteousness or justice is being undermined, but when something we want is being denied, delayed, or disrupted. It works like this:
 - When I'm **weary** I want **rest**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted - *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **sick or in pain** I want **relief**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted - *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **preoccupied** I want **uninterrupted focus**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted - *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **running late** I want **to avoid appearing negligent**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted - *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **disappointed** I want **my desire fulfilled**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **fearful** I want **escape from that threat**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **uncertain** I want **certainty, preferably that which is reassuring**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
 - When I'm **enjoying something** I want **to continue until I wish to be done**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*

The reason irritability is unloving & also unrighteous anger is that it's a selfish response to a barrier for what we/I desire. Our desire may not be sinful, but a selfish response to its denial, delay, or disruption is a failure to *trust God at all times* (Psalm 62:8) — and often a failure to value, love, and serve another human soul (**which, by the way, are the very people created in the image of God!**)

How does selfishness affect my relationships?

- With God?
 - Selfishness is a sin against God
 - Each selfish act places a wedge between me and God
 - Can you ever imagine saying to God - “I know your son Jesus humbled himself, left heaven, took on human flesh, and absorbed the full weight of your wrath for my sin – **BUT you don’t understand** that I have needs which are supremely important right now!”
 - Examples from the Bible –
 - We’ve already talked about the eternal separation of Lucifer from God
 - How did Adam and Eve’s selfish act in the garden effect their relationship to God? It impacted all of mankind
 - What was the result of Cain’s selfishness and his relationship with God? Genesis 4:14, 16 “*Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden...then Cain went away from the presence of The Lord...*”
- With others?
 - As my irritation is thrust onto others, it becomes a burden for them Proverbs 15:1 says a soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up ANGER
 - My sin of selfishness may cause others to sin with their words, thoughts, or actions as you play the role of the tempter for them
 - My sin of selfishness will strain relationships, drive wedges among friends, and has increasing potential to sever marriages or family unity
 - King David and his selfish act of adultery brought shame to the house of God which severed a marriage and also ended in murder

Now, what does God say about Selfishness?

- Walk in the SPIRIT not in the FLESH
 - Turn to Galatians 5:16-21 and would someone read vs.19-21a? What do you notice about the relationship between Selfishness and the works of the flesh? Selfish ambition is included in the works of the

flesh with a variety of pretty despicable sins – so doesn't that tell us a little bit about how God views selfishness?

- James 3:13-17 Who has wisdom and understanding among you? Demonstrate that by good conduct in the meekness [gentleness] of God's wisdom. [But] If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (self-seeking) in your heart this leads to wisdom that is boastful and arrogant. That wisdom is earthly, natural, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. On the contrary, wisdom from God is
 - Pure – moral integrity
 - Peaceable – promotes peace
 - Gentle – kind, patient, courteous, “sweet reasonableness”
 - Willing to yield - teachable
 - Full of mercy – quick to forgive
 - Without partiality – consistent in their decisions
- Walk humbly preferring others above yourself
 - Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves
 - Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his **own interests**, but also to the **interests** of **others**
 - Luke 9:23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself** and take up his cross daily and follow me
 - Hebrews 13:16 ...**do good** and to **share** what you have, for such **sacrifices** are pleasing to God
- Be compelled by love
 - I Corinthians 13:4-6 Love is:
 - Love is **patient, kind, does not envy or boast**, not **arrogant or rude**
 - Love does **not insist** on its **own way**, is not **irritable** or **resentful**
 - Love does not rejoice at **wrongdoing**, but rejoices with the truth
- Give generously
 - I Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to

do good, to **be rich in good works**, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

How do I avoid or overcome selfishness?

- **S. — Stop, repent, and ask** We must stop immediately — even mid-rant — to repent of our sin, and ask, “What am I desiring that is being denied, delayed or disrupted?”
- **T. — Trust God’s promises** Collect promises like [2 Corinthians 9:8](#), [Philippians 4:19](#), and [Philippians 4:11–13](#) to trust that God and His powerful Spirit will combat the temptation of being selfish.
- **O. — Obey** Remember that your **emotions** are **gauges, not guides**. Don’t let SIN (such as selfishness) reign in you ([Romans 6:12](#)). As you obey in faith you will find that your emotions will, however reluctantly at first, follow. Christ says, obey my commands if you love me ([John 14:15](#)).
- **P. — Plan** Yes, plan. More forethought and intention can be a spiritual discipline, an act of love, and a weapon against sin by avoiding temptations to irritability. Ask yourself, “What things cause me to be selfish?” As a test of your own understanding, ask this same question of those who know you best (and often may be the recipients of your irritation). Based on their answers, seek to put into place some systems and habits that will remove irritable stumbling blocks from your path. Pursue the escape from temptation offered by the Lord ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)) by taking advantage of the grace of planning ahead.

DEATH TO SELF!

If God desires us to be generous because He was generous to us then one of the first steps we must take is to repent from our sin of being stingy or selfish and live to give freely to God and others with our Time, Talents, and Treasure!