

Looking Inward:

“What can I get, vs. what might I give?” OR “It’s not all about me!”

Psalm 8, Philippians 2: 1-11 NRSV

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**2** If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PRAY.

Today we are in our second of a series of messages, based in part on Thom Rainer's book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church and twelve ways to keep yours alive. Last week we were Looking Backwards—focusing on the value and the pitfalls of memory, appreciating and learning from the past, as well as from the heroes/heroines in the "Faith Hall of Fame" (Hebrews 11).

Today our focus is Looking Inward: What can I get, vs. what might I give?

Looking inward has value. Introspection can be a helpful tool for gaining self-understanding. However, introspection is to be differentiated from selfishness or self-centeredness.

Paul, who writes to the church he planted in Philippi, is awaiting trial before Caesar, while under house arrest in Rome. He has had a long history with this congregation. He loves them, and it is mutual. This letter is full of joy: In spite of his situation, Paul is joy filled because he is grateful for this church. He is grateful for their generosity, as they have sent a financial gift that allowed him to remain under house arrest, vs. being thrown in the dungeon. He is filled with joy because month by month, he has been chained to a whole line of guards to whom he has personally given witness. Many of these guards have come to confess faith in Christ! This has brought encouragement not only to Paul, but has emboldened local pastors who have become more confident and fearless in their preaching. All of this is great, isn't it? But one thing is lacking.

Paul has a request of the church in Philippi (in verse 2):

"Make my joy complete..."

Sure, Paul, anything...we'll do anything to make your joy complete. What is it?

*"be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..."*

Wow... that's a tall order, Paul. Of course we'd like to do all that for you. We really would. But you're asking an awful lot of us, aren't you?

Have the same mind/attitude...the same love...all of us, all at the same time?? We're too different. Impossible! No way.

Yes, way, says Paul. Jesus himself has shown us the way, Jesus himself has given us the example, he's the role model.

Paul argues that this is possible,

Since they (and we) have encouragement from Christ

Since their hearts (and ours) are secure and comforted by Christ's love

Since the Holy Spirit is active among them (and us).

Since God has given them (and us) compassionate hearts!

In other words, God is a God of abundance, not scarcity! God has met our needs so graciously! Having lavished love upon us, to that we have more than enough! We can share what we have with others!

Since God can, and will make it possible, Paul makes his request: *Complete my joy by living in harmony with one another, by being like-minded, by being one in love, in attitude, in purpose.*

HOW? We can achieve these lofty goals, through serving one another! By setting aside our own self-centered ways, and by deferring to others, by allowing others needs to take precedence over our own, we demonstrate the same attitude that Jesus had.

Humility is not highly valued in our present society. In fact, it appears to me that in an effort to bolster one's own sense of confidence or self-esteem, it is not uncommon for people today to put others down in demeaning "tweets" or Facebook posts, in order to build up oneself.

The title of an online article I read recently, posed this question: **When it comes to relationships, is it all about you?"**

The article states that..."selfishness, or being overly concerned with just your needs, wants, and feelings, which prevents you from holding up your end of a mutually satisfying relationship...Many people don't recognize when they're being selfish because they operate inside a bubble of me-first thoughts and beliefs. Putting yourself first becomes a habit.

According to the article, “Here are six ways to tell that you're selfish:

1. You like being in control and find it difficult to compromise.
2. Giving and sharing do not come easily to you.
3. Putting another’s needs first — before your own — is very difficult.
4. You hear constructive criticism as personal attacks.
5. You become moody when others have the spotlight. (You like to be the center of attention.)
6. Forgiving others is difficult.

The article concludes that: “Selfishness...is a learned behavior. That means like any other bad habit it can be changed. **Make a conscious effort to shift your focus from *me first* to *we first*.**”

<https://www.yourtango.com/experts/drs-evelyn-and-paul-moschetta/are-you-selfish-6-ways-know>

Paul would say that true humility does not shift focus from *Me first* to *we first*, although that is a start. He would advocate a shift from *Me first to others first*. Part of the problem is our consumer mentality. People go “church shopping”! When we approach worship or being the church we need a mindset that does *not* start with the question: What will I get out of this (worship/class/activity)? Instead we need to ask: What can I give, how can I serve others through this (worship/class/activity)?

Muhammed Ali was known for saying: “When you’re as great as I am, it’s hard to be humble.” Ted Turner said: “If I only had a little humility, I’d be perfect.” I think these statements fit in the category called “the humble brag”. (Wow—that is an oxymoron if I ever heard one!)

Twitter is apparently a common place to find “humble brags”, which are tweets that are an attempt at getting others to envy the Tweeter. Here’s a prime example:

Reportedly, a well-known actor once tweeted “It’s a good night for natural light in LA” and then he posted a picture of his fireplace, but strategically located on the mantle above it, were like 20 Emmy awards. A not so subtle

brag about his awards! He did a follow-up tweet three days after Christmas. "Stockings still hung by the chimney with care" and attached a picture of his family's stockings all hung on his Emmys. The point? He really seemed to want his followers to know he won a bunch of awards—a humble brag!

(<http://twistedifter.com/2011/05/funniest-humble-brags-on-twitter/>)

Biblically, our self-esteem derives NOT from human awards or accolades, but from the fact that we are created in the image of God, we are loved and redeemed by Jesus. Our value as human beings is derived from these facts. Secure in the love of God, we can easily follow Jesus' example of humility, and let go our need to be in control, our need to be the center of attention, etc.

***We need not think less of ourselves, just think of ourselves less!***

This is what Jesus modeled for us. *Christ did not focus on himself, but rather, his focus was on what could he do to serve others.* This is the mindset, the attitude that Paul challenges the church in Philippi to have, and for us to have as well.

A mom was preparing pancakes for breakfast, when her sons, Kevin and Ryan, began to argue over who would get the first one. Mom, seizing this teachable moment, said to them: "Hold on, boys. Wait a minute. If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"

The two boys were silent for a moment. Then five year old Kevin said to his younger brother: "Ok, Ryan. *You* be Jesus!"

Paul's warning here is to both individuals and to the group.

**Now in Rainer's book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church, he notes that when the focus of a church is turned inward, it becomes a problem.** This is NOT to say the focus is on introspection, as much as to say the focus is on ourselves as a congregation.

What are our preferences? What pleases us? In what ways are we self-serving, vs. serving others in our community? How many of our activities focus on us/our needs vs. how many of our church activities directly engage people in our community (and address their needs)?

I have it on good authority, that Calvary is generally a warm and welcoming congregation.

Consider this: how welcoming would we be of someone who is different than us? Someone who is not perceived as "one of us" but "one of them"... "them" being someone who is different from us in some significant way. For instance, a homeless person, someone of a different ethnicity, educational, or economic background, or sexual orientation.

**The ultimate challenge? To become one family in Christ, so that "them" becomes "us"!**

**What are the things we cling to?** Rainer says in his book, that in surveying churches that closed, a common thread among the things they refused to let go of -- even as they were dying -- included worship styles, fixed orders of worship, and fixed worship times.

I personally know a church that said they wanted to reach the "unreached" in their neighborhood. After months of discussion and number crunching, they decided to pay some musicians who would provide contemporary music in hopes of attracting younger adults and families with children. But they totally ignored the input they received from those they said they wanted to serve!

A survey of the neighborhood indicated that those in the age bracket they were wanting to reach, would be most likely to come to a contemporary service at 11 a.m.

To do that, would require the congregation to give up their preferred worship time of 10:15 am. So, they began a contemporary worship service at 8:30 am. No surprise, the service did not accomplish its purpose, and it folded.

This is but one example of a church putting *their own* preferences...even to preferred style of service and music—*first*--ahead of the desire to truly reach out to those who did not/do not yet know Christ.

While this may seem counter-intuitive, Paul reminds us that we can put our own needs aside, in favor of others, because God has so generously and

lavishly met our needs! We can assume a role of humility, because we have confidence in who we are as God's beloved children. We can trust in God's abundance, to supply not only our needs, but the needs of those in our community as well--particularly if we are acting in ways that reflect a Christ-like attitude and mindset.

The question and the challenge before us is this: **What are we willing to sacrifice, or give up, if it would increase the chances of reaching those in our community who don't yet know Christ?**

**How we answer this question, will determine in part, the health and future of CPC.**

Let us PRAY.