

# “Selfishness Leads to Hopelessness!”

Genesis 2:25; 3:1-13

**Intro.** – Recently at a national conference for the American Association for Marital and Family Therapy, a Dr. Mark Carpol asked one question. Dr. Carpol believes if every couple would honestly consider and answer this one question throughout their married lives they would rarely, if ever, need marital help. The question he urged husbands and wives to ask is this: “What is it like being married to me?”

Let me use this to introduce this new series of sermons on the family. Wherever you are in life – married, not yet married, not going to get married, divorced, widowed – wherever you are these sermons will convince and challenge your thinking as to what God says in His Word when it comes to relationships with each other. These principles are found in Scripture and are essential when it comes to relationships, especially in the home.

God performed the first wedding ceremony. It was perfect. It was a garden wedding with perfect weather, perfect surroundings bringing together the perfect man and the perfect woman. Bible tells us that Adam and Eve walked around the garden naked but had no shame/embarrassment. Their being without clothing went beyond the physical aspect; they were totally transparent with each other and with God.

You know what happened after awhile. Adam and Eve both ate from the forbidden tree. This set off a chain of events that affects you and me today. It also led to the first marital fight in history. When God asked for Adam concerning his sin, the man responded how? “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave {the fruit}, and I ate.*” In short, Adam blamed his wife. Then, when God addressed Eve, she responded how? She blamed her surroundings and her circumstances. “*Lord, the serpent deceived me, and I ate.*”

Does all of this sound familiar? As a result, this covenant relationship designed by God as a perfect union to benefit both Adam/Eve and to glorify God Himself, collapsed into an exchange of accusations/blame calling. What is this? SELFISHNESS. We all struggle with this sin which lies at the heart of every marital problem. Marriage counselor Willard F. Harley Jr. wrote: “The sudden surge of divorces in the 1970’s, that has made America the country with the highest divorce rate, has a great deal to do with changes in our basic beliefs. More to the point, it has to do with a major shift toward self-centeredness. Beliefs that encourage self-centeredness destroy marriage.”

Ed Young in *The Ten Commandments of Marriage*: “...if every couple walking the aisle took seriously this simple principle, a welcome oasis of marital bliss would spread across this nation. Divorce lawyers would have to ‘take a number’ at the unemployment office...”

*Purpose: to see how selfishness especially in marriage leads to hopelessness*

Philippians 2:3 “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*” Sounds basic enough, but it’s not simple. Selfishness is the one character trait that is sure to torpedo a relationship, especially a marriage. The following will help you and me identify this sin in our lives and to avoid the inevitable hopelessness it brings:

## I DEFINING SELFISHNESS

### A. Immature Love vs Mature Love

1. Make it a habit to ask young couples coming to me to perform their wedding ceremonies: “How do you know you’re in love?” The range of answers I get is always amazing, but, generally speaking it follows pretty much this line: “*I feel special whenever I am around them... I feel lost without them... I feel lonely when they’re not around... I feel excited...*”
2. Nothing wrong with puppy love but unless this grows into mature love, marriage will struggle/probably not survive. “If you build your marital relationship on puppy love, you’ll end up living a dog’s life.”
3. 

PUPPY LOVE	verses	MATURE LOVE:
focus on taking		focuses on giving
impatient – self-serving		patient in spite of other’s flaws
outbursts of anger		responds gently and patiently
insists on meeting its needs		transparent and open

### B. Thoughtlessness vs Thoughtfulness

1. Insensitivity will destroy any relationship, but it will murder a marriage.

2. Note how *thoughtless* Adam and Eve were to each other and most significantly to God after they had chosen to sin. Their thoughtlessness led to sinning and ultimately to sorrows of life itself.
3. Ephesians 5:17 “*So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*”
  - a. two contrasting words are the meat of this verse: *foolish* and *understand*
  - b. foolishness is the natural result of a lack of understanding!
4. This is what’s meant by “working at marriage” = understanding one’s mate absolutely essential...
  - it takes constant effort to develop a marriage... it takes no effort to ruin one...

C. Killing Time vs Using Time

1. Ephesians 5:15-16 “*Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*” = literally means “buy up” all the opportunities time brings to you.
2. So easy to spend our time on careers, hobbies, work and other *self-gratifying* activities all at the expense of our marriages or other relationships.
3. How many marriages suffer daily simply because one or both in the marriage are so wrapped up in their selfish wants and needs they don’t have time left for their mate or anyone else?
4. Avoid selfishness and you’ll use time wisely in your marriage!

Obviously other areas can be brought up, but examine these three and see how they define selfishness.

## II DEALING WITH SELFISHNESS

- do you see yourself in any of the three identifying marks just used to define selfishness? Are you at all immature in your love for your mate? Ever been thoughtless with your mate? Do you tend to misuse your time leaving your mate the leftovers? Truth is most if not all of us are guilty... How deal:

A. Set Your Priorities Together

1. Every marriage has “priorities” problem in most marriages have a husband/wife with two different sets of priorities and usually one being dominant – again evidence that selfishness reigns.
2. Only the Lord can *enable* a husband and wife establish the right priorities together:
  - a. Ephesians 5:22-25 “*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*”
  - b. only way this can and will be accomplished is by both being Christians... Spirit of God...
3. Be thorough students of God’s Word and let the Lord set the priorities for your marriage...!

B. Know Your Expectations

1. Prior to their sinning, Adam and Eve had a perfect understanding of each other’s expectations – there was no conflict in what the one expected from the other... all changed when sin entered...
  - why we end up with books and tee shirts like these...
2. Healthy marriages sit down with each other and constantly strive to understand one another’s expectations, goals from marriage.
3. It’s a matter of focusing on your mate, rather than being focused on yourself.

C. Recognize Your Backgrounds

1. When two people marry they come from differing backgrounds – understanding this is essential
2. Adam and Eve initially didn’t have this challenge, but after sin, they certainly did.
3. It is going to take time to understand how your mate is going to make decisions, resolve conflict, handle money, discipline the kids, deal with pressures etc.
4. This is why the Lord said, *leave* mom and dad and *cleave* to your wife... husbands and wives must establish their own homes even though they come from differing backgrounds.

**Conclusion:** How then will one know they are successfully dealing with self-centeredness in their marriage? How can a couple identify they truly are recovering from selfishness? *Love*. Love is the key... 3 aspects:

- 1) Feeling Love (eros) or romantic love – following poem describes most of we men here today = lovesick

I climbed up the door and shut the stairs;  
I said my shoes and took off my prayers.  
I shut off the bed and climbed into the light.  
And all because – She kissed me good night!

This kind of love is God given and is kind of love that will have its ups and downs because of selfishness...

- 2) Friendship Love (phileo) – friendship love results in “falling, madly or blindly” in love, -- it too will have its ups and downs because of selfishness...

- 3) Forever Love (agape) – eros love is about looks...; phileo love is all about feelings...; but agape love is all about choice – it sustains the marriage and gives it depth -- Bible provides the classic definition for love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

Feeling love brings sizzle to marriage... Friendship love brings interest and fun... These loves will surge and retreat – come and go; however, Forever love (agape) love remains constant and brings security to marriage. It is this kind of love that is essential to crowd out selfishness in our marriages.

Few yrs ago a TV talk show host asked Billy and Ruth Graham about their 56 year marriage. “What’s the secret to your wonderful marriage?” asked the host. Graham responded: “We are happily incompatible.” What did he mean?... They had learned to overcome their own selfishness and consider each other more important. Great illus. to understanding selfishness leads to hopelessness when it comes to marriage.

Granted, marriage isn’t always easy, but it’s always worth the effort. When a man and woman learn to put aside themselves and give their mate top priority, their marriage will fill with satisfaction and power!

Like this shorter player trying to guard the taller player. Marriage engulfed with selfishness is hopeless!