

It's Not All About You
(From the series: Building Great Relationships)

Texts: Philip. 2:1-11

6/6/10

I

“It’s not about you.” That’s the first line from Rick Warren’s unlikely best seller *The Purpose Driven Life*. It sold 30 million copies and stayed at the top of the New York Times Bestseller list for an amazing number of weeks.

I say “unlikely” because Hawaiian shirt wearing, southern California Baptist megachurch pastors don’t often write books that the New York Times lists as bestsellers. And unlikely because we are told it is “all about us” all the time.

We turn on the TV and channel surf from the lifestyles of self-absorbed celebrities, to the endless supply of consumer goods on the Home Shopping Network, to the latest secret on how to have rippling flat abs – it is all about us!

But somewhere many of us have sensed a contradiction. If you want great relationships with other people, it’s hard to live as if it’s all about you. It’s hard to be friends with a narcissist. So if it’s not about you, what is it about?

The Christian faith has never been shy on this point. *Love is not self-seeking* Paul writes in I Corinthians 13.

He says it positively and more completely in his letter to the Philippians: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* (2:4)

And that thought hardly began with Paul. He borrowed it from Jesus who said: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second it like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.* And Jesus himself borrowed that thought from the book of Leviticus.

There’s no secret here. What does it take to have a great relationship? Have an abiding concern for other people that is at least as great, preferably greater, than the one you have for yourself.

II

You know with any luck this could be a short sermon. In fact some people say you don't need a Christian sermon to discover the importance of selfless concern. You can hear it in plenty of other places.

You can find it in other religions. The Buddha wrote centuries before the birth of Christ:

[“We are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfless thoughts give joy when they speak or act. Joy follows them like a shadow that never leaves them.”](#)

If you've ever been in the United States Army, you've probably heard core value number 4: *“Selfless service”*

If you've ever recited the Boy Scout Oath you promised:
To help other people at all times...

And even the actor Sylvester Stallone has said:

[“Real love is when you become selfless and you are more concerned about your mate's or children's egos than your own. You're now a giver instead of a taker.”](#)

Even Rocky knows “It's not about you!” Somewhere buried in the human heart is the stubborn reminder that keeps whispering “It's not about you.” Yes, there are plenty of other voices that say otherwise but this one just won't go away.

III

So maybe part of the Christian answer to building better relationships is simply to ask “What would Jesus do?” and go do it. Be a selfless servant in your personal relationships. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Certainly the life of Jesus is the epitome of our text: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others.*

He forgave the woman caught in adultery, the tax gatherer on the take, and even his own fickle disciples...

He healed the sick and the demon possessed...

He fed the hungry crowds...

He spoke out against injustice...

And along the way the taught us:

Be reconciled to your brother or sister...

If they take your shirt give them your coat too...

Give to the one who asks you and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you...

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave...

What would Jesus do? Well he'd certainly empty the family dishwasher and he'd refill it, too. I suspect he give you a \$20 if you needed it and he had it. He'd find a way to forgive his wife, children, and co-workers when it was necessary. He'd probably stop to help change a tire, even if it made him late. And he'd stop by the neighbors house where there had been a death to see what he could do.

So just do it! Serve people – intentionally, sacrificially, regularly – and see if your relationships from your spouse to your golf buddy don't go better. Just do what Jesus did.

IV

Of course, as the saying goes, if it was that easy everybody would be doing it. We have a problem. There's quite a distance from the theory of considering other people better than ourselves, to the practice of it.

Servanthood seems like such a noble idea, until someone treats you like a servant. Until someone doesn't appreciate this selfless, thoughtful, demonstration of other-centered concern you've decided show. We can dispose of our selfless concern almost as fast as we can dispense it. It will be a while until we make ourselves vulnerable again.

Christian writer Richard Foster has put his finger on it. He says:

"Right here we must see the difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. When we chose to serve, we are still in charge. We decide whom we will serve and when we will serve. And if we are in charge, we will worry a great deal about anyone taking charge over us. But when we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge.

I can find all kind of guidance on selfless behavior. But where I can find a selfless identity?

I'm all for practicing selfless behavior. I'm all for teaching children and adults that one of secrets to good relationships is to get your eyes off yourself and onto the other person. And I'm all for it whether you learn it in Sunday School or Scouts. As long as we remember that lessons in "do the right thing" will only take you so far in this world, and that it's not far enough.

V

The Apostle Paul never said to copy Jesus. He said to follow him. And there's much more to following him than trying to figure out what Jesus would do for other people. He says you have to learn to see them the way he saw them.

Your attitude should be the same a same as Christ Jesus...

We're not supposed to simply copy his behavior. What we need is a piece of his mind. Paul is saying to me and you – and most importantly this whole congregation together – if you hope to live the Jesus life you'll have to adopt the Jesus point of view. And what is that?

Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (2:6-7)

Jesus didn't choose to serve. He chose to become a servant. He set aside right, privilege, and entitlement. Which means he saw people from a very different point of view. If you want a better marriage, better friendships, and better relationships with your co-workers – by all means get your eyes off yourself and on them. Work at it! But much more importantly become intimately involved with Jesus Christ. Become so involved that his point of view about people begins to become your point of view.

When you get up in morning and turn on your computer it has a default setting. You don't have to adjust the settings every time it boots up. Certain programs open, the screen looks a certain way. When you open your eyes every morning what is your default setting without thinking about it: self-seeker or servant?

The Christian life isn't mainly about changing our behavior. It is about changing the default settings of our lives. Making nice toward other people will only take us so far. Practice doesn't make perfect. It's time to adjust our default, by hungering for a Jesus point of view for the people with whom we share our lives.

VI

Someone has said "holding up Jesus as a (moral) example...seems rather like holding up Tiger Woods as an example of how to hit a golf ball." If that's what it takes to play why bother. And it's even worse because Jesus never had an off day.

When it comes to serving other people with the concern with which I serve myself, I've played some bad rounds. I don't always know what Jesus would do, and sometimes when I do know I still haven't done it.

But the gospel is not the command to practice perfect behavior toward our neighbors. It is the invitation to change our mind about them. To open our eyes and begin to see in them what Jesus saw, because like him we are becoming God's servants.