



# THE DISCIPLINE OF SELFLESSNESS

WEEK 9  
07.30.17

## FOCUS VERSE

### Luke 22:42

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

## LESSON TEXT

### Luke 10:29–37

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

Deliberate acts of selflessness help defeat the tyranny of selfishness.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## Sanctified Socialism

Often it appears that everyone cares only about self and not others' needs. Selfishness is such a problem that some governments force people to give. Governments take from some to give to others. However, governments fail to develop the godly characteristic of willingness to give.

Disasters, however, often elicit deep kind-heartedness from individuals. A man gives his life so his quadriplegic friend does not die alone in the World Trade Center; a woman feeds hundreds of tornado victims; a man maneuvers his boat through dangerous flood waters to rescue stranded people. This type of giving is not government enforced; it comes

from compassionate hearts that choose to help. The good Samaritan chose to help the injured man. He chose to lend his own transportation and pay for the man's health care with his own money.

Perhaps laws and taxes would not be necessary to enforce kindness if God's people lived in continual awareness of the needs around them. It should not take tragedy and substantial loss in communities to shake loose the believers' grip on their two gold coins.

But more than just being aware of physical needs, God's people live on the alert for the spiritual needs of those whom they encounter each day.

### OUTLINE

#### I. TO BE HUMAN IS TO STRUGGLE WITH SELFISHNESS

- A. Eve in the Garden
- B. A Child's Natural Selfishness
- C. The Tyranny of Selfishness

#### II. VICTORY OVER SELFISHNESS

- A. Selfless Acts Help Us See a Samaritan as Good
- B. In the Garden, Jesus Struggled with the Human Desire for Self-Preservation

#### III. THE TESTIMONIES OF TWO WOMEN

- A. Widow Near Starvation
- B. Barren Woman Who Built a Room

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Every human wants to be great—to have a life that is significant in some way. Many people attempt to accomplish this the wrong way. In their pursuit of greatness, they might push others away or step on people to get where they want to be in life. However, the way to self-fulfillment can be found in helping others.

We can learn a lesson from men like Samuel Rutherford, Andrew Carnegie, Edmond Halley, and Bill Gaither. Rutherford was a brilliant chemist whose insights could have won him many Nobel prizes. Instead, he inspired his students to investigate and test his theories, allowing many of them to go on to earn Nobel prizes of their own.

Carnegie was a famed industrialist with the skill for surrounding himself with great minds. His inclusion of some of the brightest minds of his time propelled him to become a household name. In addition, he became a significant philanthropist.

Halley could have become a force to be reckoned with in his time, but he used his sharp mind to propel Isaac Newton to become a name the world acknowledged. Halley pointed out some errors in Newton's early logic and helped him get his mathematical calculations right so his theory of planetary gravitation and other discoveries could become mainstream. Halley got little recognition during his life other than to become known for the comet he discovered.

Bill Gaither does not claim to be the best voice in gospel music. However, anyone who knows gospel music knows his name

because he discovered some of the best voices and introduced them to the world. His Homecoming events, a showcase of classic singing groups and emerging talents, made him a household name to many. True greatness can be achieved not by self-promotion but by putting others first.

John the Baptist provided a great illustration of this character quality. He said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Not only do we accomplish this in worship and in sharing the gospel, but also we lift Jesus higher by showing kindness to the underdogs.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

From the dawn of time, humans have asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Normal people enjoy others’ company when it is convenient or beneficial. In a game of Monopoly, for example, we need others to rent from us and to otherwise contribute to our success. However, when we are playing to win, we do not help others win.

In real life there is no blessing for those who hold back in self-interest. People dislike a miser who hoards more than he needs while they suffer lack of basic necessities. (See Proverbs 11:26.) We cannot be true witnesses of Christ if we live only for ourselves.

We should not be aloof from the needs around us. We might have an opportunity to speak up and be a godly influence in some given situation. We might say nothing or hold back from doing good, and nobody may be aware of it. However, God knows. He not only sees when we withdraw from the good we could do but also will repay such stinginess to us later. (See Proverbs 24:11–12.) On the other hand, those who give to the needy will be blessed. (See Proverbs 28:27.) The way forward presents itself clearly: Do good for those in trouble, and God will look out for you in your down time; ignore the needy and you will suffer many things.

Paul said fleshly drives and Spirit drives are in conflict with one another (Galatians 5:16). The lust of the flesh includes greediness and self-interest; the desire of the Spirit includes generosity and treating others as better than oneself. We must stay surrendered to the urges of the Spirit to be truly selfless.

This is not to say humans do not often help others. Acts of altruism such as volunteer organizations helping disabled or poor people appear to be normative in human experience. However, some human goodwill has ulterior motives and is not truly unselfish (done solely for the good of others). People may volunteer or donate to philanthropic causes because they want recognition. The aspiring politician signs up to lead many charitable causes so as to build a résumé that looks noteworthy. Businesses may show kindness by providing such things as diaper-changing stations or wheelchair-accessible facilities because they want more customers.

Some people do good things for others because of the positive feelings they themselves receive. They feel a sense of accomplishment and feel that they have made a difference in someone’s life. None of these are true selflessness but may rather be backhanded forms of selfishness.

The generosity the Spirit craves is the giving that does not receive something in return. Jesus taught us to give to those who could not repay. He taught us to invite people for a meal who could not invite us over in return. We are to be good to those who might treat us poorly or even reject us no matter how much kindness we show. That is the selflessness He modeled for us.

Sometimes church people are guilty of being friendly only with other church people. One family takes another out to eat, and the other family reciprocates with a barbecue a couple of weeks later. This is good community, but it should not be mistaken for strong character. Jesus warned us not to show love only to those who love us, because even sinners show love to those who are in their “in group.” (See Luke 6:32–34.) Rather, we are to do good to those who do us wrong and lend to those who cannot repay. When we do good to our enemies and lend without hope of repayment, then we have great reward in Heaven (Luke 6:35). We must learn the selflessness that God notices.

Selflessness is not just about interpersonal relationships. This also has to do with our worship to the Lord. Some worship may be based in self-interest. We worship God because we want to feel His presence; we pray because

we want His provision; we give because we want a reward. Do we fast for the Lord's sake or for our own? Do we do all we do for the Lord and not for ourselves? God chastised His people for fasting and feasting unto themselves.

*"When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (Zechariah 7:5–6).*

What about tithes, offerings, fasting, singing, praying, and other forms of self-discipline? Are they self-oriented or Jesus-oriented? Is our focus totally on the Lord?

## **I. TO BE HUMAN IS TO STRUGGLE WITH SELFISHNESS**

Some people struggle with drug addiction. Some have a pornography problem. Others fight a desire to gamble. However, every person has an issue with selfishness. While not everyone needs a support group for substance abuse, gambling, or some other vice, everyone needs help overcoming issues of self.

Selfishness takes many forms:

- *Peer pressured.* Some people seek to preserve self by blending into a crowd or bending their personalities to fit with others in hope of acceptance. Their desire for "self" to be accepted is so strong they are willing to morph themselves into people others will love.

- *Appreciation starved.* Others do things or buy things so as to be noticed by others. They are so desperate to be appreciated that they will give of time or resources to be noticed.

- *Quality controlled.* Others preserve self by correcting and even condemning others. This is their way of proving self to be worthwhile in contrast to those who somehow do not measure up to their values. Perhaps it is a misplaced effort to create a flawless, non-offensive world to enjoy, so they edit and confront everything until they can have things just the way they like.

- *Tenacity driven.* Another characteristic of selfishness is pushiness. People with this characteristic want to bulldoze their way

through life to accomplish certain goals. Often this self-interest will push aside or run over several others in the pursuit of a goal.

To one extent or another, we all are naturally selfish.

## **A. Eve in the Garden**

Falling into temptation is an act of selfishness. When Satan tempted Eve, he appealed to her selfishness. He told her she could be like God. When Eve saw that the forbidden "tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis 3:6; compare to I John 2:16). In other words, she grasped after what looked good and appealed to her senses. We are tempted by the selfish desires latent within us, which come alive and conceive sin (James 1:15).

Selfishness grasps for what is immediately gratifying. When Abram and Lot had to part ways, Lot chose according to his selfish impulse: "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where. . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan" (Genesis 13:10–11). Selfishness chooses for the moment rather than for the legacy. Rather than ask, "What will be best over the long term?" selfishness asks, "What will make me happy right now?"

Jesus was not driven by selfishness. By His example we learn to be unselfish and to "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). Jesus had this others-first mindset, and although "in the form of God," did not think equality with God as something to be grasped at. (See Philippians 2:5–6.) Jesus stooped to serve the lowest of humanity. (See Philippians 2:7.) Because of His selflessness in obedience to the point of death, Jesus became higher than any angel or other created thing in all the universe. (See Philippians 2:8–11.) One would hope that all Christians would share the same character as Christ. However, Paul lamented the shortage of selfless servants in the kingdom of God: "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Philippians 2:20–21). How much more we should make sure we are living like Christ.

## **B. A Child's Natural Selfishness**

Humans are born selfish. To some extent, we have to be selfish to survive. The child screams for attention when hungry, cold, tired, wet, or needing something else for life and comfort. The role of a parent is to help train a child to think of others rather than just self. No one wants to deal with a twenty-year-old who thinks only of himself.

Part of maturity is learning to deny oneself even the survival "needs" for a time. One learns to fast—to give up eating for a day or days in order to put others' needs first (Isaiah 58:6–10). One learns to give up her time to help others in need even though she must maintain personal time as well. A believer may give up his sleep in order to help someone through a crisis. A couple learns to give their finances to help others rather than spend their money only on themselves.

## **C. The Tyranny of Selfishness**

The quest for self-preservation can come at the expense of others' well-being. Intimidated by David, King Saul sought to kill him. Overcome by rage, Saul hurled his spear at the young musician. Some people today attempt to destroy each other because of selfishness.

We may not agree with other believers who have different convictions, values, political persuasions, and opinions. However, we should not be divisive about our differences. One person may believe everyone should be a vegetarian; another may think barbecue is God's gift to us. "Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15, NKJV). Selflessness will not force such personal choices on another.

Someone might say, "Yes, but some people have too many convictions and rules they go by." Romans 15:1–3 (NKJV) answers:

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself."

## **II. VICTORY OVER SELFISHNESS**

Did Jesus die so we could live according to our own agendas? No. Our Lord Jesus

"died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15). "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (I Corinthians 10:24, ESV). That sounds far removed from the American dream, but it is the Christ-like dream. We should invest in others. Those opportunities come randomly and unexpectedly.

## **A. Selfless Acts Help Us See a Samaritan as Good**

Suppose a man got mugged on the street of your city. A politician came by and saw the wounded man but was too elite to get involved in something like that. A preacher came along but was too preoccupied with his schedule to stop and help. A Sunday school teacher came by but had a deadline crunch and hurried on by. Finally, a Muslim stopped and helped the wounded man.

A simple act of selflessness can shred preconceived ideas people have. Jesus told a story like that to the people of His day who harbored deep prejudice against Samaritans. Think of the anti-Christian world. Would it surprise people to see us do some selfless deeds? Or would it confirm what they assumed about us? Do they see us as caring and loving? To much of the world, Christians appear as poster-carrying protesters with a cause they think everyone should follow. We can break cultural barriers and even convert atheists by being selfless. What if every Apostolic person started living for the good of others? We can talk a big talk about changing the world, or we can do it by stopping and showing love to others.

## **B. In the Garden, Jesus Struggled with the Human Desire for Self-Preservation**

Jesus did not want to die, it appears, so He prayed, "Let this cup pass from me." However, He surrendered the desire for survival to the divine will: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). This is an important prayer for us daily. Life is not about our desires but the living out of His desires. Just as the Spirit of Christ overcame His human urge to survive, so the Spirit in us will help us overcome our basic instincts.

### III. THE TESTIMONIES OF TWO WOMEN

It is easy to be selfless on one's own terms. It can be difficult, however, to give something when it takes away from self. Jesus modeled such spontaneous selflessness when John the Baptist had been brutally executed. Jesus got away from everyone, like anyone else would want to do, for an undistracted time of grieving. But when people found out where He was, they came crowding to Him. Rather than becoming upset at their being so inconsiderate, He had compassion on them and gave of Himself (Matthew 14:13–21). Jesus exemplified the principle of “in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10). Sometimes there are legitimate reasons not to give, but selflessness gives anyway.

#### A. Widow Near Starvation (I Kings 17:8–15)

The woman had lost her husband, and the drought had left her without food. She and her son had one meal left—and there would not be much in that meal either. When the traveling preacher came into town, she could have shrugged off his needs and eaten the last of what she and her son had to eat. Instead, she practiced selflessness.

How amazing that we must turn to a widow woman outside the nation of Israel—a non-believer, so to speak—to find an illustration of selflessness. When she gave everything to help another in the same situation as herself, she discovered the miracle power of the God of Israel. The Lord multiplied this single-mother's food so she never ran out of meals for herself and her son until the drought ended and food was available once again.

What miracles might we be missing out on if selfishness rules our lives? Believers carry one another's load, which fulfills Christ's law to love one another (Galatians 6:2). The world, in contrast, teaches people to be lovers of their own selves and lovers of pleasure rather than putting God and others first (II Timothy 3:2–4).

#### B. Barren Woman Who Built a Room (II Kings 4:8–37)

Another woman could have hoarded her space for herself and her husband. Perhaps

she enjoyed gardening and working in the great outdoors. What she did not enjoy was being childless.

Rather than live in sorrow for what she did not have, this woman of faith focused on someone else's need. She noticed that the preacher came through her town often but had no safe place to stay. “Honey,” she said to her husband one day, “could we add onto the house so the man of God always has a place to sleep?”

“Sure,” the hard-working man answered.

“We could give him a bed, a desk, and a chair. Wouldn't that be wonderful?”

Soon Elisha was sleeping in a quiet, safe place every time he came through town. One day Elisha called the woman to his quarters and promised that God would give her a child. God had noticed her selflessness as she put the needs of others first. God rewarded her with what she desired more than anything—a child.

Selflessness in the life of believers manifests in their contributions toward supporting the preacher. Selfish believers may say it is not their responsibility to make sure the preacher has food or a place to stay. But selflessness gives generously to the support of those who lead, teach, and serve in the kingdom of God. Generous believers see miracles others will never experience.

Supporting one's leader is more of an attitude of selflessness than just a list of obligations. King David had loyal followers who were devoted enough to fight to the death beside him if need be. One day when his hometown was under siege by God's enemies, David muttered, “Oh, it would be so nice to get a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem!” His three mighty men took off in a hurry, broke through the enemy lines, and filled a flask with that precious water. Then they made their way back to bring it to the man they so deeply admired.

This selfless act so overwhelmed David that he gave the water as an offering to God. He felt that the men's risking their lives was too high of a price for him to feel justified in drinking it (II Samuel 23:15–17). Selfless leaders inspire selflessness in others.

Paul explained at length his commitment to do whatever it took to win others to the truth

(I Corinthians 9:19–23). This “whatever it takes” mindset may cause sleepless nights, financial drain, adjusting to uncomfortable situations, and much more, but it is worth it to save a soul. Selflessness breeds more selflessness. Selfishness, on the other hand, will reproduce too.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

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In his article “To Illustrate,” Mark Tidd told of a time he and his wife encountered a man from the neighborhood. When Mr. Roth first showed up, they were quite taken aback. His wrinkled face sported silver stubble and glassy eyes. Out of pity, they purchased some vegetables he offered for sale. In a week, he was back, offering more food from the earth. He proved to be an interesting character, living in a run-down shack at the end of the road. He seemed happy enough, playing gospel songs on his harmonica and talking about Heaven. They grew used to the sight of this mismatched man and his two right shoes on both feet.

One day, he came to their house in great excitement. “The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch.” They expressed their excitement for him and thought

of how much he could use an upgrade to his wardrobe. When they had finished their hurrahs, he shared more good news: “You know what’s even more wonderful?” he asked them. “Just yesterday I met some people that could use them” (*Leadership*, Fall 1990).

Selflessness is foundational to apostolic identity. When the Spirit was first poured out, many people may have lost jobs, work contracts, and homes because of their change of faith from Jewish tradition to embracing Jesus as Messiah. However, the new believers took care of each other.

*“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” (Acts 4:34–35).*

The world will know we are true believers by our love for one another. Love cares about others more than self, gives when it hurts, and seeks the advantage for someone else rather than self. The very foundation of the gospel is selflessness: Jesus laid down His life for us. We are to lay down our lives for others.

## REFLECTIONS

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- What are some areas where you stopped living for short-term results and started investing in long-term rewards?
- What are some ways the Spirit helps you overcome your selfish urges?
- How closely do you guard your schedule and finances? Are you selflessly flexible?