

SELF-IS (H)

INTRODUCTION

The Corona virus crisis has had a tremendous effect on society. Livelihoods have been lost, loved ones have become ill and some have passed away. Many people have experienced the strain of loneliness and also depression because of it.

Times of crisis tend to bring out both the best, and the worst in people. Many have risen to the challenge during this time out of hearts of compassion and have given both materially and financially to assist others. Medical staff have literally put their lives on the line for others, as have people in other vocations. The level of care and compassion which the human spirit is capable of was placed on display in a spectacular manner.

However, the opposite is also true. Prices of goods have spiraled, blaming the crisis for stock shortages etc. But often the underlying reason is plain and simple greed. In our country, we have heard accounts of corruption linked to the purchasing of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), and distribution of food support. We have seen online schemes and scams geared towards defrauding and robbing unsuspecting people of the little that they have as a result of the crisis. This is in line with God's word: **Jeremiah 17:9** (NKJV) "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Possibly less obvious, is a trend as the crisis continues, to put oneself first:

- "My safety", "my distance", "my comfort", "my finances", "my job", even, "my feelings".
- Me, myself and I...These words are always linked to selfishness.

Last week we heard about a new level of love. The new commandment from Jesus is to love one another as He loves us. Key to doing this is dealing with self - the me, myself and I. Let's have a look at the word selfish today, become aware of what it does and see how we can overcome it.

MESSAGE

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NKJV) But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.

The day and age we live in, as the signs of the times indicate we are moving closer and closer to the end, is a day of selfishness.

- men will be lovers of themselves.
- without self-control.
- Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

"Having a form of godliness but denying its power". They may look godly but deep down they lack the power that goes with being godly.

These people described in these verses are selfish and self-centered.

- Dictionary.com describes selfishness as: (of a person, action, or motive) lacking consideration for other people; concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure.
- Merriam Webster dictionary states it this way:
 - concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself: seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others.
 - arising from concern with one's own welfare or advantage in disregard of others.
 - Doesn't this sound like the people described in the scripture I just read, 2 Timothy 3:1-5?

As I thought about the word "selfish" this week, I realised we can break the word selfish up into two words and have an "h" left at the end:

- Self – is – (h)

This is a great way to understand the word and to test if we fit into this category. We simply add whatever we are doing after the words "self-is" and it will quickly let us know our whether our attitude behavior at the time is selfish.

I believe this crisis has caused a level of selfishness to creep into our lives and even into the church.

- We are required by law to wear masks. These things are uncomfortable and make us feel claustrophobic sometimes. They are also hot, and for those of us who wear glasses, they can be a constant frustration because they steam up the specs. But, when we give all these reasons as a reason to not wear our mask in public, we are behaving selfishly. How? We are placing our own comfort above the health of others.
- I was in the bank the other day, someone used the distancing to jump the queue. This was an act of selfishness, they put themselves in front of others who had been waiting patiently for longer than them.
- We often see it when driving our cars, where people will cut someone off or hoot at them for not driving at a speed that works for them. Others will take a parking they can see someone else was waiting for.
- We may be so concerned because of our own financial setbacks during this time, that all we can see is our own need and it results in us not focusing on the needs of others. Consequently, we prevent God from using us as a blessing to others.

- In families, there could be a husband or wife who puts themselves first. They may often go out with their friends leaving their spouse and children at home and lonely. They may not assist with household tasks. They may be selfish in the way they use their household income. There are many examples.

Selfishness is all around us, and as God's precious children, we need to guard against it with all our heart. **Proverbs 4:23** (NKJV) Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

Have you been selfish lately? Ask God to reveal it to you by His Holy Spirit.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF SELFLESSNESS

While teaching one day, Jesus was asked, "Who is my brother?" In response, Jesus told this parable:

Luke 10:30-42 (NLT) Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

31 "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. 34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. 37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

This parable teaches us that even those who would normally be our enemy, are our brother. But this parable also gives a great example of what selfishness looks like and what selflessness looks like. His instruction at the end was, "now go and do the same."

- This parable tells us that selfishness is not justified, even if the person needing help is not someone we see eye to eye with.
- The priest and the temple assistant represent religious people, people of standing in the community, and those who one would probably have expected to help and yet they did not.

- Denying someone in need is an extreme example of selfishness!
- It tells us that we shouldn't be afraid of helping others, no matter what people may think of us. Sometimes selfless acts come from the most unexpected places.

This parable is a challenge to us today. What would we do if we faced a similar situation today?

- ***Would we walk on by, pretending not to notice?***
- ***Would we ignore someone in obvious need of help?***
- ***Have we possibly encountered a situation like this and failed the test?***
- ***Or are we like the Good Samaritan? His level of assistance went beyond what one would expect.***
- ***How much would we be prepared to do for a stranger?***

AGAPE LOVE CONQUERS SELFISHNESS

How do we conquer selfishness in our lives?

Ephesians 4:2 (NLT) Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

The word love here is the English for the Greek, "agape". We understand agape love as the God kind of love. Wikipedia defines Agape this way: Agape is a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God"

In Solly Ozrovec's daily devotional, "Your God reigns", he states, "agape-type love entails the disregarding of self. As long as our own egos occupy the central position in our lives, we will never achieve perfect unity. We are thereby rendered incapable of building any real sense of community, forced instead to remain mere individuals who are unable to co-operate with one another".

- "Agape-type love entails the disregarding of self".
- Does our own ego occupy the central position of our life or has that place been reserved for Jesus?
- The God kind of love means that we set aside our selfishness.

Jesus said if we want to follow Him, we must pick up our cross daily. This means we are crucifying and disregarding our own self interests. He is our greatest example of how agape love overcomes selfishness. He set heaven aside and came to His creation to die for us. He laid down His life on the cross in an act of total self-denial so that we could be saved. His amazing words in the Garden of Gethsemane perfectly describe the selflessness required of us if we are to love like Him: **Matthew 26:39** (NLT) He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let

this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

That was an act of total selflessness!

He told us to do the same! **Luke 9:23** (NLT) Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.

If you are struggling with selfishness, victory is possible.

- ***Focus on loving with the God-kind of love – this is the love which loves others as Jesus has loved us!***
- ***Ask God to help you pick up your cross as you follow Jesus,***
- ***Giving up your own way, will, desires and plans.***
- ***Pray this today, “Father, I want your will to be done, not mine”.***

CONCLUSION

We have been challenged to love others as Christ has loved us. When self-centredness and selfishness rule in our lives, we are not capable of attaining this higher form of love and we need to address it.

- We overcome selfishness by living out the God-kind of love, agape love.
- We overcome selfishness by imitating Jesus Christ.
- He is our example – “Not my will be done but Yours”.
- He instructed those who want to be His disciples to daily pick up our cross, deny ourselves and follow Him.
- Who is at the centre today? Jesus, or self?

Let us be like the Good Samaritan, loving others and going the extra mile. Let us be careful that this Corona virus crisis does not turn us into self-focused, self-centred and selfish people who are only interested in our own self-interest. Instead, let us put others first, then we are on track to obeying Jesus command to love others like He loved us.