

The Key to Harmonious Relationships

Philippians 2:4

Introduction:

1. One of the greatest causes for stress in our lives is when our relationships are characterized by friction, contention, and strife.
2. Did you know that this is not God's plan? Consider some verses with me - **Romans 12:18, 14:19; 1 Timothy 2:2; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13**
3. Notice in our text verses 2-3. God does not want our relationships to be characterized by strife and contention, but love, unity, and peace.
4. But verse 4 reveals to us the key. Paul is saying, "Don't be consumed and wrapped up in yourself, but rather look for ways to be a blessing and help to others."
 - Verse 4 in a nutshell - "Put away your selfishness and learn to serve others."
5. We live in a world that shouts, "Me first." Selfishness is a trait that used to be considered rude, but now it is not only tolerated, but in style."
6. Could it be that this is why the divorce rate is 50%? In second marriages, 2 out of every 3 end up in divorce.
7. When you have two people with the attitude "me first," **Job 5:7** might as well be their life verse, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."
8. Paul gives to us the key to harmonious relationships and that is to put away selfishness and live for others. Let's say verse 4 together. How do we put away selfishness and learn to live for others?

We must consider the cause of selfishness.

1. It is not overly complex, but rather simple. Selfishness is ingrained in our natural, fleshly inclination towards sin. **Illustration:** Kids and their toys
2. Why did Eve eat of the forbidden tree? Selfishness. It looked good, she wanted it, so she took that which did not belong to her and ate it. We all come out of the loins of Adam and Eve.
3. The bottom line is that we are selfish because we love ourselves. Jesus said, "*Love thy neighbor as thyself,*" but we shorten it to "love thyself." **2 Timothy 3:1-2**

We must understand the consequences of selfishness.

1. We cannot be followers of Jesus Christ.
 - Notice what Jesus told the twelve during His earthly ministry to Israel. **Matthew 16:24**
 - Likewise, Paul told the church today that we must yield ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. **Romans 12:1**
 - Do you know what the result of this is? **Romans 12:3** - Your thoughts are no longer consumed with yourself, but others.
2. We will miss God's blessing.
 - There is so much joy in giving. **Luke 14:12-14; Acts 20:35**
 - A selfish person is a lonely, miserable person. Somebody who is unselfish and giving is so blessed.
3. We will never be able to demonstrate true love. **Romans 12:10**
 - True love equals sacrifice. True love means giving of yourself.

- How can you demonstrate love to your wife, kids, friends, etc., if you are selfish and self-centered, caring only about yourself and your needs? This doesn't speak love at all.
 - The very essence of love is giving. **John 3:16, 15:13**
4. Contention will follow us everywhere we go.
 - **Proverbs 13:10** - What is the middle letter in the word "pride?"
 - Self-centered and selfish people have problems relationally in all different areas of life (marriage, work, friendships, church, and children).
 - In **2 Timothy 3:1-3**, notice all the sins that stem from selfishness at the top of the list.

We must realize God's command concerning selfishness.

1. Maybe until now you have never really considered selfishness as a sin against God. Maybe you thought, "That's just the way I am. Everybody is selfish."
2. Did you know that once we are saved and we know Christ as our Savior, God expects us to put away selfishness? Selfishness is part of the old man, not the new man that you are in Christ. **Romans 15:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:15**
3. This isn't a **suggestion** from God, but a **command**. God desires for us to put away selfishness and put on the fruit of the Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23**

We must apply the cure to selfishness.

How do we develop an "others first" attitude in a "me first" world?

1. Accept Christ as your personal Savior.
 - Selfishness is natural to our fleshly instincts, but loving sacrifice is supernatural and can only come from God's Spirit living inside of us. **1 Corinthians 6:19**
 - Christ was the ultimate servant, and when His Spirit lives within, you have a supernatural power source to overcome selfishness.
2. Allow God's Holy Spirit to fill you.
 - There are two ways to live the Christian life. We can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit or we can be filled (controlled) with the Spirit. **Ephesians 5:18**
 - When we are depending on Christ and obeying God's Word, the Spirit fills us and Christ lives through us and loves others through us.
 - When we are living through our own power and strength, we grieve God's Spirit and we are self-centered, selfish, and consumed with what will make us happy.
3. Pray about areas in which you struggle with selfishness.
 - Be honest with God - "God, help me in this area of my life. I am selfish, but I don't want to be. Help me to be more aware of when I am being selfish and may I have Your heart to serve others."
4. Parents, help your children to drive out selfishness.
 - Do not tolerate a selfish spirit and don't encourage a self-centered life in your kids.
 - Teach them at a young age that joy comes through giving and serving others.
 - Teach them what Christ taught in **Matthew 20:26-28**.