

So, as I began to prepare for today, I was wondering what to speak on, and so I thought I'd spend the next little while just talking all about me. What I mean is that today we are going to think entirely about ourselves. Now you might be thinking to yourself well that's not very Christian like – it's not what you expect to hear in church, is it? Usually it's all about what we can do for others and not ourselves. And yet today's world is very much centred around a me me me culture – it's about what the world can do for me.

Today we live in an age of the selfie. We all know what selfies are. We all have phones that take selfies. And according to Google, 92 million selfies are taken every single day. Certainly in the younger generation there's a preoccupation with taking photos of oneself. So why is this so common today?

Well, I think it's a fun thing, and so I wouldn't want anyone to think that it is entirely unhealthy. However, in our youth generation, it's very unusual for them to post images of themselves on social media if they are not looking their very best. The lighting needs to be just right, the hair and the lips need to be just right so as to get the best image. It's actually a fine line before selfies eat into the issues of self-esteem, wanting to fit in with the crowd, and this can become a dangerous spiral.

But there definitely is an obsession today in many people about how one looks, or what can the world do for ME, or what about MY opinions. There is definitely a cultural of SELF. But for the followers of Jesus, we are meant to be counter-cultural.. We are the antithesis or the opposite of everything the world thinks is important. It was GK Chesterton who wrote, "We do not want a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world." So how can we ensure that we don't become so wrapped up in ourselves like everyone else today?

In our reading today from Romans 15, I want us to explore how we as believers overcome living a life where we focus on ourselves. And here's how our passage today opens – verse 1 – "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves". It's no longer about what is in it for me, but rather about how I am making a difference for others.

But before we get into this, let me pray  
PRAY

So I want us to think of four steps that we can apply to our daily living, which move us away from thinking about ourselves so much. We are going to think about our PATIENCE with others, next we will look at who is our ultimate EXAMPLE, then our need to STUDY what God's word instructs us, and then finally consider HARMONY with each other.

## **PATIENCE**

But let's begin with the first - patient activity. We are to be patient with others, in fact patient with those that are weak. Remember that the context of the earlier chapters was that Paul is dealing with a new church that has differences because the Jews had been around as God's chosen people for generations and generations. But now the Church of God included Gentiles also. And so even though they are all together, the Jews still think they are more important. And so I think Paul is saying to them – you think you're strong? Ok, if that's how you feel, if that's your arrogance, then that's fine but our new way of living means that you now have to put your interests to one side as you care for the others who

you still consider as weaker and less important. Paul is saying that we have got to be patient with each other. We have got to bear with one another.

Bearing with one another means to carry a burden with. We are to carry the load, and help him or her work through that to where it's no longer a burden. So who today can we come alongside? If we are to be a church that welcomes everyone in, then we can't group ourselves into our comfortable corners. We have got to work at spreading ourselves around in the body. So here's a test. When was the last time that you chose to sit beside someone that you don't know here? That's right – never, because all of us prefer our routine. Or when was the last time that you chose to not come to this Church service but decided to come to the other church service so as to meet other people in our church family? That's right, for many of you the answer is never. Yes it's very comfortable to be around those who we can connect with, but how then do we expect us to be united? Here's how Paul puts it in Philippians 2, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others".

Paul is instructing to move away from thinking about our needs all the time, and start putting others before us, being patient with each other.

### **JESUS – OUR EXAMPLE FOR LIVING**

So you might already be thinking that this is so hard, and you're right, but the good news is that we have an ultimate example, and that is Jesus which is our second point. Paul says to us in verse 3, "For even Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." This is a direct quote from Psalm 69:9.

And he's quoting that to simply prove the point that Jesus' whole life was marked by selflessness. Not selfishness, selflessness. He wasn't selfish at all. Selfless living. Jesus, at one point said, "I always do those things that please the Father." Every time I read that verse I think, I wish I could say that. But I can't.

I can't, in all honesty, say I always do those things that please God. Frankly, I probably won't be able to even do that before I get home today. But I want to. I aim to. That is my desire. He is our example. Jesus said, "I always do those things that please the Father."

But then he said this. He said, "For the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." In other words, Jesus' entire life was not a selfish life, but a selfless life. When performing the ultimate act of love for salvation, he thought about others. Have you ever realised that if Jesus had thought about himself at all, he never would have gone to the cross. In fact, he never would have come to the Earth.

And so, for us, we have the example of Christ to follow. If we want to move away from the me me me culture, then we have to conform to Christ. The default position of every human being, is to serve yourself. Look out for number one. It's all about me. And so we are never more like Satan than when we serve ourselves, when we talk about ourselves and what is going on in OUR family, our jobs, our lives. But we are never more like Jesus than when we serve others, when we always give glory to God, when we put ourselves second.

I'm sure you have all come across the WWJD bracelets – it stands for What Would Jesus Do? But actually whilst they have been a thing for the past 30 years, the idea of following the

path of Jesus has been around much much longer. And for us a practical exercise each day is to consider this :

Before you do anything, before you make any choice in your business, in your family, in your home, in your social life, in how you use your money, just ask yourself the question what would Jesus do. And when you have a conversation, make a point of giving glory to God alone and not yourself.

And even if you fail, which we all do, it will get you thinking more about placing your focus and attention on others before yourself.

## **DEVOTED TO STUDY**

So practice patience, follow the example of Jesus, and now Paul teaches us about study. Look at what Paul says after referring to Jesus. Verse 4 he says this, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope”.

What Scripture was Paul referring to here? Well it was what we know as the Old Testament. The New wasn't written at this stage. So Paul is telling this early church that those scriptures are there to teach them how to live.

So the obvious question for us is this – why is studying the scriptures going to be important to overcoming our issue of self-centredness and our me, me, me culture? Well it's because it reprograms us, that's why. As I read the Bible, my mind, my thinking gets reprogrammed. I move from my default mode, which is selfish thinking, selfish orientation, thinking about just myself, my needs, me, planet me. And I start thinking about what God wants and how to please others.

As I read, I become God oriented and others oriented. It reprograms me. Daily doses of this scripture help us see clearly. We need the Bible in order to see clearly. Because your vision and mind will get fuzzy and foggy if we just watch TV and stare at that stupid little Instagram feeds, or read books that frankly fill us with other people's opinions. Only scripture will provide you with the lens from which to look at how to deal with things in life, and how to interact with others in a God directed way. Now I'm not saying that we can't read or look at anything else. But if we measure the amount of time we spend in God's word every day compared to the time we spend on everything else, we then have the answer to why we are not able to deal with relationships or decisions. It's because we are addressing these things with our own mindset.

And Paul says that through the scriptures and the study of them, and the encouragement it brings us, it provides us with hope. So how can you make the study of the scriptures a priority? How can we double the number of bible study groups in our churches? The answer is when all of us make it a priority in our lives.

So let's finish as we look at the forth mechanism for overcoming self-centredness, and that is harmony.

## **HARMONY**

Verse 5-7 “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God”.

Hear that – we are to have the same attitude towards one another – we are to have one mind – we are to accept one another, and through that we bring praise to God. So the

converse of that is that if we don't have the same attitude, if we have differences that mean we don't accept one another, then we are not bringing praise to God.

Remember what I said a few weeks ago – stop sweating the small stuff. In other words, decide whether our differences really are worth fighting over. There will be things that we have differing opinions on, but those are not things to divide us.

Remember that unity does not mean uniformity. It does not mean we're going to see eye to eye on every topic, every subject, every issue. That is impossible. The main thing however is to keep the main thing the main thing. The main thing is Jesus, the biblical Jesus. The main thing is that God's word cannot be altered or interpreted to suit a modern culture. The greatest form of harmony is when we look past our differences and we glorify God. So thank the Lord that he gives us patience to be able to work with our brothers and sisters through these differences.

Folks we all know that the easy way to live life is to put me before you. And I know many times I have thought that I would have such a better life if I just put my needs before serving God. But that ultimately will not make me happy. The Christian way of life is and should always be you before me. It's harder to do but it's the only way to bring glory to God. So what's that going to look like for you as you leave here today? What will putting the other person first before yourself look like within this church family? What will putting the other person first before yourself look like when it comes to serving God in his church? What will putting the other person first before yourself look like in your daily life? How do we each move away from thinking about me and turning it around to them.

Remember that the default position for everyone here and in our world is me before you, but the Jesus position is you before me. May we look to rearrange our lives so that others can become our focus – that we learn to be patient with others who maybe we don't naturally associate with, may we look to Jesus as our ultimate example of service, may we soak ourselves in prayerful study of scripture to help us see how God desires for us to live, and may there be a harmony among us as we strive to live together even in difference. Let me close in prayer.