

Christian Essentials

"If You Miss Everything Else, Don't Miss These"

Part II - Love People

Introduction for Leaders

I've got two possible video clips from "The Grinch" and "A Christmas Carol." Rent one or both ahead of time if you choose to use them. Since this week seeks to motivate students to love and serve others, you might want to plan a service project that they could sign up for afterwards. You could also use this as an opportunity to promote a mission trip. Further, consider ending with an assignment much like the first week, asking them to think of specific ways to love and serve people during the week and reporting back on it next week. Next week could be further motivation with specifics on how to live out this second part of the Great Commandment: how to love and serve people.

Purpose: By the end of this session, my students should be motivated to serve others rather than themselves.

Introductory Review

Discussion: Last week we began with a discussion of "Essentials CD's." Does anyone remember what an "Essentials CD" is? Someone explain it and how that ties in with "Christian Essentials"?

That's right. It's easy to stray away from the main thing in our spiritual lives. We can get into using our gifts for God, giving money to God, being cool in the youth group, but still miss out on the main thing - the Christian Essentials. Let's read the verse one more time where Jesus spelled out the Christian Essentials for us (ask for a volunteer):

Matthew 22:34-40.

But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the great and foremost commandment.

And a second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

A main characteristic in common to both of these two sides is **both are focused outward**. Love God; Love People. It's not about us; it's about others. We're talking about an essentially selfless life, where our excitement is found more in giving than receiving. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

...and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (II Corinthians 5:15)

Now, at first it seems like Jesus is asking us to make some huge sacrifice. He basically wants me to change from getting up each morning asking, "What's in it for me? How can I make me happy today" to begin waking up saying "How can I make God and others happy today?"

Discussion: Why would this be such a hard commitment to make? Why would you argue that it's still reasonable to decide to live for God and others?

This may sound really weird, but there are some really good selfish reasons to live a selfless life. In other words, God tells us to live a selfless life because it's really the most satisfying and rewarding and joyful life we could live. People who put their own happiness first end up miserable. People who put other people's happiness first find happiness themselves. So, if I'm wisely selfish, I'll live for others in order to get the most out of life myself. As Jesus said, you've got to die in order to really live.

Four Good Selfish Reasons to Live a Selfless Life:

1. Do you want fullness of joy? Then live for others.

Why do you think people live selfish lives? Basically, they think it will make them happy. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be happy. They're just going about it the wrong way.

Illustration: *Imagine for a moment that you're an idiot and don't understand how lights work. Walking into the youth room you find that the light isn't turned on. So you immediately go to the light to try to make it turn on. **What's the problem with that?** Right. In order to turn the light on, you don't go for the light. You go to the light switch. (Use this as an object lesson. Have a student act like an idiot and try to turn on the youth room light by going straight to the light. He's saying to himself things like, "Now how can I get this light on?" "Maybe if I just turn the bulb harder." "Maybe it needs some W-D 40 to oil it." "Duct Tape! It will fix anything!")*

In the same way, you don't go looking for happiness and find it sitting somewhere. You find it by going to the switch. The switch to true happiness is making others happy. It's getting up in the morning and asking, "How can I encourage someone today? What can I do to make someone's life better today?"

It's okay if you don't believe me yet. To most students it probably looks like a lot of the selfish people at school are the most happy. But after you live more of life, you begin to see the misery inside most of those people. Here's an example:

Illustration: *Evangelist Billy Graham tells of a time that he and his wife Ruth visited an island in the Caribbean: "One of the wealthiest men in the world asked us to come to his lavish home for lunch. He was seventy-five years old, and throughout the entire meal he seemed close to tears. 'I am the most miserable man in the world,' he said. 'Out there is my yacht. I can go anywhere I want to. I have my private plane, my helicopters. I have everything I want to make me*

happy. And yet I'm miserable as hell." We talked with him and had prayer with him, trying to point him to Christ, who alone gives lasting meaning to life.

Then we went down the hill to the small cottage where we were staying. That afternoon the pastor of the local Baptist church came to call. He was an Englishman, and he too was seventy-five. A widower, he spent most of his free time taking care of his two invalid sisters. He reminded me of a cricket--always jumping up and down, full of enthusiasm and love for Christ and for others. 'I don't have two pounds to my name,' he said with a smile, 'but I'm the happiest man on this island.'

'Who do you think is the richer man?' I asked Ruth after he left. We both knew the answer." (Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham, p. 697)

Joy comes from a relationship with Jesus - focusing on Him and others rather than yourself. As Jesus said,

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)

As someone said, "joy" is spelled:

Jesus first
Others second
You last

Caution! While selflessness leads to happiness, being a doormat leads to misery. **In your opinion, what's the difference in being selfless and being a doormat?**

A Doormat - does everything that everyone wants him to do in order to try to please everyone. Since he can't please everyone, he's stressed and miserable.

A selfless Person - tries to do what's best for everyone. If a person asks for help but should really help himself, the selfless person might refuse to serve.

On John 15:11 - "Their love for others must therefore be a sacrificial love. But the practice of that love would never be a joyless duty. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him, and part of that joy lay in the knowledge that His disciples, in obeying the commands He had given them, would find in their obedience the fullness of their own joy." (Tasker) "We can share His joy, and as we walk in His blessed steps, following Him as our pattern, abiding in Him and in His love, our joy in Him will be full. We rejoice with Him in the things in which He rejoices." (Gaebelein)

Illustration: You'd have thought that Elvis Presley had it all. He was called "The King" by millions of adoring fans, had tons of money, girls, and friends to help him with every aspect of his life. But inside, he was often empty and miserable. Why? His stepbrother and closest friend, Rick Stanley, observes that Elvis "was brought up to find his fulfillment in pleasing others. Not in serving them, but pleasing them. There is a difference. People who are motivated to please others rarely have their need to love and be loved met. Their lifelong search for that kind of fulfillment is often tragically unsuccessful." (Rick Stanley, Caught in a Trap: Elvis Presley's Tragic Lifelong Search for Love, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1992, p. 21)

How tragic! Remember, we're not out to *please* everyone, but to *serve* them. There's a huge difference.

Video Clip: "The Grinch." Show a clip from the first of the movie about how miserable he was in his selfishness. Then, a clip from the end where he saw the "Who's" experiencing the joy of Christmas even without the gifts. His heart grew and he experienced joy himself. If you don't have the video, just get kids to share about the movie.

2) Do You Want Eternal Rewards?

Ignorantly selfish people try to get happiness here on earth at any cost. The wisely selfish go for spiritual rewards both here and for eternity. Why not go for happiness that lasts forever?

"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:4)

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19,20)

3) The Devastation of a Selfish Life.

Diedrick Bonhoffer wrote a great book called "The Cost of Discipleship," warning us against casual Christianity. Great book. But another one could be written called "The Cost of Un-Discipleship," warning us about the cost of a selfish, ungodly life. As the Apostle Paul warned us,

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." (Galatians 6:7)

Selfish people become miserable; I don't care how much money they have.

Illustration: *Howard Hughes was the wealthiest American of his time. He could have anything he wanted. Since he liked fresh squeezed Orange Juice, he had it flown in each morning from California. When the ice cream shop had discontinued a flavor he liked, he paid thousands of dollars to have the company make a new batch. Since he despised popular entertainer Frank Sinatra, he didn't want him performing in his town of Los Vegas. So, he bought the hotel where he was performing just so that he could kick him out!*

You'd think that he'd be supremely happy. But he was miserable. He loved things and used people. His closest associates despised him. His latter years found him living a lonely and tortured existence.

Conclusion

Listen, if you wake up each morning thinking "What's in it for me?" and go through the day trying to have fun at other's expense, get out while you can. It's a dead end existence. You're trying to turn on the light at the wrong place. You're headed for misery. But it's not too late to escape. Earlier we saw how "The Grinch" made the change. Another incredible change was made by "The Scrooge." (You could use a clip here as well.) Do you remember his story?

Ebenezer Scrooge, consumed by his greed lived a lonely, joyless life. People meant nothing to him.

But after three spirits reveal to him the misery he's caused others and the way others despise him, his life is forever changed. He begins to empathize with others, forgetting about himself and meeting their needs. By turning outward, he finds an incredible joy he never knew. Here's how Dickens describes the changed man:

Do you lack joy? Perhaps you need to learn from Ebenezer Scrooge the joy of giving.

"He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk – that anything – could give him so much happiness... Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them... His own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him."

I know that it's scary to make this huge shift in life - from living for self to living for God and others. But as one person in a recovery group said,

When I turned myself over to God, I took my life out of the hands of an idiot.

I want to give you that same opportunity tonight.

Concluding Discussion: In small groups, discuss some specifics of how you can live a selfless life this week. Dismiss from your group with a prayer for God to help you to live for Him and for others.

(If your group is short of ideas, or if you want to give them a few ideas to jump-start them, here are a few: before you leave this room meet someone you don't know and be nice to them, wake up each morning thinking what you can do for others. Think first of your home: what can you do for mom, dad, brothers and sisters? Who's someone at school that others don't pay attention to that you could encourage? Is there a sick or elderly person in the neighborhood that you could help with yard work or other practical matters? What can we do for others at church?)