

Keeping Others' Interests in Mind

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Have you ever noticed how God never asks us to do something that He has not modeled for us? We are told to pray without ceasing, and Jesus prayed so much that His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. We are told to assemble together, and we see Jesus with others in the Temple and in their homes. We are told to be gracious and merciful, and anyone familiar with the Gospel would know of God's grace and mercy to us. We are told to give, and God gave us His Son and spiritual gifts through which we can serve Him.

In fact, God's dealings with us form a model for how we are to deal with each other. We clearly see this fact in Paul's letter, from prison, to the church in Philippi:

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:1-5 NASB)

Christ comes alongside us in our life situations. In love and through His Word, He whispers words of comfort and encouragement to us. He sent His Holy Spirit who indwells our very bodies. He could have just looked in the mirror and told Himself how great He was, but He was always ministering to others. He made water into wine at the wedding in Cana when it had run out. He fed the 5,000 men (some estimate that if women and children were included, that it may have been as many as 15,000) when they needed food. He visited the unpopular tax collectors. He raised a widow's son from the dead, touched a leper, and wept with two grieving sisters who had lost their brother a few days earlier. It's almost impossible to find Jesus alone, and even then, in most cases we find Him praying for others. The awesome God of all creation stoops to become a baby to show us, in terms that we mere mortals can grasp, what God is like. Even as He fulfilled His mission, He prays for those who had placed a crown of thorns on His head, who had beaten Him, who had scourged and spit upon Him, and who had crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Paul's words to us are, in short, "Do the same thing. Be like Christ."

It's a fairly straightforward concept to be like Christ. If we are not this way, the causes listed in the above passage are characteristics that we all are familiar with. We can see them in others, and if we are honest, we can see them in ourselves: selfishness, empty conceit, and a lack of humility. We saw them in Satan when he imagined himself to be like God. We saw them in Eve and in Adam when they imagined that God was not good and that He was holding out on them and when they acted, independent of Him, in taking and eating of the forbidden fruit. We saw them in David's sin with Bathsheba and in Peter's bold claims (along with that of all the other disciples) that he would never deny Christ. They are behind our desire to hold positions of leadership to lord it over others rather than to serve. They are imbedded in every lack of consideration for the cure seen in Christ's example. What is that cure? Paul said, "With humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." In short, we are to have the attitude of Christ — the one He most graphically exemplified when He submitted to the Father to the ignominious death on the cross.

Many of you have given and labored so sacrificially — looking out for the interests of others. You have taught, administrated, mowed lawns, cleaned, visited people in the hospital, cooked meals, led mission trips and Vacation Bible Schools, hosted a small group, ushered, and a whole host of other ministries with others in mind.

How else can we look out for the interests of others? **First, we can let our yes be yes.** If we say we will do something, make sure we do it or take responsibility to get someone to do it for us if we cannot. Others counting on us will be encouraged rather than disappointed that we did not show up and then scrambling to fill the void. Let us keep our commitments. **Second, show up on time.** We show up on time for work or for movies. Let's not shortchange the praise we give to God or offend those who have prepared to lead us in worship by showing up late for worship. Let us not keep parents and children waiting for teachers to show up. Get up a little earlier. Plan for interruptions or "disasters" so when they come we can still be where we have said we would be when we said we

would be or when we are suppose to be. **Third, volunteer.** When someone or some ministry is in need of help, whether it is mowing, cleaning, teaching, childcare or cooking a meal, think what it is like for someone trying to recruit others for a ministry. How many calls would you like to make, and how many times would you like to be told no? Say yes when you can, and the recruiter's job will be a lot more enjoyable. **Fourth, share your faith?** You may be a sower, or one who waters, or one who reaps the harvest, but imagine what it will be like in heaven when someone thanks you for introducing them to our Savior.

The list could go on, but do not miss the point. Christ has done so much almost always with others in mind. Let's make sure that we are not looking out for our own interests, but also for the interests of others, too. May God get the glory when we do!