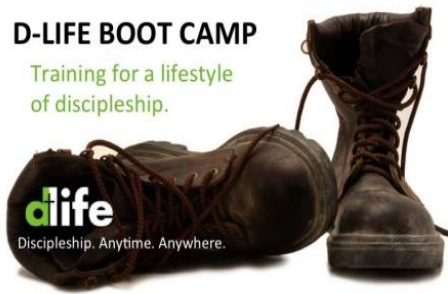


D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

Training for a lifestyle
of discipleship.



Keeping it Real

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Pastor Dale L. Crawley Sr.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

Rev. Deborah Crawley, Teacher
Sis. Tammi Crummy, Asst. Teacher

SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Self-centeredness is the source of so much of what we experience. There is a verse in Proverbs 13 that you really ought to look up, because you wouldn't believe it if you didn't read it in your own Bible. Verse 10 says, *"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."* Many people at first would take issue with this and say, "Wait a minute. Pride can't be the only thing that causes contention or strife. Proverbs 17:14 says that contention is the beginning of strife, so strife has to be caused by more than just pride. It's what so-and-so has done to me." Others will say, "You don't understand; this is just the type of person I am." No, the scripture says that *only* by pride comes contention. It's not one of the leading causes; it's the only cause. Some people again would take issue and say, "I've got all kinds of problems, but pride isn't one of them. If anything, I've got such low self-esteem, there's no way anybody can accuse me of pride."

We have to redefine what pride is. It's not just thinking you're better than somebody else, but in the simplest terms, it is seeing yourself as the center of everything. Self-centeredness is really the root of all pride. In Numbers 12:2, Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother, came against him, criticizing him because of an interracial marriage, saying, *"Hath the Lord indeed spoken only to Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?"* The Scripture then says in parentheses in verse 3 that Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth. Instead of taking offense at what they said, he began to pray and intercede for them.

THE PHARISEE WITHIN

In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Notice what he says about the Pharisee:

"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not

like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’” (Lk. 18:11-12 NASB)

He is praying to himself. He’s boasting about his greatness compared to the so-called bad people of society. He’s even so bold as to look down and point out the guy on his knees next to him! Then, in his hypocrisy, he publicly proclaims his self-righteous fasting and tithing! This man is over-the-top.

The Pharisee clearly failed to see his own sinfulness in the presence of the Holy God. He wasn’t humbled by the presence of a holy God. He chose showmanship and flexed his tiny spiritual muscles instead. When we are truly in the presence of God, we may notice others’ sins, but as Isaiah spoke, “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5 ESV). When we become expert plank-pullers, we won’t be so preoccupied with others’ splinters (Matt. 7:3-5).

WORLDLY GRIEF

Self-centeredness paints up in humble garb as well. We definitely ought to look into hearts and say, “I am deeply grieved by my sin!” However, if we spend too long there, we will end up caught in a cycle of morbid introspection.

Jared Mellinger aptly describes this sort of introspection in his book *Think Again*:

“There is a kind of introspection that sucks the life out of our souls. It steals the joy God intends for us to receive through knowing him. It blinds us to the beautiful realities of the world God has made and numbs us to the generosity of his many good gifts. It can torture us, but it cannot purify us.”

Morbid introspection may be a sign of worldly grief—a tearful response to sin that is more concerned with the earthly and relational impacts of sins than with our offense against God. It doesn’t take us to the foot of the throne of grace where we have Jesus interceding for us (Rom. 8:34 ESV). It doesn’t produce “a repentance that leads to salvation,” an eagerness to be cleared from sin in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 7:10-11 ESV). Unlike godly grief, worldly grief never leads to indignation toward sin, fear of God, zeal to put sin to death, or a readiness to see that sin crushed—which happened at the cross. It draws us into ourselves like a vacuum.

Rather than look to our Savior, we dwell on our sin.

Rather than our Redeemer, we gaze at our repentance (or lack thereof).

Rather than grace, we stare at our grief.

There is a better way.

THE TAX COLLECTOR WITHIN

In Jesus's parable, the scum of the earth tax collector gives us hope. He doesn't have accomplishments to boast about before God. He is in a profession generally known to be corrupt. Yet, he doesn't navel-gaze at his sinfulness only to walk away without forgiveness. Instead, this tax collector confesses his wickedness and clings to Jesus. He looks away from himself and exemplifies both seeing our sin and seeking our Savior:

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” ([Lk. 18:13 ESV](#))

His humility and godly grief are on full display. He is standing far off, not feeling worthy to be close to others. He would not even lift up his eyes to heaven because he felt totally unworthy of God's attention and presence. He beat his breast because he felt the weight of his sinfulness. If Jesus had stopped here, we would see a man who is deeply grieved by sin. We may even be left wondering if his grief was godly or worldly. Jesus doesn't leave us hanging.

Here's the game-changer in this parable: when the wicked tax thief sees his sin, he cries out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” ([Lk. 18:13 ESV](#)). Unfortunately, some translations don't give us the full weight of this verse. Unlike the Pharisee, this tax collector is so concerned with only his sin that he says, “be merciful to me, *the* sinner” (NASB, emphasis mine). He cries out to God for mercy because he knows that God's mercy is his only hope.

As Jesus was being crucified, He was able to turn to the very people who were crucifying Him and say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He didn't control those people but instead had control over Himself. It's self-centeredness that makes us angry. Jesus didn't come here for Himself, but He so loved the world that He came here for us. He thought of His mother as He hung on the cross and spoke to one of His disciples about taking care of her. The reason Jesus was able to forgive and operate in love—in the midst of intense agony, injustice, and everything that came His way—was because He was not self-centered.

It's your own selfishness that makes you angry, yet the Scripture says you're supposed to be dead to yourself. If I had a corpse in front of me, I could insult it, kick it, spit on it, or ignore it, but if it's truly a corpse, it wouldn't respond. The reason you respond the way you do to the things around you is not because of those external things but because of what's on the inside of you. You will never be so strong in faith that you can remove all obstacles and everything that rubs you the wrong way, but you can deal with yourself. You can come to a place where you make Jesus Lord of your life and love Him, His kingdom, and other people more than you love yourself. You'll find that when you do that and deal with self that the strife and contention in

your life will cease.

The Solution to Self-Centeredness

Most of us would agree that we have become a very self-conscious and self-centered society. The baby boom generation, has been labeled, “The Me Generation.” Generations that have followed have seemingly grown progressively worse in the area of over-emphasizing self. We are preoccupied with ourselves. We shouldn’t be surprised. The Bible told us to expect this to happen in the last days...

2 Timothy 3:1-2 (LB) “... ***In the last days it is going to be very difficult to be Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money.***”

Let’s look at some of the **EXPRESSIONS OF A SELF-CENTERED CULTURE**. There are basically three forms of self-expression in our culture:

1. Individualism | “***Others*** don’t matter!”

“I’ve got to do what’s best for me.” The motto is “Do Your Own Thing”. The theme song is Frank Sinatra’s megahit, “***I Did It My Way.***”

Have you noticed that many of the people in our society are becoming more and more inconsiderate and rude? What’s causing that? Among other things, **individualism**. As the wise man Solomon said, “An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends” (Proverbs. 18:1).

2. Secularism | “***God*** doesn’t matter!”

Most people believe *in* God, they just think He’s *irrelevant*. They’re just not that interested in Him. They ignore Him. They don’t need God – that is, until they do. It’s kind of like what Job said in chapter 21, verse fourteen: “***The wicked tell God to leave them alone. They don’t want to know His will for their lives.***” It’s like, “**God, You stay on Your side of the fence and I’ll stay on mine. You don’t bother me, and I won’t bother You. You handle the world, I’ll handle my own life.**”

King David said in Psalm 10:4, “**A wicked man, in his pride, thinks that God doesn’t matter.**” Can we become so full of ourselves that we don’t have room for God? The answer is **yes**. The problem with a **self-made** man is that he often ends up worshiping his maker, and he lives for himself.

3. Narcissism | “***I’m*** all that matters!”

Narcissism is an epidemic in our country! All that many people are interested in these days is *their* goals, *their* dreams, *their* desires, *their* fulfillment, *their* happiness, and *their* careers. Everything is evaluated by the question, “**What’s in it for me?**” I have become sensitive to the narcissism of these days to the point where themes in certain commercials and ads start to bother me. Like the Twix ad that says, “Two for

me none, for you,” or the Reebok ad that admonishes men to, “Cheat on your girlfriend, not your workout.” I once saw an ad for plastic surgery that encouraged people to “reduce certain parts of your body, enlarge other parts ... you’re worth it!” All that matters is me.

The devastating effects of these “isms” are disintegrating families, superficial relationships, frustration and despair. Superficial relationships are a result of having no time for closeness. People are too busy with their own goals. They can’t afford to let a relationship interfere with *their* career, *their* plans or goals. And the sad result is many lonely people.

If you place yourself at the center of your universe, pretty soon your world becomes very small and meaningless. Self-centeredness never satisfies. It leaves a bitter taste in your mouth – an aftertaste. There’s more to life than just you. If you make *you* the center, if you make *yourself* a little god, you’ll quickly realize life is meaningless. Like Proverbs 28:25 says, “Selfishness only causes trouble.”

If all that’s true, and I believe that it is, then what’s **THE SOLUTION TO SELF-CENTEREDNESS.**

There are three antidotes that have worked for me over the years:

1. **BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS.**

Get interested in other people. Cultivate some friendships. Join a Life Group! You need other people to give you balance so that you’re not so self-centered. You need to make time for relationships for your own psychological health, and your own spiritual health. The apostle Paul wisely said, **“In God’s plan men and women need each other”** (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Caring about somebody else is the fastest way to get your focus off yourself. Build some relationships. One of the purposes of the church is to build relationships so you’re not selfish. It’s called community. I believe that one of the antidotes you need in a selfish society is a church family, a place where you can belong and become and be what God wants you to be.

Doing “church” through the television or *only* online can make for passive people. It’s too easy. There’s no interaction with anybody else. It requires no involvement, no commitment. You don’t have to interact with anybody. **We need in-person community.**

2. **GIVE YOURSELF AWAY.**

Give yourself away through some kind of service. I’m convinced that to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and balanced, everybody needs some form of service on at least a weekly basis, where they voluntarily give themselves away without receiving

any personal benefit in return. I think you need it as a counterbalance to what our culture encourages. **Sign up for an MINISTRY TEAM!**

You have 168 hours each week. God doesn't want you to spend them all on yourself. You need a place of service where you say, **"I'm going to give myself away."** The apostle Paul comes through for us again when he says, "God has ... given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others" (Ephesians 2:10).

What's the word that describes the drive of your life? Money? Success? Fame? Power? Those things will *not* satisfy. Jesus said, **"... Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the good news will ever know what it means to really live"** (Mark 8:35).

If you're not giving your life away, you're just existing. You're not living. Only those who give their lives away in service know what it means to really live. The world says, "Get all you can." Jesus Christ says the exact opposite – **"Give all you can."**

3. PRACTICE SELF DENIAL.

This is not a popular concept. But every day you need to find at least one opportunity where you can choose to do ***the thing of conviction***, rather than ***the thing of convenience***.

in a society where everybody else is saying live only for yourself, think only for yourself, we, as believers, must be different, go against the flow, and not just think of ourselves.

Jesus said, **"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me"** (Luke 9:23). **Daily.** In other words, he must make it a daily habit. Every-once-in-a-while doesn't cut it.

What does it mean to really deny yourself?

Let me give you a few practical answers:

- When you can watch those close to you prosper and succeed without feeling jealous, but rather rejoice in their success, then you know the meaning of "deny yourself."
- When you can see other people reach goals you've failed to reach, and see others receive rewards and recognition that you'd like to have, without being envious, that's denying yourself.

- When you see other people's needs being met while your needs are not, and you don't question God or fail to be grateful for what you do have, that's denying yourself.
- When you choose to serve your spouse or children and put their needs ahead of yours, that's denying yourself.
- When you share your faith at work or school knowing that you may be insulted or put down, that's denying yourself.
- When you don't seek praise or fish for compliments and approval from others, and when you can live without constantly being recognized and applauded, that's denying yourself.
- When you draw out the other person in conversation rather than telling your stories and opinions, that's denying yourself.
- When you tell the truth, even at the risk of personal expense, that's denying yourself.
- When you pay your fair share of taxes while many others are cheating, that's denying yourself.
- When you can accept criticism willingly and learn from it with a teachable attitude, that's denying yourself.
- When you can be content with less than the best of circumstances without griping or complaining, when you can accept interruptions that God places in your schedule and patiently endure irritations, that's denying yourself.
- When people break their promises and let you down, and you refuse to become bitter, when you are misjudged unfairly and your motives are questioned and you don't retaliate, that's denying yourself.
- When you are content to let God settle the score, and content to wait for your reward in heaven, that's denying yourself.

Would you pray this prayer in your heart right now:

***“God, help me to build strong relationships. Help me to find a place of service where I can give my life away. Help me to practice self-denial daily in a culture that says, ‘Think only of yourself’. I pray this in Jesus’ name.
Amen”***