

# SELFLESSNESS

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

In the last lesson, you learned about what fasting was and what a blessing it can be. Have you tried it yet? If you have, did you feel closer to God? If you haven't yet, when will you put it on your calendar? Unless it's scheduled, it probably won't happen. See how your relationship with Jesus will grow as you intentionally fast and focus on Him.

Selflessness is one of the hardest aspects of being a disciple. It's difficult because it's not in our nature. We naturally want to put ourselves first and put everyone else second! But part of being a disciple is doing just the opposite.

I see this internal struggle every day with my two boys. They are awesome kids, but there are regular struggles over toys, Legos, blocks, cars, you name it. It usually starts when one of the boys grabs a toy from the hands of the other boy. Then, I hear something like this. *"HEY! I had that first! That's mine! Quit taking my toys!"* The struggle revolves around getting what they want and disregarding what their brother wants. While it would be easy to just giggle at them and say, "Well, they are just kids," the reality is that adults and all Christians struggle with the concept of selflessness.

There is a story in the book of Acts that shows the struggle of selflessness even in Christian disciples. The story goes that a man (Ananias) and his wife (Sapphira) had a piece of land that they owned. They decided to sell it, and once they found a buyer, they sold it. After they had the money, they decided that they wanted to give the money to God's work and to ministry. But, as they were deciding to give the money away, selfishness welled up in their heart. They stopped thinking about others, ministry, or giving it away, and they started to think about how they would like to keep it for themselves. So, they decided to keep some of the money, and not tell anyone about it. They were selfishly hiding it and keeping it for themselves.

When they brought the money to the Christian leaders, God helped everyone see that they were not only lying about the price that was paid for the land, but everyone saw the selfishness in their hearts. As Peter confronts Ananias, here's what he says.

**Acts 5:3:** "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ some of the money you received for the land?'"

The story closes in a very sad way, because the natural consequence of sin (death) happens as both Ananias and Sapphira die because of their selfish heart.

Selflessness is one of the greatest aspects of discipleship, because it puts others first and honors God in the process. All throughout the Bible, there are verses that help us see the importance of selflessness. Here is one of my favorites that gets right to the point!

**Philippians 2:3-4:** "Do nothing out of \_\_\_\_\_ ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others \_\_\_\_\_ yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Being a follower of Christ revolves around one thing: Mission. We are following Jesus, getting to know Him better all along the way, so that we can help others know Him too. When we are on His mission, we are called to think of others **first** and ourselves **second**.

The concept for selflessness comes from Jesus. You see it in His life as He constantly put others first. He would take time out of His busy schedule to spend time with kids. He'd put sick people ahead of His own needs as He healed them and blessed them. And you can really see Christ's selflessness in these next few verses. Let them be a challenge to your life and your mindset as you try to be selfless.



**Philippians 2:5-11:** "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he \_\_\_\_\_ himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It's hard to read this description of Jesus without seeing His unbelievable selflessness! He was GOD, and yet put humans first, as He was willing to become human. Not only that, but He became human so that He could follow the plan of redemption, die on a cross, and give humans eternal life! That is some crazy selflessness modeled in Jesus' life. He sets the example for how we should live too!

## BASIC POINT

Selflessness is one of the greatest aspects of discipleship, because it **puts others first** and honors God in the process.

For the rest of this lesson, let's get practical. What does selflessness really look like in real life? And we are going to let the Bible help us identify ways that we can be more like Jesus and more selfless.

**Luke 6:35:** "But love your \_\_\_\_\_, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

One of the easiest ways to be more selfless is in your relationships. Whether that is with your co-workers, your neighbors, your friends, your parents, your siblings or anyone that you know. Being selfless with them is a perfect place to start. Let them "get their way." Let them win! Let them choose...

**John 15:12-14:** “My command is this: \_\_\_\_\_ each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

Loving others is being selfless. When we love others, we are exemplifying selflessness. Love is really giving of yourself to others. It’s an act of selflessness that shares what you have with others. There are so many in life that don’t experience love, and when we love others, it is giving selflessly from what we have. Jesus even takes it one step further by saying that the greatest example of selfless love is laying down your life for someone. When I hear these words, it challenges me. Would you die for someone else? Would you be that selfless with your love?

**1 Thessalonians 5:15:** “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ for each other and for everyone else.”

Wow! Now this is getting really practical! Selflessness means forgiving one another as well as not paying someone back for what they did to you! That means not holding a grudge. That means not remembering bad things that someone did. Selflessness means to forgive and forget and to respond with something that is good!

**Proverbs 3:27:** “Do not withhold \_\_\_\_\_ from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Selflessness, “you first, me second,” means that you will always think of the good for someone else, and if you can give them “the good stuff,” then you give it to them! Selflessness might even mean that you sacrifice what you have for the sake of someone else.

**Galatians 6:2:** “Carry each other’s \_\_\_\_\_, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Helping someone else in their struggle, even though you have your own struggle, is a way to be more selfless. It’s putting the issue that they are having in front of your own. And as you do this, you are fulfilling the law of Christ. What does that mean? Well, I think it fulfills the law as Jesus summarizes the 10 commandments, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” When you selflessly carry someone else’s burden, you are honoring God too!

Living a selfless life where you always think of others first and yourself second is an unbelievable challenge! It even sounds impossible, if your focus is to just be selfless. That’s why I believe our focus should not just be on being selfless, but our focus should be on knowing Jesus better. And then, as we focus on Him, our lives will be transformed from selfish to selfless.

One of my favorite authors, Ellen White, writes in the book, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 301:

“By beholding we are to become changed; and as we meditate upon the perfections of the divine Model, we shall desire to become wholly transformed, and renewed in the image of His purity. It is by faith in the Son of God that transformation takes place in the character, and the child of wrath becomes the child of God.”

May we continually fix our eyes on Jesus, yearning to know Him more, and as we do, our lives will change into the selfless disciples that He desires.

## FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

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1. Why is being selfless so difficult?
  2. Who is the most selfless person you know, and what do they do that is so selfless?
  3. How can you focus on Jesus more?
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### LESSON 6: SELFLESSNESS

