

Love in a Selfish Society

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[0 : 0 0] Now, let me start with a question. Not the same question as was on the screen, but a slightly different one. And the question is this. When did you first realize that you lived in a selfish society?

That people around you are basically selfish? When did you first realize that? Now, I see maybe a few surprise or stunned looks.

But I can understand that if you grew up in a family like mine, then you probably wouldn't realize. You probably had loving parents who cared and protected you, put your needs before theirs.

They made sure you had enough to eat before they did. They bought you new clothes while they kept wearing old ones. They stayed up late into the night when you were sick.

If you had parents like that, then you might not realize that the default position of most people is towards selfishness. That is, until you started school.

[1 : 1 0] And then you encountered that one student who hogged the swing and never gave others a go. Or perhaps it was that boy in class who keeps asking questions and making everyone else wait to be dismissed.

They wanted to go out to play, but all he wanted to do was get his questions answered. Not because he didn't know the answers, by the way, but so that the teacher would know how smart he was. Of course, it just keeps going, doesn't it?

At uni, when so-called friends refuse to share their notes. At work, when colleagues are possessive about their clients, you know, don't talk to them because they're afraid that if you talk to them, suddenly their clients will become your clients.

Or rather, the other way out, your clients will become their clients, that's right. But it doesn't really matter where you look because this disease of being selfish is actually pervasive.

It's actually the default mode of every individual, organization or nation. I mean, just take a look at the nations and global politics. It seems quite complex, but actually a lot of it can be explained just by realizing that nations, people, politicians are motivated by self-interest.

[2 : 3 1] The phrase, it's not in the national interest, sounds very noble, doesn't it? But it's actually just a fancy phrase for being selfish, isn't it? Take the trade wars between America and China, for instance.

The US started putting up terrorists, and then China responded. And if you listen to Donald Trump's rationale for it, he basically appeals to America's national interests.

He wants to look after American jobs first. Now, it doesn't matter that the economics of it actually doesn't work. But the motivation is clearly a selfish one, isn't it?

Now, lest you think China then is a beacon of selfless virtue, what do you think prompted America's response? Well, if you go back far enough, it was actually China's own protection of its local firms.

Thirty years ago, as part of opening up the country, the Communist Party made it a condition that if foreign firms wanted to access the Chinese market, they had to enter into a joint venture with Chinese firms.

[3 : 43] And here's the bit. They had to share the IP with the Chinese firms. And so these Chinese firms ended up copying and then undercutting the products of the foreign firms.

So that's selfish behavior, isn't it? The Chinese Communist Party knows that to retain power, they had to keep the growing middle class happy.

That meant jobs, cheap goods for the Chinese people. But that, again, is a selfish response from the middle class, isn't it?

So being selfish is pervasive from superpowers all the way down to, if I'm honest, little old me. You know, my daughters kindly tell me all the time how selfless I am, that I'm the best and only dad they have, because I do things for them all the time.

But little do they realize that even when I'm doing things for them, I'm actually being selfish. So I make them walk up the hill outside school to be picked up, so I wouldn't have to be stuck in the jam just outside the school gates.

[4 : 58] I insist they wash their luncheon box straight after they get home, so that I can have a pristine kitchen bench ready to start my dinner prep and maximize my culinary creativity.

And girls, I'm sorry, that's still going to be the case. You'll have to walk up the hill, and you'll still have to clean those luncheon boxes, even though that's selfish of me.

But you see, I end up wanting my own way too, don't I? And I suspect that that's not too different from any of you. All of us are selfish.

It's not that we're incapable of selfless acts. It's just that our default position is to think of ourselves first, our needs, our feelings, and what suits us.

Now, if you're not convinced about that, I want you to imagine yourself driving to work. Would you have much regard for other road users? Or would you see the journey simply from your own perspective?

[6 : 04] I would dare say it's the latter. When you need to change lanes, do you think people should make way for you? But if someone wants to cut into your lane, what do you think?

You say, how dare they cut into my lane? I mean, don't they know I need to get to work on time? But we don't stop to think, do we, that perhaps the other driver needs to get to work too.

Maybe he's even a surgeon, and the lives of their patients are depending on him. Or if it's the bus driver, he has got 50 people to get to work, rather than just poor old me, one person.

No, my needs and my goals are more important than others. And so I think we have to be honest, we're all selfish really. And so together, we make the society we live in a selfish one.

And ultimately, when you take that to its extreme, this selfishness is actually destructive, because it undermines trust. It leaves each of us anxious and fearful, because we're always watching over our shoulders, guarded, defensive, because we know that no one else is looking out for us.

[7 : 25] And we've seen on TV, haven't we, that there are places in the world like this, fortified communities, where people travel around with bodyguards and with guns. And sometimes we see a microcosm of this at our work or study.

Toxic environments, where everything, everyone's dog-eat-dog, no one shares, and people just turn on each other easily. Well, thankfully, we do live in a country where we've managed to curb much of the excesses of our selfish natures.

But don't let that deceive you to think that somehow then, you know, we must be less selfish by nature. It's only because we've made laws and appointed governments to restrain ourselves as a society.

We've delegated to law enforcement bodies the task of keeping us accountable, the tax office, the police force, the council, to keep check on our neighbours and us to make sure that we all don't act selfishly to the disadvantage of others.

But all it takes really is for one selfish act to go unchecked, and eventually it affects everyone. A classic example of this are the nightmare traffic jams that we see in some of the major Asian cities.

[8 : 43] Like a photo of this, I've got one in Asia. Oh. All it takes, isn't it, is for one driver to flood the traffic rules with impunity.

I don't know who started it. It must be the red car, I think. And then before you know it, everybody's like that, right? If he can get away with it, so should I. And then even if you're that one law-abiding resident or traffic person, you can't obey the rules even if you want to, can you?

When it gets like that. Now if trade wars and traffic jams were all we had to contend with, then we'd probably live with it, maybe. But the problem is that, no, the problem of selfishness infects even our personal relationships, don't they?

And that's where I think it's probably the most destructive. Which brings us to the rationale for the series. Because one of the things we need to live well is love.

It's not actually good health or material wealth, but it's loving personal relationships that we need in order to live well. And if you've ever experienced the trauma of relational conflict and breakdown, then you know what you're missing and you'd agree with me.

[10 : 04] That we don't have those loving relationships. Life is pretty horrible. Now if you think back to a previous conflict you had, just think how much of that was actually due to selfishness.

My guess is probably that it did play a part in it, a significant part even. Just think that if there were not selfish parties involved, actually the conflict would have been quite easily resolved.

but no, it's because parties are selfish that things escalate and get worse and worse. Am I not right? And so, as you look at the outline, I argue that love is the only cure to selfishness.

Because to truly love, you have to be selfless. many of you will be familiar with 1 Corinthians chapter 13. That's a favorite passage that we see here at most weddings or many weddings.

Well, let's have a look at it and let's see how Paul describes love. He says, love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud.

[11 : 13] It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. If you look at the list again, pretty much everything here is a description of selfless character.

To be patient, to not envy, to honor others, not self-seeking, forgiving, not keeping a record of wrongs. All this involves putting the needs of someone else or others before your own.

It involves seeking the true welfare of others before yours. And sometimes it even involves laying down your own lives if it came to it.

It doesn't take a genius to get this, does it? We all know how crucial love is for relationships to work and how important relationships then are to life and living well.

[12 : 18] So whether it's husbands or wives, parents or children, or between family and friends, we know that selfish behavior destroys relationships. And truly loving, selfless behavior nourishes relationships and life in general.

So we all get it, don't we? We know this. And yet, even though we know, why is it that we find it so hard to love? Why is maintaining loving relationships such hard work?

Now, I don't make it a habit to watch reality shows like The Bachelor or, you know, Married at First Sight, but often, you know, it just comes on TV.

I can't help it. And as I sort of just catch a little bit of it, I find that all the drama on the show actually arises because the participants misunderstand what true love is.

Have you ever noticed when asked, the contestants always say that they've come on the show to find love? By which they mean, I think, they wish to find someone to love them.

[13 : 32] Someone who can be selfless to them. You almost never hear anyone say that they've come on the show to find someone to love. Do they?

Because if that were the case, they wouldn't need to get on the show, right? There's plenty of people to love wherever they are, to give sacrificially and unconditionally to without having to worry whether they deserve to be loved or not.

No, they come on the show because they want someone to love them, someone that is worthy of loving them. And that's why I think their search for love is often so elusive because everyone comes on the show with a selfish aim to find someone to love them.

But no one is there with the aim of being selfless, is it? They may end up loving someone, but that's only after someone has taken the risk to love them in the first place.

And often when people come on the show, they make things harder for themselves because they come on the show already hurt before. They've been hurt elsewhere and so they come on the show thinking that they'll find someone who will love them without hurting them.

[14 : 48] But that means that they find it hard themselves to be vulnerable to love again. And that's a sad irony I think with many of these shows because being able to love selflessly is actually the healing they need from the past hurts.

But the more that we've been hurt, actually the less able we are to love. Because we don't want to be hurt again, do we? We put up barriers so that we won't get betrayed again.

We've put ourselves out there and there's not been anything in return. So what do we do? We just say, oh, I'm not going to do that anymore. In other words, we become selfish.

We go into self-preservation and self-protection mode when the very thing we need is to love. Now I say all these things because what all this means is that love in a community or society is actually very fragile.

Just like that traffic jam. All it takes is for one person to be selfish and it actually undermines loving relationships and community. And that's why it's so hard to maintain loving relationships and community.

[16 : 02] but tonight I want to you know not I may have played a very bleak picture but I want to share that actually it's not that there's actually hope and if you've come here today you've been hurt in the past or you've struggled to love or be loved then the Bible tells us that there is hope and it's not a faint or flaky hope you know just try it and hope for the best kind of hope but rather it's a certain and secure hope and this was revealed in our New Testament reading by Michelle tonight and I just want to focus on one particular section in that passage which I'll put up on the slide again it says this is how God showed his love among us he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him this is love not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins we can see can't we how God's love is actually true love because it's the very epitome of selflessness now if you're here not familiar with

Christianity then let me explain briefly to you what's it all about that at the heart of the Christian faith is this truly selfless act that God our creator sent his one and only son from heaven into this world to die for us on the cross as John puts it as an atoning sacrifice for our sins God could have chosen to punish us because of our rebellion because we've ignored him because we've hurt him grievously as a human race we've all turned our backs on him he could have chosen to do that but instead instead of judging us God sent his son instead to take our place and the name of his son is Jesus and Jesus himself came willingly in obedience to the father but also because he loves us he too was sacrificial and selfless in his love and it's this great love act of love dying on the cross that allows the world to be reset as it were it's this great injection of love into this selfish world that's powerful enough to dispel all the hate that's built up as a result of our selfishness and it's this love from God that if we receive it allows us and powers us to love others in turn and that's what

John goes on to say in the next paragraph it says dear friends since God so loved us we also ought to love one another no one has ever seen God but if you love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us friends when we receive God's love for us then it truly enables us to love others as well and I know many of you would have experienced this in a small way because when you were young you learned to love because your parents loved you but God's love is tens and thousands of times more powerful than your parents loved we're able to love because of God's love even for those of us who may have missed out on love from our parents when we come to God and receive his love we receive his forgiveness for every wrong that we've committed God gives us a fresh start in life through faith in his son all our failures past present and future are covered by Christ there for us and then we know that God will continue to love us even though we're imperfect and all that creates this immense reservoir of love that fuels and empowers our own love for others and enables us to live for him and that's why

John can say if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us it enables us to love others even when you know as we love we are rejected again or that love is not reciprocated we love without needing validation from others it's nice when we have it but if we don't have it we know that even then God is the one that loves us it's a very robust kind of love isn't it not fragile or contingent nothing like the kind of love that we see in human society today just between human beings it's not plagued by jealousy or insecurity or doubt because the one who loves us is perfect is trustworthy unlike the humans that we tend to love and here in church is the place where we are able to live and love in this way because God's spirit is with us and we can do it with his help now don't get me wrong as Christians or as a church we're not perfect because without God we're just as selfish as anyone in society in fact whenever we forget

God's love for us then our selfish side tends to rear its ugly head again and yet because we know God's love and we're constantly reminded of it through his word we remember it in his death and his spirit is among us to spur us on then even though when we fail and we stutter you know we can repent and we can keep going and keep growing because God is with us and so if you're here today and you're not yet a Christian if you long for love like that then let me encourage you to join us receive Christ put your faith in him and then join the church come and live with us as we learn to love one another and I know that some of you may have been hurt by the church or Christians in the past and I'm not here saying that well I promise that we'll never let you down again nor am I saying that just because of that all your past wounds would be healed immediately but this is where God is and this is where God is able to meet you in his word as you experience his love so come join us even if you're not sure come and talk to me come and find out more how trustworthy this God is who promises to love you but here there's also a catch because if you're hoping to truly live well then you must be willing to love as well that means your goal even as you seek love is to be selfless as well and I think here that's where many people come unstuck because although they want to be loved they're often unwilling to admit that they too have been selfish that they too need to love in order to live well now I know that can be hard if you've tried before and you've been hurt but let me just suggest that if that's you then you know the first step is not to worry so much about being hurt but actually to open up your heart to God first recognize that he's already loved you by sending his son love him first by acknowledging what he's done for you love him by humbling yourself before him and submitting to him as your creator and savior in other words love God first do that vertical thing first love him and once that's done and you know that God loves you then God will begin to work on that horizontal aspect of loving others loving people even who are not perfect and may still hurt you from time to time so yes we live in a selfish society but love is possible even in a selfish society like ours and it's possible because God has already loved us and reached out to us in his son so please if you haven't done that as yet come to him and put your faith in his son let me pray so that he might be able to help us do that father we look into our hearts and as we do that we see that we are selfish by nature we want to be loved and yet are unwilling to be selfless in giving love forgive us thank you that you are able to forgive us because you love us and you have given us your son to us as an atoning sacrifice as we come to know your love help us to love others too heal us of our past hurts in Jesus name we pray amen are

[25 : 28] people please do study at