
SELFISH LOVERS AND SERVANT LOVERS

Part 9 of Real Marriage

Pastor Mark Driscoll | March 11, 2012

SELFISHNESS AND PRIDE

Raise your hand if you're selfish or alive. Okay? The reason I put those together is those are synonyms. If you are selfish, it's because you're alive, and if you're alive, you're selfish. And some of you say, "No, I'm not." You're the most selfish of all, if you do not agree how selfish you are.

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself insofar as selfishness goes? Number one, "I'm Jesus. I'm not selfish at all." Number ten, "I'm really selfish." And then what would your spouse rate you? Probably higher, right?

Selfishness is an innate part of the sinful, fallen human condition. Martin Luther rightly says that sin is the self bending in on the self. So, "It's not all about Jesus. It's all about me. It's not all about you. It's all about me. It's only about me. It's always about me." And it starts when you're little, especially if you don't have good parenting. Your parents can make you the center of the universe.

I'll tell you what happens, selfish people get married, and they have miserable marriages. It's just the way that it works. So, we're going to talk about the juxtaposition between being selfish lovers and servant lovers.

Let me say that under selfishness is pride, and pride is basically this: "I'm more important than you are." You stopped laughing. But that's true, right? Pride is, "I'm more important than you. What I'm doing is more important than you. So, whatever you want, whatever you think you need, whatever you're doing, stop, because me and my situation, activities, proclivities, they're more important than yours. Don't inconvenience me with you. You and I should both agree how important I am." That's selfishness. Undergirding it is pride, and pride says, "I'm more important than you."

If you have that attitude going into marriage, you don't love your spouse, you use them. You don't love your spouse; you use them. "You're here to serve me. I'm not here to serve you." It's selfishness, and it's pride that is the root of so much marital struggle and strife.

So, we're going to talk about pride. And I know some of you, you say, "Well, I don't know about pride. What about self-esteem?" Pride! It's just a cuter word for it. It's marketing. Right? "Well, what about self-actualization?" Pride. "Well, shouldn't you have a positive self-image?" I don't know, pride. We found a clever way to make pride a virtue and not a vice.

The Bible says something very different about pride. In fact, I'll share it with you, all right? So, put a helmet on. We'll read these verses. Proverbs 8:13, "Pride and arrogance . . . I hate." Who says that? God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who knows your thoughts, words, deeds, and motives. That's a scary verse. That's a spooky verse. That's a Scooby-Doo verse, right? That one's troubling.

"I hate—" Some of you say, "What does 'hate' mean in Hebrew?" Uh, hate! He hates it. He really hates it. There's a list of things here in this verse that God hates. One of them is pride. Are you proud?

All right, we'll just keep going. All right, Proverbs 16:5, "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished." "What? But my teacher said I was like a snowflake. I'm one of a kind. I'm special! And I feel like I have a lot of potential, and deep down I'm a good person, and you don't know my heart! And I need to have self-esteem so that I can live a good life!"

"Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished." It's being transformed by the renewing of your mind. It's not taking what the world would tell you, going to the Scriptures and trying to find justification and vindication for it. It's going to the Scriptures and getting the mind of God.

Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." God's plan A is always humility. Plan B: humiliation. If you don't choose the path of humility, you're choosing the path of humiliation.

Additionally, 1 Peter 5:5 and James 4:6—the Bible says this multiple times. This is Peter, the leader of the disciples, and James, Jesus' brother. Some of you say, "Well, that's their opinion." Let me say it again. The leader of the disciples, who was crucified upside-down for Christ, and Jesus' brother, both say the same thing, and it makes the Bible twice. That must mean it's important. Amen?

"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another," and this definitely is applicable to marriage, "for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" Some of you wonder why your life is hard, why you can't make any traction, or why it feels like things are coming together and then they always fall apart. I don't know. There could be any number of reasons, but let me ask you, are you proud? If you're proud, you're fighting

God. You're declaring war on God. That's what it says. God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

How does this play out in marriage? Proud people become selfish lovers, in and out of the bedroom. And what happens invariably is this: If you have two selfish people in marriage, you have a brutal marriage. They're both trying to use one another, abuse one another, take advantage of one another, take from one another. It's a brutal marriage, where there are two proud, selfish people, both trying to take, both trying to use. If you have a marriage where one person is selfish and the other is a servant, you will have an abusive marriage. They give, you take; they serve, you take; they love, you take.

What's your marriage like? Is it two selfish people, two proud, selfish people? Is that why there's so much conflict, why it's so hard and so difficult? You're wondering why the rest of your life isn't coming together. It may be because God is opposing you. He's trying to work on your humility. And if you would humble yourself, he would give you grace. But if you would oppose him, he must give you justice.

Your marriage, number one, two selfish, proud people; number two, a selfish, proud person and a humble servant; or number three, two humble servants. And I would say none of us can ever say, "I'm humble! I did it! I landed the dismount on humility! I'm now humble! Oh, wait, I told everyone. Now I'm proud." Okay, so we can never say we're humble. All we could say, as a friend of mine says, is that we're proud people pursuing humility by the grace of God.

But is the disposition of your marriage someone who is a humble servant—that's what they're pursuing by the grace of God—married to a humble servant? If so, those marriages are enduring, they're endearing, they're friends, they have fun in and out of the bedroom. They love, serve, care for, nurture, encourage one another. Marriage tends to get better. It tends not to get bitter.

So, I want to really hit this issue of pride and humility. I will tell you that this was, for a long time, the big issue in our marriage, because I did honestly believe that what I was doing was more important than Grace and that she should serve me and my life and cause, and I was very proud and very selfish. I'm not saying, "And now I'm not." I'm saying now I'm aware of it.

As I've come to understand this, I see that, yeah, this is off-putting to a spouse. This is someone who is difficult to trust, and be intimate with and enjoy. Because if you're worshiping Jesus, and they're worshiping themselves, and their goal is for you to worship them, it's hard to really ever have a good marriage.

JESUS THE UNSELFISH SERVANT

So, let's look at the Lord Jesus. And what I'm not going to do is say, "I'm humble, and let me tell you about my humility." I will say, "I'm proud with you. Let's look to Jesus." Now, Jesus is the unselfish servant. Would you agree with that? Okay.

Even if you look at, let's say, the book of Isaiah, from Isaiah 40–66, that whole last section of the book, it's all about Jesus as our suffering servant. Seven hundred years before he was born, it was prophesied repeatedly, "He's coming as the humble, suffering, unselfish servant."

And then Jesus comes. God becomes a man. He goes from heaven to earth. He goes from a throne to a manger. He goes from riches to poverty. He goes from hearing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," to "Crucify him, crucify him, crucify him." So, Jesus is the unselfish servant.

I'll give you a few occasions where Jesus teaches on humility and how it relates to servanthood. In Mark 10:43—there's a stupid argument in the Bible. There are more than one, but there's one stupid argument in the Bible that keeps happening with the disciples. They keep arguing in the presence of Jesus which one of them is the greatest. That's amazing.

Now, what Jesus does is he humbly teaches them. That's convicting. Okay. What he doesn't tell them is, "Why would you want to be great? Why would you want your life to count and make a difference?" Instead, he takes their sinful desires, and he redirects them toward holy purposes. He says, "Well, if you want to be great, I'm not actually going to rebuke you for that. I'm going to tell you how to accomplish that."

He says, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." Oh. Well, there's an upside-down world. There's an upside-down world. But this is Jesus who got down and washed the dirty feet of Judas Iscariot, his enemy, who would betray and murder him. You want to be great? Jesus says to be a servant. You want to have a great marriage? Then be a great servant.

Mark 10:45, "The Son of Man," that's Jesus speaking of himself as God in human flesh, "came not to be—" what? "served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus lived without sin. He died on the cross in our place for our sins. He rose for our salvation. That was all of humility. He served us through his suffering. This is amazing.

This is one of the reasons why people didn't even think Jesus could be God. He's humble, not proud. He's poor, not rich. He serves others. He himself is not all about being served. And many rejected him and thought, "Well, certainly, this can't be God. Because if I were God, that's not how I would be." That's why we're not God. We're sinners, and God is holy. That means he's different than we are. He's humble. He's humble.

He "came not to be served." Let me ask you this. Going into marriage, is that your primary motivation? You're going to be served. For those of you who are single, you're incredibly selfish. Your whole world is about being served. From your barista, to your bank teller, to your dry cleaner, it's about being served. We live in a service economy. We pay people to serve us. And the more people we can pay, then the more significant we feel.

And then single people make a list of all the things they want in a spouse, and what it is, "It's a job description for the ways in which you can serve me, if you are lucky enough to be chosen by me to spend the rest of your life with me. Good luck. You're welcome."

Single people need to have a second list: "All the ways I want to serve my spouse; all the things I don't want just from my spouse, but I want to be for my spouse. I want to serve them in this way, and love them in this way, and encourage them in this way." Dear single people, if you're going to have a list, make sure you have two, and make sure that the list of the things that you need to work on is longer than the list of what you are wanting others to do for you, particularly your spouse.

How about those of you who are married? Is this the source of your frustration? Did you even come to hear this message, hoping, "Yes, I hope Pastor Mark tells my spouse to do the stuff I want them to do, especially in the bedroom. Are we at that point in the lecture yet? I was looking at my phone, and I missed the pride stuff, 'cause it seemed unnecessary."

Philippians 2:3-7, "Do—" what? "Nothing." That's a huge category. "From selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." These general principles for Christian living are particularly applicable to the covenant of marriage. Consider your spouse more important than you, more significant than you, a higher priority than you. If you both do this, you'll have a great marriage.

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests—" "Well, that's not what I want to eat. That's not what I want to do. That's not what I want to watch. That's not where I want to go." "Look not only to his own interests." And selfish people want to marry somebody just like them so they always get their way. "I like Chinese food and rock climbing and, yeah, never being told I'm wrong. Are you like that? Then I should marry you, so that I can always have exactly what I want, because I'm a very selfish person. I don't want to marry anyone different than me, because that would mean I would have to accommodate them."

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves—" See, repentance and change, it begins in the mind. You have to start thinking differently, before you can start acting differently.

It goes on to say, "which is yours in Christ Jesus." If you are a Christian, if you are in Christ positionally and Christ is in you practically through the person and work of the Holy Spirit, you can have a new mind.

Now, if you're not a Christian, you don't have access to the Holy Spirit to start to think like Jesus Christ and subsequently act like Jesus Christ. But if you are in Christ positionally and practically, you can have a change of mind.

So, let me say this. Don't just say, "I'm a selfish person. I was raised in a selfish family. I always got taken advantage of. Now it's time for me. This is my ethnic heritage. We just tend to be this way. This is my personality. I took a test, and I'm a J-E-R-K on the personality test."

All right, instead it's like, okay, I want to have the mind of Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God—" He's the same as God the Father, all the same attributes of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He's God, Creator of heaven and earth, eternally existing.

He "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." He didn't say, "I'm not going to earth, becoming a person, growing up poor, working a job as a carpenter, walking around instead of being carried on a throne like a king. I'm not going to allow people to betray me and my family to disown me, and I don't want to be broke."

Jesus set all of his rights aside, not as deity, but he set aside his rights. He humbled himself. He emptied himself. He set aside his rights. He set aside the continual use of his divine attributes. He retained them, but he did not continually use them.

God lived a life like we do. He had to learn how to walk, and talk, and read. He was gossiped about, and he was betrayed, and he was abandoned, and he bled, and he suffered, and he was homeless, and he died.

"By taking the form of a—" what? "servant, being born in the likeness of men." If the Holy Spirit is in you, this is convicting. Amen? You say, "Okay, selfish, proud, got it. Prone to use my spouse more than love my spouse." That's not how Jesus treats you and me. He's not proud. He's humble. He's not selfish. He's a servant. He comes not to take, but to give.

This is why, friends, if you're not a Christian, you need to become a Christian, because until you're in right relationship with Jesus and served by him, you won't understand the mind of Christ. You won't have the power of Christ. You can't emulate the life of Christ.

SELFISHNESS AND THE "LITTLE THINGS"

How does selfishness show up? Experience shows me that selfishness is oftentimes in the little things, the quote-unquote "little things." Now, there's a verse of the Bible that references this, the great love story, the Song of Songs 2:15. They talk about this issue. "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards."

Now, there are a lot of viticultural metaphors in the Bible. "I am the vine, you are the branches," Jesus says, a lot of this vine-branch imagery. So, I went actually some years ago to wine country, Napa Valley, purely for research purposes, to the glory of God, as related to biblical, exegetical, theological investigation. That's why I went. So, you're welcome, Baptist friends. That's why I went.

So, I found a beautiful vineyard that was run by a Christian woman. I think she'd been running it for a number of years. She was very sweet and very nice. And so she took me on a tour of the vineyard for a couple of hours and just was teaching me, because I don't know anything about, you know, vines and branches. And what she said was, you know, the vines are very valuable and precious, some have been growing for decades, very, very old, very, very valuable, and very, very fragile. So, everything needs to be clipped, and kept, and cut. It needs to be kept off the ground, and it's this very sensitive, painstaking, careful process to cultivate a fruitful vine.

And what she said was one of the greatest threats to the vineyard are these small animals that will sneak in under the fence, and they'll come in, in a hidden and unseen way, and gnaw down toward the root of the vine, and kill the whole vine, and destroy decades of cultivation, and work, and fruitfulness. And she said, "It's catching and keeping out those little animals that is one of the hardest jobs of vineyard tending." That's really helpful.

The Song of Solomon says that your marriage is like a vine. You've got to prune it, and tend to it, and you've got to water it, and you've got to pull the weeds, and you've got to nurture it and keep in healthy soil and environment, so that it can be fruitful, growing in love and service to God and others.

But there are little foxes that come in and gnaw at the vine toward the roots and can destroy the whole marriage, as a small animal would—to use the analogy—a very precious vine. See, your marriage is a very precious vine. What is that for you, those little foxes who get into your vineyard and gnaw at the roots? What is it? You say, "Well, it's not a big thing." But is it just gnawing away? Is it something they need to repent of, or you need to just let go of?

Now, for some of you, you have the spiritual gift of serving, so it's going to come a lot easier for you. You'll be like, "What? People don't serve?" No, you've been so busy serving them, you may not notice that they have never served you. You have the spiritual gift of service. You like to help people and do things.

Now, for those of you who don't have the spiritual gift of service, you can't say, "It's not my gift. God didn't give me that gift. Apparently, he doesn't want you to be served. So, you know, talk to him about this dilemma you find yourself in." Instead, all Christians are called to be servants. It's a high honor, because it's an office that Jesus held for us.

Now, a couple of things regarding being a servant versus selfish. Number one, if you have a child-centered home, you will think you're serving your spouse because you're serving your family. Okay? You'll say, "No, no, I really do serve my spouse." What do you mean? "Well, you know, I help with the kids, and I run them to Little League, and I do this around the house, and we have a good family, and I'm really committed to our family."

This is a common Christian myth: "If I'm serving our children, if I'm serving our family, I'm serving my spouse." Not necessarily. You can have a child-centered home that neglects the marriage, and this is why some couples, it looks like they've got this awesome family, maybe even this great Christian family. The kids grow up and leave, and it all falls apart for mom and dad. They got divorced. They committed adultery. They lived parallel lives. They don't really like each other. They're back-to-back or maybe shoulder-to-shoulder, but they're not face-to-face with their friendship. You say, "What happened?" Oh, they were both serving the family. They were both serving the kids. Once the kids left, they didn't have a relationship of servanthood toward one another.

Number two, some people have a business-centered marriage. They're both serving the business. They're in business together, working in the company, trying to make money. Are you a servant? "Oh, I'm totally a servant. I'm helping out. I'm helping the family business. I'm helping to generate revenue and income. Absolutely." No, that's different than serving your spouse. That's shoulder-to-shoulder working with your spouse, but that's not face-to-face serving your spouse.

And thirdly, some have a ministry-centered marriage, where there's a lot of serving, but it's for the purpose of ministry, not for marriage. This was the sin of Grace and me. And as the head of household, I take responsibility for it. When we first got married and we started a ministry in Seattle, the first three years I didn't get paid. I was a volunteer. We were flat broke. We reached a lot of young twenty-something college kids.

As a result, everything was in our house. We started the church in our home. We had the offices in our home. We had all the Bible studies in our home. One year, we had at least two thousand people come through our home. Monday night, Bible study. Tuesday night, Bible study. Wednesday night, Bible study. Thursday night, Bible study. I'm leading the church. Grace is running the women's ministry. We're doing all the premarital counseling. I'm officiating all the weddings, preaching on Sunday, traveling during the week to make ends meet.

All of a sudden, the church loses its offices, so we move the church secretary into our home. We've got three, four interns living in the basement. The main floor has the church secretary. Upstairs is my office, next to our bedroom, and we have kids. Two thousand people are coming through our home, and people would have looked at it and said, "Boy, those people really serve—" not each other. We were serving so many people that we weren't serving one another well.

So couples will use children, business, or ministry as idolatry to appear as humble servants when, in fact, they're still selfish people, not caring for their spouse. So I'm going to ask you some questions.

Number one, do you consider your spouse and his or her needs above your own? Do you consider your spouse and his or her needs above your own? Yes or no? And does it show up practically with how the money is spent, and time is spent, and what the holidays look like, and what vacations look like, and what date night looks like, and where you live, and how life is put together?

Or is it always, "I get what I want, and they need to accommodate me, because I'm the bully in the marriage. I'm the drama queen or king. I'm the one who is very vocal and verbal, and I can impose my will on them or manipulate them in some way to get what I want, because, ultimately, I think I'm more important than they are."

Number two, do you do the thankless and menial tasks in love to God and your spouse, the stuff when nobody's looking, the kind of jobs that nobody wants to do? I will say this publicly about my wife. I have never met anyone who serves as faithfully and humbly as my wife, without grumbling or complaining. She loves being a mom. We've got five kids, and she does serve, and she does not complain. She is far more mature at this than I am, far

more mature.

Number three, do you humbly receive instruction and correction because you are a sinner? One of the things that humble people can receive is correction and instruction. "You were wrong. You could do this better. Let's talk about this. I think you need to reconsider that." Proud people, they can't be corrected, and they're always the teacher. They're never the student.

Number four, do you encourage your spouse more than you criticize him or her? Are you building them up or tearing them down? Are most of your words, "Thank you. That was great. I really appreciate it. I notice that you said or did blank. You know, that meant a lot to me." Or is it, "You did it again. You failed. That's a mistake. That's not how you do it. That's not right." Is it mainly encouragement with the occasional correction, or is it mainly criticism with the rare encouragement?

Number five, are you able to serve and be served? Humble people not only serve; they can be served. Sometimes religiously proud people, they can serve, but they can't be served. And it looks humble, but it's proud. Jesus did serve, but on occasion he was served. He stayed at Mary and Martha and Lazarus' house, and they loved him, and they would feed him, and look after him, and tend to him, and care for him, and he allowed that. He'd send guys ahead. "Go find this room. Set it up for this meal and ceremony." He would allow them to go ahead and to set it up for him.

Jesus didn't go through his whole life saying, "No, no, no. I'm the servant. I always serve. I'm the server. I'm not the servee." If you're married to someone like that, I want that person who likes to serve, but won't be served, to know that you're selfish, and you're proud. Even though you're looking like a servant, it's still about you because you're not allowing your spouse the opportunity to have the same joy that you have when you serve, and that's selfish.

This was an issue in our marriage for years. "Grace, what do you want to eat?" "I don't care; whatever you want." "Where do you want to go?" "I don't care. Where do you want to go?" "What do you want to watch on TV?" "I don't care. What do you want to watch?" It was like, "Is there anything I can do?" "Nope." "Then why am I here?" Like, you know, like, that's what I'm thinking, you know. Like, "I want to serve you. I want to do something. I want to be a blessing." Can you serve and be served?

Number six, do you continually ask the Holy Spirit to make you like Jesus? Because this is going to take a miracle, right? It's going to take a miracle for a proud person to become humble, for a selfish person to become a servant. It's going to take a miracle. So, you've got to always be asking, right, clothing yourself with humility, "Holy Spirit, please make me more like Jesus today. As I'm being served, let me be thankful and grateful and encourage. Let me see opportunities to serve and do so humbly, lovingly, and gladly."

SERVANT LOVERS

Some of you say, "I thought we were going to talk about intimacy in the bedroom." Let me tell you the truth. Most of the problems in the bedroom are the result of problems outside of the bedroom. If you are humble servants out of the bedroom, that will translate into the bedroom, right?

So, we'll talk about servant lovers, lastly, out of 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights," this is marital intimacy, being together, "and likewise the wife to her husband." A couple should be intimate freely, frequently, according to the Bible.

"For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." When you get married, you become one, and he serves her, she serves him outside of the bedroom and in the bedroom, not keeping a record, but loving, serving, caring for one another in various ways that does include your marital intimacy.

I'm not saying that there should ever be abuse, that someone should violate their conscious, that if there is sin outside of the bedroom or harshness, then that means that the person you're married to can't say no. I'm not saying that there aren't extenuating circumstances sometimes that would cause the marriage to benefit from a break, which we'll come to in just a moment, but I'm saying the typical pattern of a marriage is, "I belong to you, you belong to me. I serve you, you serve me. I want to take care of you, you want to take care of me, outside of the bedroom and in the bedroom. By the grace of God, we want to grow to be humble servants."

And then he continues. He says, "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement," some of your translations will say, "by mutual consent," "for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." That a couple should be together regularly, and if they've got a big problem in the marriage that is causing trouble, trial, then they can, if they agree, say, "Right now, this issue is so big, we've got to work on it. Let's work on it for a while, for a limited time, not indefinitely, so that bitterness and Satan get involved. Let's pray through this. Let's work through this. Let's forgive this. Let's give this to Jesus. Let's meet with a pastor. Let's meet with a biblical counselor, so then we can resume normal, frequent marital intimacy."

Now, statistically, the younger the couple, the more they are intimate together, two to three times a week is an average. As a couple gets older, it becomes statistically less frequent. Depending upon what survey you read, 15-20 percent of couples do not have a sex life in their marriage, 15-20 percent. This means they're together once a month or less. Some, it is zero times a year.

I actually know people, some ministry leaders that they have not been intimate with the spouse they're still married to in over a decade. Because in Christianity, we will discipline people for going too far: "You committed adultery." We don't discipline people for not going far enough: "What's wrong with your marriage? Satan has gotten in there. He's sleeping between you in the bed. That's why you just literally go back-to-back with enough distance to leave room for the great dragon to slip in between the two of you and keep the bitterness as cold as ever."

There are extenuating circumstances: You just had a baby, spouse is deployed for military, there's a big sin you're working through in the marriage. But

there are also sinful circumstances: “I’m selfish. I’m lazy. I’m bitter. I’d rather be into pornography or adultery.” Weird things like, “We put the dog in our bed.”

I had a counseling appointment recently. They’re like, “Yeah, we’re not intimate very much.” “How come?” “Well, the kids and the dog sleep with us.” “What?” Yeah, that would be a mood killer. The kids need to sleep in their bed; otherwise, they’re going to figure out how they got here. Right? It’s just, it’s not right. And the dog’s a weird one. Like, the dog’s in the—like, I won’t continue to talk about it, but I threw up in my mouth a little bit just thinking about it.

Sometimes it leads to two separate beds and two separate rooms. One of the growing trends in construction of new homes for affluent couples is two master bedrooms with two master closets and two master bathrooms, one for him, one for her. Friends, that’s roommates, not soul mates. That’s two, not one. That’s not humble servants. That’s proud, selfish sinners saying, “I live over here, you live over there, and as long as we don’t have to be together, then we’ll be fine.”

So, my closing question to you is this. On a scale from proud and selfish to humble servant, from a one to a ten, how would you rate yourself? “Man, I am really proud and really selfish, and the truth is that’s probably the underlying issue for much of our marriage.” How would your spouse rate you? Or would you say, “In the grace of God, I’m a humble servant, and I’m married to a humble servant. And if Jesus is perfect, we’re not there, but in the grace of God, we’re becoming more like him together.”

PRAYER

I’m going to pray for you and bring Grace out, and we’ll take some questions, because these are categorical issues, but they have practical implications.

Father God, I pray against the enemy, his servants, their works and effects. God, we acknowledge that pride is satanic. It’s demonic. It’s what caused your enemy and ours to think that he was worthy of glory, to declare war on you, to lead a rebellion in heaven, to take that rebellion to the earth, and to invite us to sign up for his army, and to join in his war against you. And God, we can call it self-esteem or a high self-image, but, God, it’s just good, old-fashioned pride. And, God, we confess that we’re all proud and selfish by nature and choice. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, who came as our humble servant and continues to be a humble servant. God, I pray this would not be just for us theology but testimony, that this would impact and affect all of our relationships, but particularly our marriages.

I pray for those who are single, Lord God, that they would see how incredibly selfish they are. Their money is spent on them. Their time is devoted to them. All their worries are about them. Lord God, I pray for parents, that by your grace, we would raise children to know that selfishness is a sin, that pride is a sin, and that it harms relationships, and it leaves a bitter legacy.

God, for those of us who are married—and I confess, God, as Paul says, chief of hypocrites: proud for years, thinking I was more important than Grace, doing more important things, and selfish, wanting her to make my life easier, without being nearly as concerned on how I might be a blessing to her and make her life better. God, I ask for us all that this attitude, this mind of Christ could be ours, both out of the bedroom and in the bedroom, and we acknowledge that most of the problems in the bedroom are the result of problems outside of the bedroom, and underlying those problems are selfishness and pride, which we ask by the grace that Jesus gives to put to death for his glory and our good. Amen.

Q&A WITH GRACE

I’m going to go get Grace. *[Applauding]* All right, you ready?

Grace: Okay.

Okay. Can you scoot over just a little bit? I am too thick, and I’m going to fall off. And then I’m going to end up on YouTube. Thank you for serving me by scooting over.

“I find it unrealistic that sex should be saved for after marriage. Shouldn’t we be sexually compatible?”

Grace: Well, the Scriptures tell us to be pure before marriage and keep the marriage bed pure, and—what?

You’re just so cute. I don’t know. I kind of forgot we were doing an event. I’m sorry. I’m just sort of—I apologize, you know.

Grace: What was the question?

I don’t know. That was—

Grace: Okay. “And do not awaken love before its time,” in Song of Solomon. There are lots of Scriptures that reference sexuality and keeping it in marriage. It’s the safe place for sexuality because it’s the most intimate thing you can do with someone. And to do that with someone that you’re not in covenant with is dangerous. It’s just not a safe thing, and God gives us those commands to protect us from putting ourselves in unsafe situations. Both emotionally and physically, there’s a lot of abuse in, like, couples that live together. There’s a high percentage of abuse with couples that are sexually active, living together. So, God knows the best way. He created it the best way and wants that for us because it protects us emotionally and physically. And it’s selfish to even want to take that from someone or participate in that with someone, if you don’t know that that’s going to be your spouse someday.

And I would say this dude’s a porn head. This dude’s a porn head. He’s watched a lot of porn, and he’s had other people, via technology, perform for

him sexually, and he wants to take that same mind into marriage. “Well, I want to see my wife in action, and I want to make sure that, you know, she does what I like, and I want to make sure that I get what I want.”

I mean, first of all, are you a Christian? Because that’s completely selfish and sinful. It’s the height of arrogance and pride. It’s assuming you’re the world’s greatest, most amazing lover, and you need somebody who’s ready to do Cirque du Soleil for you. . . . That was a good one. *[Laughing]*

Number two, this is basically saying, “I want to try on people sexually and see which one I like after I compare them with one another.” I’ll tell you what. Everything looks different when you have a daughter. Right, dads? Right? If this guy came to my house and said, “There are a number of women that I’m willing to explore sexually to see which one performs up to my standards. And, congratulations, your daughter has made the list.” I would take everything I’ve learned from watching CSI on how to hide a body. I would use it. . . . That was good, too. *[Laughing]*

And thirdly, if you don’t compare your spouse to others, how will you know if you’re not compatible? We had friends in college. I was a new Christian and had been sexually active before marriage, and then God saved me and changed my mind, and I’ll never forget this buddy of mine in college. He loved Jesus. He was a virgin. To me, that was like a unicorn. Like, I’d heard about them but I had never seen one. I didn’t know they were real. I thought these were mythical creatures. He had never kissed a girl, and he was engaged to be married.

And I remember he gave a lecture in, like, one of our classes, defending purity before marriage and chastity in marriage. And he said, “Now, I’m not going to kiss any woman until I kiss my wife when I say ‘I do’ on the altar.” And I thought, “That’s amazing.” Now, as a dad, I’m like, I hope he had sons, because I want them to meet my daughter. You know, like, I want her to marry somebody who cherishes and honors her like that and isn’t treating my daughter like, you know, some athlete in a competition to perform for a judge.

And then some frat guy raised his hand and joked and said, “Well, how do you know if she’s any good?” And his answer, my buddy’s answer was, “How will I know if she’s bad?” It’s like, “Yeah, good point.” “I have never had a piece of cake. This was my first piece of cake. Seems like a good cake.” *[Laughing]* “It’s better than the cake I wasn’t eating.” . . . That was good, too. *[Fist bump]* Thanks, babe. Anything you would add? I just—

Grace: No.

No, you’re good? No, okay. All right, you can do the next one.

“How do you go from a brutal relationship, two selfish people, to a servant lover relationship without going into an abusive relationship?”

So, two selfish people, and then how do you get to servant-servant and not get stuck with selfish-servant, so one person is getting abused and taken advantage of?

Grace: Well, we were sort of in this situation. I didn’t, from the outside, look like I was being selfish, because I was serving. I just wasn’t serving you. So, because God convicted me first, I needed to trust that God was going to protect me in whatever happened, if, you know, if I felt like you weren’t serving me back, I still was being obedient to what God was asking me, through conviction of the Holy Spirit. And so we don’t do things—if I was to say I couldn’t do it until you changed, then that would’ve been a selfish response and just prove my selfishness all the more. We do things because God asks us to and because we see in his Scriptures that that’s the right thing, and he loves us, and he knows what’s best for us.

So, first of all, the decision needs to be based on what God is asking me to do, by the Holy Spirit. And then being obedient to that, I’ve seen God’s faithfulness in abundance and—but, again, I didn’t do it for that. I did it because I knew that that was what I needed to do, because I didn’t want to be a selfish person anymore.

And God has changed you. He’s changed both of us, and we serve each other, and we’re learning more every day how to continue to serve each other better, and I still see my selfishness when you do things that are very serving of me. It reveals my own selfishness still that I need to work on.

So, I think, first of all, just being teachable and asking the Lord, you know, “Lord, this may seem scary for me to go first and change first, but I trust you. I trust you that because you’re asking this of me, you’re going to protect me emotionally, and you’re going to guide me, and you’re going to change both of us.”

Because God wants our marriages to be good. He wants them to be holy. It’s not like he wants one of us to be good and one of us to be bad. So, it’s being in prayer, too. I remember praying for myself and praying for you a lot, just, “Lord, change my heart. Continue to help me be strong in the changes that I need to make, and help Mark change in the ways that you want to make him a more godly man.”

And for a woman, maybe explain the difference between serving and enabling. I think for people, in general, that’s a big issue, but sometimes for the wife, that’s a really important distinction. I know you hit that in the “Respectful Wife” chapter in the book.

Grace: Yeah, I think for a wife, she can be afraid of the responses that come when she’s willing to serve, not necessarily, I mean, it could be if a man is physically abusive, it could be that, but sometimes it’s just as simple as an emotional response that she may get from her husband or a rejecting response. And so she doesn’t want to continue to feel that, if she’s serving and doesn’t get a servant response. And so instead of taking that step of repentance, she’ll enable and just allow him to get away with his sins, but that’s not loving our spouse.

It doesn't mean that we need to disrespectfully speak up against their sin. In fact, we're told to be respectful as wives and to be helpers. And to be a helper would mean that we're helping them to live like Christ, and so speaking respectfully, but honestly, and having regular conversations about it, so it's not just blasting them all at once with things that you see in his life that are horrible, but, again, praying for a tone that's right. Praying for the time that God has you to speak and the words he wants you to use, and then going forward and trusting, "Okay, I'm going to speak into this."

And I think prefacing it with, "I do love you, and I've sinned against you, because I've seen these things, and I haven't spoken up, and I'm sorry. And so I don't want to attack you. I just want to address some of these things, because I think we're hurting our marriage." And just even talking about it in that way, showing that I've sinned against you by doing this, and opening the opportunity for him to see his sin against you.

Yeah, because sometimes it turns into a war, and somebody's got to say, "I'm calling a truce," and that's the face-to-face friendship, like, "We have both been selfish. We have both hurt one another. And if this continues, it's only going to get worse, and Satan is going to have a victory, and we're going to have misery. And so I want to put my gun down and be your friend, and I want to serve you, and I want to be a blessing to you, and I'm asking you to be willing to do the same," and inviting that person in.

Grace: And enabling, too, makes a man—if a woman is enabling, it makes the man feel like he's above reproach, like he's great, and he doesn't need to change.

Like, "She's never said anything."

Grace: Yeah, and so then if she's hurting or not able to be a servant lover in some way, he gets angry, and she—it's partially her own fault, because she hasn't said anything, and she's enabled his pride and just for him to get puffed up more and more. And so we've got to help each other in these ways mutually. The husband needs to lovingly speak into those areas, in his wife's life, too.

Yeah, and as we look at the Lord Jesus, he doesn't give us what we want. He gives us what we need. He doesn't tell us what we want. He tells us what we need, and he's the most humble servant of all. And so you can serve your spouse by telling them the truth. You can serve your spouse by doing what needs to be done, not just what they want to be done.

And so, yeah, I think this is a good clarifying question because sometimes "servant" is interpreted as "voiceless, submissive employee." That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about "like Jesus." Nobody's more bold, more courageous, more brave, more forthright, and more meek, and more humble, and more loving, and more well-intended than Jesus.

And so I would just say it can get confusing if you just focus on the categories. That's why I try to present Jesus and say, "Just keep reading the gospels, going back to Jesus. Okay, as a servant, he had conflict. As a servant, he said some things that were unpopular. As a servant, he did some things that some people didn't like," and that's part of being a servant: humbly, lovingly, respectfully doing and saying the things that are best for someone, not just the things that are easiest for someone. Does that make sense?

This is where, for us, it's always back to Jesus, back to Jesus, back to Jesus, back to Jesus, back to Jesus, because marriage is ultimately best learned by looking at Jesus and the church. That's what Ephesians 5 says. So, how does Jesus treat people? Okay, that's indicative and that's a pattern for us to learn by the power of the Holy Spirit to treat one another as Jesus treated people.

So, it's a great question. I think that's good, babe. Thank you. Would you be willing to close our session in prayer? Thanks.

Grace: Lord, again, thank you for just your Word. Thank you for giving us so much to work on toward humility, but giving us a perfect example of your Son. Lord, give us strength in pursuing humility. Give us courage. Lord, allow us to see the sinful areas in our life where we are selfish and be willing to examine those and allow you to change those, through your Holy Spirit, Lord. Help us not just to look at the other person in our life as selfish and wish they would change, but to allow your Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and just give us hope for what you can do in our relationships. Thank you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.