

Text: Ephesians 4:22-28

Title: “Detoxing Your Relationships ... Selfishness”

SERMON BUMPER – If you’re a believer you are going through an amazing process called sanctification. God is perfecting and shaping you into the image of His Son Jesus. And one of God’s most important tools in this process is adversity ... physical adversity, financial adversity, and, yes, relational adversity. So in our relationships we are constantly bumping up against selfishness, pride, bitterness and a lot of other annoying things ... in others and in ourselves. It’s a mess, sometimes a pretty ugly mess. But God is working through these things to teach us to love, to forgive and to be forgiven. That’s the way we grow spiritually.

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:22. There are sinful attitudes and habits that can seep into our lives like poison ... poison that can ruin relationships. So today I’m beginning a series entitled “Detoxing Your Relationships.” We want to connect with the deep grace of God that helps up us to have healthy relationships. The first half of Ephesians contains a rich description of the new life we have in Christ and the new life we share with other believers in the Body of Christ. Then in Ephesians 4 the focus shifts to a number of practical instructions on how we are to live as the new people of God in our relationships. **Read Ephesians 4:22-24.**

When we come to Christ there is to be a clear, clean break with our old way of life. We see it in three phrases in vv.22-24. First, the new life we have in Christ means to...

Ephesians 4:22b - Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

We strip off the filthy clothes of our old life. It is a once-for- always, decisive separation from our old selfish way of life corrupted by all kinds of lies. Then we are to ...

Ephesians 4:23 - Be made new in the attitude of your minds;

When we repent and trust in Christ for the gift of eternal life we are made new, but then we are also being renewed continuously.

Romans 12:2a - Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And as that happens we...

Ephesians 4:24 - Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

So we take off the dirty rags of our old, selfish way of life without Christ and we put on the coat of righteousness and holiness like Christ. The gift of eternal life is not just about spending eternity in heaven; it is also about how we spend our life here on this earth in our relationships with other people.

This goes way beyond Ellen DeGeneres saying as she closes her talk show, “Be kind to one another” ... or a bumper sticker that says, “Coexist.” The love we’re talking about is love that flows from a change that comes in the new life of Jesus Christ.

When we talk about detoxing relationships I’m not necessarily talking about getting rid of the people that make your life miserable. There are some instances where that may need to happen. My focus is to help us understand why some our relationships are so hard ... what God is doing in us and in others in that adversity.

These are very real issues and as your pastor I want to apply biblical wisdom to these issues. I normally prefer to preach books of the Bible, or sections of books, verse-by-verse. But I feel compelled to spend these weeks focused more on application to some very real issues that we face in our relationships. We’ll keep Ephesians 4 running in the background while we apply our new life in Christ to some of the relational problems that we find in families, at work and, yes, even at church. So let’s continue...

Ephesians 4:25 - Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Putting on the new life means putting off lying and deception. That’s part of our old life.

Ephesians 4:26-27 - “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Putting on the new life means managing our anger in a righteous way.

Ephesians 4:28 - He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Putting on the new life means putting off selfishness. And that's where I want to start in this series ... with the toxin of selfishness. Paul has in mind here new believers who have taken off the filthy coat of their old way of life, are made new in Christ and have put on the new clothes of righteousness and holiness. Some of them were thieves and swindlers who had lived self-centered, self-absorbed lives, always taking from others. Now that must change. When Jesus calls us to follow Him He calls us to deny self, take up our cross daily and follow Him.

You see, a healthy relationship is a two-way street. Love is supposed to go both ways. But when selfishness enters the equation it doesn't work that way. It's just one-way.

ILLUSTRATION - I have a family member that lives in another city. We visit there often and this family member mentioned that they looked forward to seeing us the next time we're in town. I jokingly said, "Hey, that highway out there runs in two directions.

You may have in your circle a person who is self-centered, insensitive, arrogant, controlling and ungrateful. They're toxic people. It may be a spouse, an ex-spouse, a child, a parent, someone you're dating or someone you work with. Their attitude is this: "Everyone is here to serve me ... I don't care how my words or actions affect others ... if I don't get my way I'll make everyone miserable ... every conversation has to be about me ... the universe revolves around me." And that makes a mess of relationships:

James 3:16 - For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

So how do we detox our relationships from the poison of selfishness? First I want you to see...

1. HOW TO DEAL WITH SELFISHNESS IN OTHERS.

How do we live out the Christ-life with people who constantly push our button with selfish words and actions? Where do we start?

Show love. God isn't finished with you and He isn't finished with the people you live or work with. Christ dealt with difficult people all the time. He did it with patience, love and grace. His love for all of us is unconditional. He doesn't stop loving us when we act selfishly. And we have to do the same. When others act selfishly toward us we can be hurt and we may want to withdraw from them. Keep on loving them.

1 Corinthians 13:4a - Love is patient, love is kind.

Most people don't change overnight. We have to be patient as God is working in their lives. And when you're at the end of your rope, remember how often God has been patient with you in your sin.

Control yourself. The temptation is to get back at someone who has behaved selfishly toward us. You can't control what they say or do, but you can control how you respond to their actions. Don't get defensive. If you let selfish words or actions control you will constantly be under the control of others.

1 Peter 3:9 - Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Pray for them. In Luke 6:28 Jesus said to pray for those who mistreat you. Ask God to let you see them the way He sees them. God can change their hearts. Ask Him to show you how He might use you to help the other person grow and how you are to respond.

Stay humble. It says in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that, "Love does not boast, it is not proud." You may think that you are right and the other person is the selfish one who is always wrong. It's easy for us to spot selfishness in others, but not in ourselves. We're all sinners and self-centered in our old nature, so stay humble.

Set boundaries. God wants us, as much as possible, to be at peace with others. But that doesn't mean that we just accept a selfish person's behavior. You might be afraid of what could happen if you confront them or hold them accountable for their selfishness. But if you truly love them you may need to put boundaries in place. A wife and mom may say to her husband, "I need you to take more responsibility for helping out around the house." Or a parent may say to a child, "That kind of language won't be permitted in our home." As difficult as that may be it has to be done.

Proverbs 27:6a - Wounds from a friend can be trusted...

Speak truth. Ephesians 4:15 says, “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” As painful as it may be there are times when we have to have the hard conversations with people we love. Make sure the motivation is love. Pray and plan carefully for how you will have the conversation.

So those are some ways to deal with selfishness in others. But what about when we’re the selfish one? Let’s talk about...

2. HOW TO DEAL WITH SELFISHNESS IN ME.

Ephesians 4:28 - He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Here’s the biblical wisdom confronting our own selfishness:

Detect it. In v.28 Paul focuses on the one who has been stealing. Maybe you were raised to think that the whole world revolves around you so you don’t realize the selfish demands you are putting on others. Pride blinds us to our own sin. We can see it in others but we don’t always see it in ourselves. Start by asking the Lord to reveal selfish attitudes and actions. Ask your spouse or your parent or a co-worker, “Am I being selfish?” Detect it.

Reject it. This is what the Bible calls repentance. Ephesians 4:28 says “He who has been stealing must steal no longer...” Selfishness is part of the old self that has to be put off. Steal no longer. Don’t use people any longer.

Redirect it. It says in v.28, “He who has been stealing ... must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Focus on becoming useful to your family, to your company, to your church. Quit thinking about how others should serve you and begin thinking about how you should serve others.

Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In Mark 10 the disciples of Jesus came to Him with one of the most selfish requests you can imagine. They ask Jesus for the privilege of sitting with Him in the places of honor and glory in heaven. What made this so ridiculous is that Jesus has just finished announcing to them that He was about to be humiliated by his death on the cross to save others from their sins. And Jesus takes the opportunity to rebuke them and correct them.

Mark 10:43-44 - Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

In other words, this is not the way of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Selfishness is not the Kingdom way and it's not the way of Jesus.

Mark 10:45 - For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Selfishness isn't the Kingdom way and it's not the Jesus way, but don't think you can conquer it on our own. You can go away from this message today and try real hard to be a more selfless person, and I hope you will. But don't do it in your own strength. The only Person who can break the "power of me" is the One who came to give his life a ransom for many. It's by the power of the Cross applied to our lives that we are truly able to get at the root of our selfishness ... our sin. Christ is our only hope for dealing with selfishness because He is the one who can dig deep enough to expose the root of our selfishness and cleanse us there.

Just below the surface of our selfishness may be something in your past that causes you to constantly try to protect yourself, and your wants and needs. When you were little you were deprived of affection, or of protection, or of the basic provisions of life. So you feel that if you don't look after your own needs no one else will. I get that. I see how that can drive our selfishness. But beneath all of that is a deeper issue. It's called sin. And the answer is the Good News that God loves you just as you are but He loves you too much to leave you as you are.