

Coach House Church

BEACONS

INTEREST IN OTHERS

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Challenges can turn us inwards. This is particularly true at the moment, when we're much more isolated than usual, with a lot more time to think over our problems.

I come to this subject, because I noticed my own prayers turning 'inwards' while facing a relentless and stressful work environment. When trouble comes, I naturally braced myself and went into defence mode. This became worse, because I had all the time in the world to think about it. While I have an 'in-person' job and don't work from home, there (literally) weren't many places I could go to take my mind off it or relieve frustration.

But first, what do I mean by our prayers turning inwards? I mean that we prioritise our own needs and focus on our own problems when we're facing difficult situations. So personally I pray for strength, for anxiety to go, for courage, for confidence, for help. There is nothing wrong with asking for these things, because it is true that we need them, and God asks us to take everything to him in prayer.

However, that got me thinking: if so many people, without knowing Jesus, are able to endure difficult days, go above and beyond, and show kindness in the midst of their own troubles – shouldn't I be able to do these things as a Christian? In other words, as a person who knows that God works all things together for the good, and that he promises to take care of all my needs. The power and love of God, over time, allows us to care more and more about the lives of others, and gives us the strength to do so.

Philippians 2:3-4 stood out to me as I was considering this, which says this: "3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Now, the context of Philippians 2:1-11 is that the writer, Paul, wants believers to be humble like Jesus rather than being self-seekers and self-promoters. Part of that humility is thinking of the needs of others as it says in verse 4. What truths about God can we internalise which will help us to look out for the interests of others?

Phillipians 2:5-8 provides us with the answers:

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

“Who, being in very nature[a] God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!”

Let's pick out some key features.

Verse 5 tells us to have the mindset of Christ, so what is that? Jesus didn't use his status as God's son to further his own advantage. He made himself a servant. He chose to be obedient to God (even dying for us on a cross). Now think about that. Look at what Jesus does in the passage. He acts to become a servant, humble himself and obey God. He is fully God, but chooses to make himself nothing and serve the world. He is not less because of this. He has the highest status and lineage as the Son of God... and what does he do with it? He serves others.

So, if we are to obey verse 5 and have the same mindset as Christ, 1. we are to accept that we have a high position as children of God, and THEREFORE, 2. we are to humbly serve others and take an interest in them above ourselves. We are loved by God and share in the inheritance of Jesus, but we are not to use that to beat others down or act superior to them, we are to choose to serve them in love as Jesus did.

This all sounds a bit draconian, unless we know the love of God for us. Jesus is equal to God, and as children of God we share in Jesus' inheritance. We have access to God himself through the Holy Spirit. These are all amazing things we have received through our relationship with Jesus. In fact, because Jesus humbled himself in the ways we've heard, we see God's response to him in

Philippians 2:9-11:

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus, humbled himself and served others, and God took care of him. At the end, he ended up in literally the highest position in the universe after "making

himself nothing" for our sake. We might not instantly receive the benefits of serving others and taking an interest in them. However, at the end of time (at the very least), serving others like Jesus will be fully rewarded. Evil always has a knife in its back. Looking out for 'number one' might seem to go well for a while, but it will eventually end badly. Serving others in humility might feel rubbish for a while, but we can be absolutely certain that it leads to good.

Before I continue, let's consider one misconception in brief (though much more could be said about it): All this does not mean allowing endless abuse towards us – confronting other's immoral behaviour towards us can certainly include humility. We are meant value others as better than ourselves, but they are not better or more valued in the eyes of God. It is about having an attitude of humility, not thinking we are trash and others are literally more valued than us.

As I mentioned at the beginning, one of the practical areas we can look out for the interests of others is by praying for them. I suggest prayer because it is something that many of us do all the time for ourselves and our personal needs. In the same way that we would pray for ourselves, let's also pray for others. It's not the only way to serve other people in love, but it's a good start. It doesn't have to be a complicated prayer, in just the same way that we don't always pray complex prayers for ourselves. This is one way that I have been deliberately choosing to take an interest in others, and stop being obsessed with my own problems – and I suggest that to you too.

We do well to remember what the 'engine room' of humble service is. It is God's love for us, and for all people. That is the basis for serving others and should be our central motivation. In Philippians 2:1-2, Paul tells us that it is the "encouragement from being united to Christ" and the "comfort of his love" that should be the basis for unity and serving one another. It is not slavish duty, or fear, or mere obligation. Let's get to know God and be encouraged by his love for us and his constant provision.

To end, I will pray with a prayer Paul uses in Philippians 1:9-11:

"9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."



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