

Wisdom for the New Year
GUARDING OURSELVES FROM SELF-CENTEREDNESS

James 3 ~ March 8 & 9, 2008

Self-centeredness is an attitude of the heart that essentially makes one's own comfort, needs, and status the priority over God and other people.

- Self-centeredness has the potential to damage & destroy friendships, marriages, and even families.
- This attitude is even more dangerous when it invades the church and it's ministries.
- God calls His followers to a far different attitude as James experienced in his life and his brother Jesus modeled.

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

James chapter 3 verse 13

- James reminds us that followers of Christ are not just consumers, but that they live out their faith by serving the people around them. ***(It's not about me...)***

A Heart Issue

- We all struggle with the problem of self-centeredness and selfishness.
- Self-centeredness is a heart issue that grows to be more and more destructive the longer that it is left unchecked.

14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

James chapter 3 verse 14

- As self-centeredness takes hold of us, it damages our relationships with family, friends, and co-workers.
- This issue that starts to develop within the heart soon grows to be something that has very real effects (spiritual, emotional, physical, and relational) on our lives.

15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. 16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

James chapter 3 verses 15 & 16

- Self-centered or "Me first" thinking & living is the strategy of choice for our world & our culture.
- God calls his people to a different way of living, namely, self-sacrifice.

Self-Centeredness within the Church

- Few things are as disruptive and destructive to the church and it's purpose than self-centeredness.
- The temptation to value ourselves as "churched" people above the "irreligious" or "unchurched" in our midst stands in direct opposition to the fulfillment of Christ's purpose to reach those who are not yet committed to Him.
- The selfish desire to make church a place that is inward focused by playing it safe and keeping things comfortable for Christians is nothing new.

- Soon after Jesus went to be with His Father in heaven, Christ follower's soon became self-absorbed, and James was a firsthand witness and voice against this dangerous attitude.

6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue...

13 When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me..."

19 "And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."

Acts chapter 15 verses 6, 13, & 19

- We stand in the way of the people who God cares about the most when we put our own desires and wants as believers in Christ above the needs of the unchurched.
- This is why we do church so differently at Bethel, and why we are committed to not making it difficult for unchurched people to turn to Christ.

Doesn't God want us to look after our own needs first and then reach out to lost people? Not exactly...

- Reaching the lost was Jesus' primary objective.

10 For the Son of Man* came to seek and save those who are lost."

Luke chapter 19 verse 10

- Jesus made the purpose of reaching irreligious people the highest priority for the church.

8b And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts chapter 1 verse 8b

- Self- sacrifice rather than self-centeredness is the true mark of the Christian and of the church.

43 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark chapter 10 verses 42 - 45

Gut Check- How well are you living a life of self-sacrifice?

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*

James chapter 3 verses 17 & 18

- ✓ At church?
- ✓ At home with your kid's or parents?
- ✓ With your husband, wife, or significant other?
- ✓ At work?
- ✓ With your finances & time?
- ✓ With your cravings or addictions?