

Title: Selfie or Servant  
Date: May 22, 2022  
Subject: We gain happiness when we  
Scripture: Hebrews 12:1 - 3

Paul David Tripp recalls a man who may have been the hardest person he ever counseled: “He was self-assured and controlling. He argued for the rightfulness of everything he had ever done. He acted like the victim when in fact he was the victimizer. He had crushed his marriage and alienated his children. He loved himself and had a wonderful plan for his life. It was his will in his way at his time. He made everyone a slave to his plan or he drove them out of his life.

“He made incredible sacrifices to get what he wanted but chafed against the sacrifices God called him to make. But in a moment of grace I will never forget, he quit fighting, controlling, and defending. He asked me to stop talking and said: “Paul, I get it. I have been so busy being God that I have had little time or interest in serving God.” It was one of the most accurate moments of self-diagnosis I had ever experienced. He was right. No sooner had the words come out of his mouth than he began to weep like I had never seen a man weep. His body shook with grief as grace began its work of freeing him from his bondage to himself.

“But my friend was not unique. If you’re a parent, you know that your children are collections of self-sovereignty. All a child really wants is his own way. He doesn’t want to be told what to eat, what to wear, when to go to bed, how to steward his possessions, or how to treat others. He wants to be in the center of his own little world and to write his own set of rules. And he is surprised that you have the audacity to tell him what to do. But it isn’t just children. Sin causes this self-sovereignty to live in all of us. We tend to want more control than we are wise enough or strong enough to handle. We want people to follow our way and stay out of our way. But when we wish for these things, we are forgetting who we are, who God is, and what grace has blessed us with. We are always either mourning the fact that we aren’t getting our way or celebrating that grace welcomes us to a new and better way” (Taken from *New Morning Mercies* by *Paul David Tripp*).

We can frame the issue in terms of serving self or serving God and others.

READ Hebrews 12:1 - 3. “Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” is often used to comfort people that loved ones and Bible people in heaven are watching us. It’s like we’re the athletes and they’re the spectators who witness what we’re doing, cheering us on. It’s a nice thought, but not really accurate.

The imagery is of Old Testament saints who were faithful to God. They bear witness/testify to God’s plan and his faithfulness through their stories of faith. They’re like Abel of whom it was said: “And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead” (Hebrews 11:4). The Old Testament saints and the saints who’ve died since the time of Christ cheer us on in this manner. Their stories implore us to follow in their footsteps.

Their stories are helpful and instructive. However, our main attention is to be focused on Jesus as shown by “let us fix our eyes on Jesus” at the beginning of v. 2 and “consider him who endured” at the

beginning of v. 3. We need to see what Jesus said about serving and how he exemplified it so we can have a better understanding and application of how we're to serve.

Jesus is the Supreme Witness by virtue of his perfect life and sacrificing his life for others. His testimony is weightier than all who came before and after him. He ran the faith race perfectly. Everyone else had stumblings and failures. He's described as the author and perfecter of our faith. Other translations and people trying to clarify the meaning use related words: beginning, pioneer, captain, leader, source, initiator, finisher, goal, completion, consummation, objective, the one who brings it to maturity and the perfection.

We wouldn't be able to have faith if it weren't for Jesus. He created it, lived it out and is the goal of our faith. The Bible asserts Jesus is the only one who could be God. He stands out among all other initiators of belief systems who remained dead after they died or never existed to begin with. He is the only person who died and came back to life.

Jesus did what he did because of the joy/happiness he'd receive. Bob Deffinbaugh: "Jesus was motivated by the "joy set out for him." The term "set out" is the same term that we find in verse 1, which speaks of the race "set out" for us. The "joy" set out before Jesus was the joy set out for Him by the Father. While the specifics of this "joy" are not spelled out, I think that it is safe to say that this joy would include... the joy of obeying and carrying out the Father's will, the joy of bringing glory to the Father, the joy of being raised, ascended, and exalted at the right hand of the Father, the joy of reconciling lost sinners to God" ([bible.org/seriespage/30-losing-weight-hebrews-121-3](http://bible.org/seriespage/30-losing-weight-hebrews-121-3)).

Jesus looked ahead to when he'd return to heaven where he'd sit at the Father's right hand till his enemies were made a footstool for his feet (Hebrews 12:2). Because of serving which led to his death on the cross "God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:8–11). He'd be restored to perfect fellowship with the Father. Full happiness.

What would be his path to joy/true happiness? We see it in v. 2: "endured the cross, scorning its shame." Kind of sounds crazy, doesn't it? Jesus Christ knew ahead of time what it meant to be crucified for the sins of all humanity. He knew how the physical pain and torture would feel -- nails driven through his wrists and feet, crown of thorns on his head, excruciating struggle of trying to breathe. He knew the mental anguish he'd go through. He knew the spiritual suffering of becoming sin, of having all of mankind's sin placed on him.

Doesn't sound like a road to joy. Sounds like a road to unimaginable misery and sadness. There may not have been joy in the journey as he experienced the cross, but he knew there was joy in his destination. Jesus did what he did because his eyes weren't fixed on himself. His eyes were fixed on us and he considered us.

Jesus came to serve. He changed the way people should view serving. Ancient Greeks viewed it as menial, beneath the dignity of the normal person. Jews saw it as meritorious, something for which they'd earn credit with God. Jesus elevated serving to the highest form of relationship though it involves sacrifice, giving of oneself, putting others interests first.

Patrick Morley defines a servant: “someone who goes where Jesus would go to do what Jesus would do... Unless and until we serve him as an expression of gratitude, our lives will have no enduring meaning. We will not be happy” (10 Secrets of Happiness, p. 141). He cited three main activities in which Jesus was involved: relieving human suffering, teaching people about the kingdom of God and training disciples to do what he did.

We are to be like our Lord and Master, the Master Servant. Jesus said as much: “Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26). Like Master, like servant. We’re servants who serve.

We began by looking at the joy set before Jesus. What’s the joy set before us? It’s expressed in related terms in Hebrews 12. The purpose of the teaching is so we “will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3). Those are certainly the opposite of having joy/true happiness. Later, in v. 5, it speaks of the word of encouragement that addresses us as sons. In v. 6 we’re reminded the Lord loves us. V. 10 - God has our good in view. Lastly, in v. 11 - a harvest of righteousness and peace would be produced in us.

Jesus told many parables about his return, referring to his followers as servants who needed to be ready for the master’s return. One parable reverses the expected roles of master and servants (Luke 12:35 - 37): “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.” So far, sounds like the usual script. Let's continue. “I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.” Another parable informs us Jesus will greet his faithful servants: “Well done, good and faithful servant!... Come and share your master's happiness!” (Matthew 24:21, 23).

Jesus, the Master, will serve his servants in heaven. He’ll reward them as he’ll provide and fill them with all they need. There’s the wedding supper of the Lamb where he, as the groom, serves as host. How will it work? Will he do the serving by speaking the meal into existence? Will the angels be the servers?

There’s “a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... On each side of the river is the tree of life which bears 12 crops of fruit... the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse...and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1 - 5). There’s the most important promise of being with Jesus: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

Listen to this depiction of joy in heaven: “The tension is taken off...for there is no need for painful effort, and the lamps that burn dimly and require tending...are laid aside, and ‘they need no candle, for the Lord is the light thereof; and there is no more intense listening for the first foot-fall of One who is coming, for He has come, and expectation is turned into fellowship and fruition. The strained muscles can relax, and instead of effort and weariness, there is repose upon the restful couches prepared by Him...ever new refreshment, like a whiff of fresh air or the gleam of the far-off daylight at the top of the shaft to the miner, cramped at his work in the dark...there is neither pollution to be feared from the golden pavement, nor

detention from briars or thorns, nor work that is so hard as to be toil or so unwelcome as to be pain. There is rest from labor, care, change, and fear of loss, from travel and travail, from tired limbs and hearts more tired still, from struggle and sin, from all which makes the unrest of life” (MacLaren’s Expositions, Luke 12:37).

We can also experience moments of joy/true happiness while we’re on earth as we serve even as Jesus experienced. We don't have to wait till we get to heaven.

Max Lucado asks us to imagine the joy-giving benefits of decisions to serve through things like offering to wash dishes, arriving on time for staff meetings and listening attentively, giving out encouragement notes or mowing the grass of the elderly couple. He says, “Of course you can! You've experienced it. When you took a pie to the sick coworker or sang a song to the sick child, were not both of you encouraged because of it?”

Then he introduces us to Moe and Joe. “Moe expects everyone to serve him. The moment he awakens he thinks, *Is someone going to bring me coffee?* He leaves the house thinking, *The traffic better be light.* If the service of the convenience store clerk is slow, Moe is mad. If the parking lot attendant forgets Moe's name, Moe grumbles. If the employees at work need more time than Moe wants to give them, Moe lets them know. Moe has high expectations of the world. He expects to be served. He expects people to cater to his plans, meet his needs, and reward him. Consequently, Moe is seldom happy. The service is too slow, the commute takes too long, and employees don't remember his name quickly enough. Moe, miserable Moe.

“Joe, on the other hand, measures the success of his day with this standard: Whom can I help today? Since there are always people who need help, Joe is insanely successful. He serves his wife by bringing her coffee in the morning. He serves the convenience store clerk by giving him a smile. He serves the parking lot attendant with an encouraging word. He keeps a positive attitude at work. Bad weather? Snarly traffic? No problem. The world doesn't exist to take care of him. He exists to take care of others. Circumstances do not affect him. Joe goes to bed with a smile on his face.

“Moe is unhappy and makes people frown. Joe is happy and makes people smile. Which one are you? Moe? Joe? Or a little bit of both, Mo-Jo? Maybe it's time to look at life differently. Make your happiness dependent on how others serve you, and you will always be disappointed. Find happiness in serving others, and ... Well, you can complete the sentence” (Max Lucado, *How Happiness Happens*, pp. 96 - 98).

While on earth, like Jesus, we’re to endure our cross. Jesus told us we’re to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Part of this is dying to self and the ways self wants us to consider ourselves as most important. It includes throwing off the dead weight of sin and running with perseverance (v. 1). It includes struggling against sin (v. 4). It includes submitting to the Lord's discipline (vv. 5 - 11). It means being alive to God's priorities. It means serving the Lord and serving others.

Two heroes of the faith provide excellent perception. When George Mueller was asked the secret of his service, he responded: “There was a day when I died, *utterly died*; died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied to show myself approved only to God.”

Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak at a large church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms as he told the congregation what Taylor had accomplished in China, presenting him as “our illustrious guest.” Taylor stood quietly for a moment, then opened his message, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.”

Since we’re to serve one another, not serving is failure to follow God’s instructions and therefore it’s sin. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for being full of self-indulgence, interested in serving themselves and having others serve them (Matthew 23:25). Prior to the fruit of the Spirit is a list of acts of the sinful nature which includes self-oriented attitudes and actions -- jealousy, envy, and selfish ambition (Galatians 5:19 - 21).

More insight from our friend Lucado: “Sin is the word the Bible uses to describe the arrogant streak that causes self-elevation. Sin engenders a sense of entitlement. Sin describes the malady that prompted my snarl in the shopping mall parking lot. A woman snagged my parking place. The parking place I wanted. The parking place I needed. The parking place for which I had been waiting. (I was waiting with my blinker on, for crying out loud!). The parking place I deserved because I was in a hurry, and I am very important, and I do not have time to lollygag at shopping malls, because I’m a man of God, and it was the week prior to Christmas. Holidays are busy times for pastors, and the parking place opened at just the right moment, proof of God’s favor upon me. How dare that woman take my blessing! But she did. I thought of saying something to her. I am so glad I held my tongue, because when she saw me drive by, she said, Hello, *Pastor Max! See you Sunday!*” (Max Lucado, *How Happiness Happens*, p. 94).

Self, selfishness, self-will, self-assertion and the rest of the self stuff are anti-serve. Theologian William Barclay, “If a man is forever concerned first and foremost with his own interests then he is bound to collide with others. If for any man life is a competition...then he will always think of other human beings as enemies, or at least as opponents who must be pushed out of the way...and the object of life becomes not to help others up but to push them down” (*William Barclay, The Letter to Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p.40.)

Here’s advice titled “How To Be Miserable.” “Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use “I” as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them. Never forget a service you have rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others” (*Daily Walk*, 6/29/93).

The apostle Paul had one person in his life “no one else like him” (Philippians 2:20). Everyone else looked out for his own interests not those of Christ, but Timothy took a genuine interest in others’ welfare and proved himself as he served with Paul in the work of the gospel. Paul also commended the household of Stephanas for similar reasons (1 Corinthians 16:15-18). Most Bible versions state they devoted/dedicated themselves to the service of other Christ followers. The King James uniquely words it “addicted themselves.” They got hooked on serving and did it to themselves. What a great addiction to have. May we be so addicted.