



## Who me?

Text: Luke 4:16-21

Care and Bridging Pastor Dan Slagle

1. Read Genesis 3.
  - a. How has the Fall affected man's relationship with God, self, others, and creation?
  - b. In many ways, the effects of the Fall can be described in poverty language. Today Dan talked about spiritual poverty. *When Helping Hurts* describe the effects of the Fall in terms of the Poverty of Spiritual Intimacy (broken relationship with God). How does this change your view of what it means to be poor?
  - c. Are you currently in a season where you are feasting and full of God's Word and spirit or do you find yourself full of "spiritual junk food"?
  - d. Where do you see (or have you seen) the effects of spiritual poverty in your life?
  - e. What is the good news of Luke 4:16-21?
  
2. Being consumed by our own fears can lead to a blindness to the those around us.
  - a. What fears are most prevalent in your life right now?
  - b. Where do you find that they invade your thoughts and keep you focused on yourself?
  - c. Is there a place that fear keeps you from engaging in the lives of others, our community, or our world?
  - d. Read Luke 2:10-14, what specific words or phrases jump out at you in the announcement of Jesus birth?
  - e. What hope does this provide?
  - f. What are ways you combat fear in your life? How can your community help and support you?
  
3. Read Galatians 5:1, 13-14. Christ came and died so that we can be free from captivity.
  - a. Dan mentioned how captive we can become to "stuff." Did that resonate with you?
  - b. What else can we held captive by?
  - c. Do you recognize captivity in your own live?
  - d. According to the verses above, what should we do with our freedom?
  
4. Read John 17:18, part of Jesus's "High Priestly Prayer" to the Father shortly before His betrayal and crucifixion.

- a. What does this reveal about what was on Jesus's mind and heart as He drew nearer and nearer to the cross?
- b. How does Jesus's mission relate to our mission?
- c. How are you currently living your life to fulfill this mission?
- d. Share with the group where you are involved in kingdom work or where you feel God calling you to engage in his kingdom work.

**Challenge:** Read Study Deeper. Where might you have become self-absorbed and blind to the needs around you whether relational, physical, or spiritual?

**Prayer:**

O God,

Open our eyes that we may see the needs of others;  
Open our ears that we may hear their cries;  
Open our hearts that we may feel their anguish and their joy.

Let us not be afraid to defend the oppressed, the poor, the powerless,  
because of the anger and might of the powerful.

Show us where love and hope and faith are needed,  
and use us to bring them to those places.

Open our ears and eyes, our hearts and lives,  
that we may in these coming days be able to do some work of justice and peace for you. Amen.

## STUDY DEEPER

### Rescued from the Sea of Self

A friend once told me the story of announcing her fifth pregnancy to her father.

Instead of the happy congratulations she hoped to receive, she heard, “You mean, I’m going to have to ask my friend to make another rug?” For each of her four previous children, her father’s friend had crafted personal, handmade rugs as baby gifts. With the news of her fifth child, her father instantly thought of the awkwardness he would feel asking the friend for yet another special rug.

Before you judge her father too quickly as an unloving or selfish soul, you might be able to think of experiences you’ve had where you reacted in a similar way.

Your husband gets a new job that he’s excited about, but you instantly think of how it will mean less time for you and the kids.

You find out your child’s new teacher for the school year is expecting a baby in November. Instead of rejoicing over the new life, you automatically wonder who the substitute will be and if they’ll be equipped to teach your child well.

You’re leading a Bible study, and the person who signed up to bring snacks sends a last-minute email that they’re sick. Instead of stopping to pray for them, you’re burdened by the thought of needing to pull together refreshments yourself.

After sharing her story, my friend said, “People are always thinking about themselves first. We’re always thinking about how a circumstance will affect us before anything else.”

Those words have stuck with me for years. I’ve been convicted as I’ve seen them ring true in my own life. Our natural sinful hearts have a tendency to be self-absorbed, thinking of how any change in circumstance or relationship will affect us personally before we think about anything (or anyone) else. This kind of selfishness brings consequences both for our own soul and for those around us.

### The Dangers of Self-Absorption

When we are so inwardly focused, we can miss out on how God is working in others’ lives. We’re blinded by our own shadows to the needs and evidences of grace around us. Our eyes are laser-focused on self, and we can become utterly detached from those God has placed in our lives.

We miss out on sharing the joy of our friend’s engagement, because we’re struggling with jealousy and bitterness over not having a relationship of our own.

We miss out on ministering to a friend struggling with depression, because we can’t seem to make our way out of our own miry pit.

We lose sight of the purpose of our ministry and the joy of it growing, because we’re worried about being overtaxed ourselves.

Bitterness can take root as we look at others around us and wonder why they’re not seeking to minister to our needs.

Self-absorption can be a slow poison that works its way into our hearts and then outwardly into our actions (or lack of action). As I've pondered this ugly truth in my own life, I've thought about the need to push against these "normal" feelings and counter them with truth from God's word.

### God's Remedy for the Inwardly Focused

#### 1. Train yourself to be others-focused.

Romans 12:15 tells us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." We have to train ourselves to empathize with others. It doesn't come naturally to our inwardly-focused selves.

When someone in our lives announces good news, we should push against the desire to automatically think about how their news affects us, and instead rejoice with them. Be glad that God has given them a blessing. Cheer with them. Praise God with them and consider the blessing this new circumstance will be to their lives. Be thankful to God with them.

On the other hand, when you hear some disparaging news from someone in your life, listen well, ask questions, and seek to empathize with the difficult season they're in. Stop yourself from running down the path of how someone's illness, or job loss, or rebelling children might affect you or your family. Instead, look for ways to serve them in their time of need. It doesn't come naturally; we have to train ourselves to be others-focused.

#### 2. Put others' needs ahead of your own.

Philippians 2:3–4 gives us a straightforward reminder to put others' needs ahead of our own. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Ask God for help not to act out of selfishness, but to consider the needs of others. Though this verse is clear that it's normal and reasonable to consider our own interests, it admonishes us to be focused on more than just ourselves.

#### 3. Look to Jesus, our ultimate example.

Look to Jesus who, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6–8).

The very man who had every reason to exalt self and reign supreme, instead suffered, bled, and died so that undeserving sinners like us would be free. He was not focused on the pain he would experience, or the loss of his earthly relationships, but he humbly submitted to the Father's will. And even in his last moments on the cross, he was concerned for his earthly mother, exhorting the apostle John to care for her (John 19:26–27).

Consider the changing circumstances in your own life and how you've reacted to them. Are you lost in a sea of self-absorption, or are you pushing against the grain to see how God is at work in others' lives around you?

Take hold of the truths of God's word and look to our ultimate example – the most unselfish person who has ever lived – seeking to be one who delights in considering others first, rather than self.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/rescued-from-the-sea-of-self>