

No One Like You

Does it seem to you that this has been a particularly hard year for sickness? Maybe it's just the people around me—my family and my small group, but it seems like everyone and their kids have been sick a lot this year. I think this last Tuesday was the first time our small group met when someone wasn't sick.

Maybe it's just me but, with that in mind, I have a question for you. *How many of you wash your hands every time after you use the restroom?* (Let your neighbor look at your hands) How many of you pretty much only wash your hands in a public restroom if there's someone else in there who will know whether or not you washed your hands?

Now, here's the deal. A recent survey found that 95% of people say they wash their hands after using a public restroom, but actually, a very large study of 200,000 toilet-goers (hidden cameras in soap dispensers) found that 64% of women did, and only 32% of men did. But another study also found that even when people do wash their hands, most people don't wash their hands enough to kill the germs. So, might have something to do with all the sickness going around. So, what do we do about it?

Well, we could educate people. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine installed an LED screen in a gas station restroom that rotated through four different messages with different motivations.

- Education: "Water doesn't kill germs, soap does."

- Insult: "Don't be a dope -- wash with soap!"
- Grossing people out: "Soap it off or eat it later"
- Public Shaming: "Is the person next to you washing with soap?" (This last message was the only one that increased the likelihood of both men and women washing with soap.)

You know what the best solution is? Yep, public shaming. To have someone always in the restroom watching you. But of course, that's creepy, so do you know what people have found is an almost equal alternative is? Put up a poster of someone looking at you when you get out of the stall.

Different topic, but same idea. In 2012, a study done at Newcastle University in England wanted to find out what would deter the bike thefts that were pervasive on the campus. So, they picked three spots on campus that had high rates of bicycle theft. At one spot they hung this poster. [cycle thieves poster] It's just a pair of eyes and the phrase "Cycle Thieves? We are Watching You." At the other two, they did nothing.

In the year after they installed the poster, there was a 62% decrease in bike thefts. But in the two control locations, there was an increase of 65% in bike thefts from the previous year. When you add that study to the growing pile of other studies, it shows that people behave better when they think someone is watching.

Now, why is that? I watched a TED Talk about this and the presenter said this about making people think they're being watched. He said, "*It can turn on people's existing desire to do good.*" I do think that most people have an existing desire to do good. It's this thing called the Image of God peeking through our fallenness. But the truth is, most of us

are more motivated to *look good than* do good. It's pretty easy to look good. All you have to do is share a meme. But it's not as easy to *do* good because it often costs us something. And the truth is, we can usually get the same immediate benefit by making a token effort that doesn't put us out too much.

Over the past few weeks, we've been walking verse by verse through the book of Philippians. In chapter one, Paul is modeling a life of commitment to Jesus. Then in chapter 2, he points to Jesus himself as the model of humility and selflessness.

Last week, Keith did an incredible job of talking about what it looks like for Christians to shine our light in the world. When Christians understand that we represent Christ, then we'll follow Christ's example of self-sacrificial love for others.

When I first sat down to study our passage this week, I thought to myself, "Why are we even studying this?" Here's the summary of the passage, Philippians 2:19-30. *"When I find out the result of my trial, I'm going to send Timothy to let you know, but first I'm sending Epaphroditus."* That's some moving stuff, right? Are you ready for the altar call?

But as I read a little deeper, three verses stuck with me. In verse 19, Paul says he's going to send his apprentice and traveling partner, Timothy to give them news. Then in verse 20, here's what he says about Timothy, **"I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."**

Now, we've been talking about Paul's great attitude when writing Philippians, but here he seems to be getting in a little dig at some people, or at least expressing some frustration. If you were with us first week, maybe you remember Paul mentioning these people. Look at chapter 1, verse 15. **"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so out of love...The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely..."**

Paul seems to be tolerant of these teachers who preach the real gospel, even if they have selfish motives for doing it. But this isn't ideal so Paul holds Timothy up as the model because he does the right thing for the right reason. Now, we'll get to that in just a minute, but let's look at some wrong reasons to do good and problem with them.

Well, we see a clue in verse 21 where Paul writes, **"For everyone looks out for their own interests..."** When someone does something good for the wrong reason, that wrong reason always has to do with selfishness or self-centeredness. Now, this is where the teachings of Christianity are at odds with what our culture promotes.

It would be a lie to say that our culture only tells people to look out for themselves. There certainly is a good amount of that, especially in marketing. But people are often encouraged to do good for others—civic engagement, stand up for other people's rights. It would be cynical to say there's no genuine goodwill there. I believe most people do really *want* to do good. And they *will* if it's not too hard and doesn't cost them too much. The problem is how we try to motivate people. Usually, we appeal to one of three things.

First, *we tell people if you do something good, it'll come back around*. Maybe there will be a financial benefit. For instance, our government subsidizes charitable giving by giving tax breaks. I'm not saying this is a bad thing or that you shouldn't accept a tax deduction for your charitable giving. I know the government is necessary, but if you can give your money to the church or a good charity, do that.

When you give in order to get something in return, you're not generous, you're making a deal. A friend of mine is raising money for a church he's planting in Des Moines next year. So, to support him, I bought this sweet t-shirt. Does that make me generous? Not really. That doesn't make it wrong, it's just not a benevolent act.

The second way we motivate people is to tell them *if you do something good, you'll feel good about yourself*. Now, this is generally true. It feels good to do something good for someone else. Evolutionary biologists would say that this trait evolved because it encouraged pro-social behavior. I say that this is something God wired into all of us to encourage us to look out for others.

But there are two problems here. First, sometimes doing good *doesn't* feel very good. I can feel good by giving a little bit of money to someone. But what about when it really costs me? And of course, as Christians, our model for doing good is Jesus who died on a cross for us. I bet that didn't feel good. But it was very good.

The second problem is that sometimes actions that make us feel good don't actually DO good. This is why I'm kind of mixed about short-term mission projects. On the

one hand, visiting a developing country can change our perspective about the world. It can build unity in a group and can also encourage missionaries that are there.

But oftentimes, churches send teams overseas to build a church paint a house or do some other work project. And it feels good to do that, because you're helping people. You get to meet the family that's very appreciative. What's not to feel good about?

But when we send teams of people to Africa to build houses or churches, many of them are unskilled workers that take away work from skilled local workers. It *feels* good, but it can *hurt* the local economy, takes work away from skilled workers, and creates a paternalistic relationship between us and them. So, while it's natural for us to feel good when we do good, that can't be our primary motivation.

Another motivation for doing is to get a good *reputation*. People think highly of us when they see us do good things—it's good PR. In fact, when a professional athlete gets into trouble, they'll often hire a PR firm and what's the first thing the PR firm does? Has them start a foundation or make sure they're seen volunteering out the in community.

But this is one that Jesus addresses directly in Matthew six. Here's what he says, **"¹Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what**

your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Now, there are some people say that in order for act to be truly good, there has to be *nothing* in it for you. But, I want you to notice something about Jesus’ teaching here. Jesus isn’t against seeking rewards for doing good. In fact, Jesus teaches a lot about rewards. He just tells us we need to be clear about which rewards who we’re seeking them from.

He says that those *“who do their acts of righteousness in order to be seen by people have already received their reward.”* What’s their reward? Being seen by people. So, Jesus says, if that’s your temptation, continue to do good, but to do it in private. Then, he says, **“Your father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”** Jesus says it’s OK to look for a reward, but only if the reward we’re seeking is from God.

So, these are the three motivations for doing good—payback, good feelings and a good reputation. So, what’s the problem with these? Well, practically speaking—reliability. If you’re doing something for human gain, when you don’t get what you want, you’re liable to stop doing it.

But when Paul recommends Timothy to the Philippian church, he says something interesting. Verse 20 again, **“I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.”** In other words, they can trust that Timothy has their best interest in

mind. He's not just doing a job. He's not just trying to get recognition. He's not doing it for selfish motives. He really does care about you!

But why? As far as we know, Timothy had never been to Philippi. He'd never met them and they'd never met him. So why would he care about the Philippians? The answer is in verse 21, **"For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."** Paul implies that Timothy is genuinely concerned about them because he's **"looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ."**

This is interesting because we would expect Paul to write, *"Everyone looks out for their own interests, not the interests of others..."* But instead he ties the interests of Christ to the interests of his people. You see, for Paul, there's no such thing as someone who follows Christ, but doesn't care about his people.

Now, this shouldn't be a big surprise, because we see it throughout Scripture. For instance, 1 John 4:20 says, **"²⁰Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."**

But probably the prime example of this comes from Jesus in Matthew 22. It goes like this, **"³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"**

³⁷Jesus replied: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The people who came to Jesus were, essentially, the religious establishment. Their question was a version of, “Jesus, what’s really important?” *We have this Law, this way of life that we believe is what God really wants. And there are 613 laws, so that can be a lot for people to remember. So, Jesus, what’s the most important thing.*

The first part of Jesus’ answer wouldn’t have been much of a surprise to them. He quotes the Old Testament—Deuteronomy 6:5 **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”** Jesus didn’t make this up. Rabbis had long considered this the summary of the Law of Moses. But what’s new here is that Jesus doesn’t stop there, because he knew there was a danger leaving it there.

The danger is that people can have some creative ideas about how to show we love God. In the past, it’s meant sacrificing your children, building shrines or Temples, sitting on a 30-foot pole in the desert for years at a time, starving yourself or simply studying theology and believing the right intellectual propositions. For the people Jesus was talking to, loving God meant following each law meticulously and staying far away from people who didn’t follow the law the way they did.

So, this was Jesus' way of saying, you can't stop there because that's not what God really wants. *What does it look like to love God with all your heart, soul and strength?* If you're a follower of Jesus, the way you show your love for God is to *love your neighbor as yourself*. I'm not minimizing the importance of right belief, but I don't care what you call yourself, but if actively loving your neighbor isn't core to how you practice your faith, you're not following Jesus because you don't have in mind the interest of Christ.

Paul says that Timothy has gotten to the same point as him in that he only wants what Jesus wants and that leads him to sacrificially serve others—especially the Church. Because of that, the Philippians can trust him to do what's best for them. He won't flake out. He won't suddenly disappear because he's done his duty. He doesn't do it because it feels good or to get a good reputation. He does what's good because Christ says it's good.

So, the question today is, *"Can people say that about you?"* We already know this is a rare quality today because we know people are more likely to wash their hands or just not steal a bike, when someone is watching. But it was also a rare quality in Paul's day because he said, *"I have no one else like him."* So, if it's not natural, what does it take to become a person that people say, "I have no one like him" "I have no one like her" that always looks out for the interest of Christ?

Throughout history, Christian practice has often been divided into "Works of Piety" and "Works of Mercy." Works of Piety are what we typically think of as "religious" things like: corporate worship, communion, prayer and fasting, or Scripture reading. In our

congregation, that would include small groups. You might think of them as ways to learn to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

“Works of Mercy” include things like visiting the sick and imprisoned, feeding and clothing those in need, and giving help to the poor; even seeking racial reconciliation. In our congregation, we do this through Together for Good and FreedomWorks. You might say they’re how we love our neighbor as ourselves.

These are known as “means of grace.” In other words, they are ways in which God communicates his grace to us. Doing them puts us in a position where God can change us, but only if we do them with the right heart. If we practice these things as a duty or as a way of earning God’s love, then we don’t really understand them.

Making these practices a way of life and asking God to teach us through them will change us. But, how do we make them a way of life when they haven’t really been on our radar before? Let me mention a couple of ways.

First, *accountability*. If you have a good friend or if you’re in a small group, this might be a challenge you take up together. Set a goal of doing a Work of Mercy every day. Now, make sure you’re doing things that really benefit others—not just token things that make you feel good. Listen to people and respond to their needs. Don’t push your way in when you’re not needed, but genuinely meet someone’s need. Then check in with each other each week. How did you do? If you didn’t do it, choose a severe punishment the rest of the group can inflict on you.

But you might say, “That’s great, but I still find myself wanting to be seen doing good things.” Well, in that case, there are a couple of things you do. First, don’t do big things with a big production. Just do the small stuff—cleaning the bathroom, helping with a project at work, getting up with the baby, doing the dishes. Small things that you don’t get accolades for, but really bless others.

Another idea is to do your service in *secret*. Give anonymously. Do the tasks no one else wants to do and don’t tell anyone about it. John Ortberg, in his book *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* suggests that you do a day of secret service, where you wake up and, without telling anyone, your agenda is simply to serve others.

Now, how does this teach us to look out for the interests of Christ. Well, as you’re doing the service, pray. If you’re like most, you’ll be tempted to think about how great you are and how lucky your spouse or your kids or your friends are to have you. But as you’re doing them, pray that God would be meeting you and teaching you in those acts.

One final thing...here’s a way you can remember to make this a way of life. Let’s go back to hand-washing. When you wash your hands in the restroom, you don’t just do it for yourself. Sure, you benefit from it, but the real benefit is that you don’t spread germs to other people.

Now, I want you to make a mental hook here. What if, every time you went to wash your hands (or were tempted to skip it) you just think, “I’m not doing this for me. I’m doing this for the sake of others.” But understand, it’s not just about hand-washing.

As you're washing, recalibrate your thinking, "When I walk through that door, I live to serve others."

Priest and author Henri Nouwen knew this life very well. For 20 years, he had prestigious teaching positions at Notre Dame and Yale and Harvard Divinity School. But these positions left him empty. During that time, he met a man named Jean Venier, who founded a network of communities for people with severe disabilities. In time, Nouwen left his teaching position, to serve as pastor to one of these communities and spent the last ten years of his life in obscurity, caring for the day to day needs of a man named Adam who couldn't speak and couldn't barely do anything on his own. And he didn't do it just because he needed a break. He did it because he had in mind the interests of Christ.

Now, I'm not telling you to quit your job and go work at a community for people with disabilities. Everyone can't do that. But I did want to give you a picture of the kind of thing Paul said about Timothy.

Many people live their lives so people will say about them, "He's so cool," "She's so smart," "He's so funny," "She's so beautiful." But what would it look like to live a life so people said, "There is no one else like her, there is no one else like him. Everyone else looks out for their own interest, but she looks out for the interests of Christ."