

“AMERICAN IDOL #4 (ME FIRST!)”
(Philippians 2:3-11)
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[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Me Linebacker” Videoclip; (#2) White Napkin]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 8-22-10]

-I-

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Philippians 2:3-11 and Pray.
2. [VIDEO INTRODUCTION TO SERIES (“American Idol” theme music & logo)]...
3. Today we’re concluding a series on the idols of American culture by talking about the **Idol of Consumerism and Self-centeredness**: ...the idea that life should be centered around “*Me First!*” – around what *we* want... around what *we* think is “best for *us*.”¹
(Read Sermon Notes...)

A–Now, we don’t have to go far to find examples of consumerism in action – all we’ve got to do is turn on our TV, surf the internet, open our email, or even use certain apps on our smartphones to be bombarded with *advertising* that tries to sell us on the idea that we’d be happier if we only possessed a certain product.

B–According to one source, in the U.S. alone, over \$413 billion is spent each year on marketing and advertising² – all in an attempt to build life primarily (and sometimes even exclusively) around *us*... the big number one!³

1–And so, for example, in the 1970s there was the “Me Generation.”

2–In the 1980s we could walk into Burger King and “Have it *your* way.”

3–And now, of course, we live in the world of iPhones, iPads, iTouches, i-this & i-that.

C–And the end result is a society/culture that’s less friendly, less trusting, more suspicious, more pessimistic, and more lonely than in any point in recent history!

4. Now, let’s be clear, there’s nothing wrong with having healthy wants and desires in life – as human beings, we were *created* to have certain needs that *should* be addressed and tended to (i.e., we *weren’t* meant to be *self-sufficient*).

A–The problem is that when we become *preoccupied* with these needs, or when simple *needs* mutate into excessive *wants*, then people/relationships are often reduced to *utilitarianism*.

B–What I mean by this is that when our quest for “*Me First!*” becomes more important than anything else, then other people become mere “stepping stones” on our way to “getting ahead” in life.

C–And it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that this can result in behaviors as *serious* as physical and emotional abuse, violence, stealing, and to things as *simple* as arrogance, judgmentalism, and plain rudeness.

5. And unfortunately, we Christians often fall to this self-centered mentality and lifestyle of Consumerism, as well.

A—For example, we look around and start comparing what *our* church has or is doing with what *other* churches have or are doing, and we make the assumption that we’d be “better off” if we could just be more like them, or have a preacher like *theirs*, or do ministries like what *they* do!

1—And we begin to think that if we don’t get what *we* want, then the solution is to just leave and “shop around” for a new church until we find what we’re looking for!

2—I can’t even begin to tell you how many times over the last 20 years of ministry that I’ve seen this happen to well-meaning church members who somehow think that “*the grass is gonna’ be greener*” at some *other* church, only to discover that when they get there, it’s not significantly different from where they left.

B—You see, what many of us have yet to understand is that *real* contentment in life, in faith and even in our church lies *not* in our superficial quest for things that will “*make us happy*” and “*meet all our needs,*” ...

1—...But in *us* instead addressing the idol in our *own* hearts which says that life should be all about what *we* want in the first place – that *our* wants/desires, and *our* happiness/contentment, are the most important things in life.

2—And I believe that *until* we address THAT idol of self-centered consumerism in *our* hearts, no amount of product purchases, or corporate achievements, or “church shopping/hopping” will *ever* bring us true contentment or fulfillment in life.

–II–

6. So, what’s the answer, then? **How do we avoid this idol that’s all around us in today’s culture?** (And how do we break free if we’re already trapped by it?)

A—Well, let’s watch one humorous solution... [WATCH “*ME Linebacker*” Video (2:58) from SermonSpice.com] What do you all think? Is that the best way to deal with today’s “Me First” mentality?

B—Well, some of you might think so, but let me suggest that in today’s scripture from Philippians 2, we find what I believe to be some more realistic pieces of advice that I want to couch in the form of two questions:

[Contemp. Service ONLY: Read [Philippians 2:3-11](#) from the MSG version...]

7. First of all, we can **ask ourselves: “Who is this really for?”** (this product, service, or desired change)? Does it primarily benefit *me alone*? Or does it also serve the interests of others?

A—I think this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote Verses 3-4, where he says
 (MSG) “*Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand.*”
 (NRSV) “*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*”

1—In other words, even when we’re seeking something for ourselves, we need to consider how it might benefit others

2—Don’t just seek what’s best for *you* in *your situation*, but seek what’s best for others around you, as well. ⁴

B—Some of us, though, are so arrogant and self-centered that when offer our opinion or advice about something that we feel strongly about, and it’s not immediately acted upon to our liking, we get all in a huff & say that “*no one’s listening to us*”...

1—...All the while forgetting that what’s best for *us* may *not* necessarily be best for *everyone*, and that what God might want us to do instead is be open to the collective wisdom of others.

2—In the leadership processes of our church, we call this “*Consensus*” decision-making –it means that we don’t “vote” on decisions (because church “voting” is not biblical), but instead we seek input from any who’ll share, and then prayerfully try to first determine, and then “live with”, whatever seems to be God’s will for *ALL* of us.

C—You see, in this kind of mindset /way of living, seeking *GOD’s* will regarding *others* is as important (if not more so) than achieving *OUR* will regarding *ourselves*.

1—So... “*Who is it really for?*” Ask yourself that question.

2—And if the honest answer is “*Me, myself, and I*” then we’re responding as worldly consumer, rather than as a biblical Christian. ⁵

8. A second thing that Paul’s advice elicits here is for us to ask a question that was popular a few years ago: “**WWJD? (What would Jesus do?)**” – it’s essentially a call for us to take on the mind of Christ whenever we’re faced with choices in life.

A—And that’s basically what Paul is saying in Verses 5-8, where he talks about the fact that Jesus’ primary concern here on earth was *not* for himself, or even for his *own* needs (even though, as God incarnate, it *could have been* = Verse 6 says (MSG) “*he had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status...*”; (NRSV) “*he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited...*”)

B–But instead, as Verses 7-8 says, (MSG) “*he set aside the privileges of deity [and went through the] incredibly humbling process... [of] staying human...*” (NRSV) “*he emptied... [and] humbled himself...*” for the sake of others, even to the point of being willing to die on a cross for others.

1–Paul is saying that far from living the selfISH, self-centered life of a consumer, Jesus lived a humble, selfLESS life of a servant.

2–And in Verse 5 he bluntly says that that’s the kind of life that should define and characterize *us* as Christ’s followers, as well. ⁶

C–So if you asked others to describe *your* life, would they describe it as one of a “humble servant”? Or would you be described as one who merely seeks selfish gain?

D–Ask yourself, “*What would Jesus do?*” and then... do it!

–III–

9. I want to wrap up today with three metaphors that I believe accurately illustrate the difference between a consumerist mindset and the mind of Christ – between the self-centered attitude that permeates today’s culture, and the servant attitude that Jesus’ followers are to have.

A–The first metaphor uses a napkin like this... [**TUCK NAPKIN IN SHIRT UNDER CHIN...**] – this illustrates the consumer-driven idea that life is all about *me*; that my job and my work and my church all exist to serve *me* and meet *my* needs! (Where’s dinner? Feed me!)

B–And yet, if we live out the mind of *Christ*, the result is a very *different* metaphor ⁷...*Watch!* [**FALL TO KNEE and TRANSFER NAPKIN TO OUTSTRETCHED ARM...**] – you see, we’re called to be *servants*; to put the needs of others *first* (or at least to *include* others’ needs along with our own); and to ask “what would Jesus do?”

1–Turn to the person next to you & say “*Life’s not about me...*” [**Give time for this...**]

2–Now turn again and say “*Life’s about serving...*” [**Give time for this...**]

C–There’s actually one final metaphor that reinforces this idea: Holy Communion – if you think about it, it’s a great illustration of COUNTER-consumerism, because while consumerism calls us to serve *ourselves*, Holy Communion is a call to follow the example of the one who *first* served *others*.

10. You see, according to today’s scripture, life shouldn’t be about our allegiance to the “American Idol” of self-centered consumerism ⁸ – it shouldn’t be about “*Me First!*”

A–Instead, a life of Christian *faith* is a call to a life of *servicing God by servicing others*.

B–And when we’ve learned *that*, then I believe we’ll have learned the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

11. [PRAY: “O God, we thank you that in your son Jesus we find the supreme of selfless living that calls us to serve others, rather than for ourselves to *be served*. Forgive us, especially as people of faith, when we’ve made our lives primarily about what *we* want and desire for *ourselves*, instead of being what *you* want and desire of us for *others*. Help us not only to recognize the temptations of consumerism when we encounter them, but to receive the power of your Holy Spirit to help us to overcome and have victory over them. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who gave himself to serve the whole world, Amen.”]
12. [HOLY COMMUNION]

ENDNOTES:

1. Please note that I am not using the word “Consumerism” in terms of *economic theory* (which argues that an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable for society and culture), but instead am basing today’s message on another dictionary definition which says that it is “*the promotion of the consumer’s interests; a preoccupation with and an inclination toward the buying of consumer goods*”(www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consumerism).
2. 2008 figure from Yahoo Answers, “How much money is spent on advertising in the U.S alone each year?”, cited at www.m-forums.com/marketing-advertising-pr/money-spent-in-the-us-a-on-advertising-and-marketing-t49.html at website <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090805095200AAhL2K1>.
3. Another example of the consumerist/self-centered mentality is the famous bumper sticker a few years back that said “*God: Co-Pilot*” – well, if God is only the co-Pilot of your life, then guess who the Pilot is?... that’s right! US! Me, myself and I.
4. It’s been pointed out that the words “me” and “I” never appear in The Lord’s Prayer of Jesus, but that “our” and “us” do multiple times – indicating that even prayer should never be selfish in motivation.
5. Please note that I’m NOT saying that we should never be looking after ourselves at all. No. There are always appropriate ways that we can *and should* look after our own needs and cares, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. However, in our culture today self-care is not our problem – our problem is that we tend to be SO self-absorbed in our own cares that we don’t think about anyone *except* ourselves. In other words, we don’t *balance* our *self*-needs appropriately with the needs of *others*, resulting in an overall *selfish* attitude/mindset.
6. Two practical tools/ways of learning or taking on the “mind of Christ” are:
 - (#1) **Go on a Mission Trip** of some sort: Mission trips have a way of getting us outside ourselves because we see how much *we* have and how little *other* people have. It helps to humble ourselves so that we see and understand the needs of the world in a way that we are often oblivious too before. It helps us to learn/understand the selfishness of our own culture from the standpoint of others outside it.
 - (#2) **Practice Christian Fasting**: the purpose of fasting is not so much to “give up” something as it is to draw us away from *earthly/worldly* things so that we may have time/inclination to focus on *spiritual* things/things of *God*. So, whether it is giving up food and replacing it with prayer, or giving up other things for a period of time and replacing them with some other spiritual discipline, fasting has traditionally been one way that Christians have found helpful to combat a self-centered mindset and/or lifestyle.
7. I’ve used this metaphor before, and I first saw it demonstrated at the Fall 2008 “Beyond the Walls” Missions Conference of McEachern UMC (GA) by Keynote Speaker Rev. John Ed Mathison (retired pastor of Frazer Memorial UMC in Montgomery, AL).
8. Other general scriptures dealing with selfishness include: Genesis 4:9; Numbers 32:6; Psalm 38:11; Proverbs 11:26; 18:17; 24:11, 12; 28:27; Ezekiel 34:18; Haggai 1:4, Micah 3:11; Zechariah 7:6; Malachi 1:10; Matthew 19:21, 22; Luke 6:32-34; Romans 14:15; 15:1-3; 1Corinthians 10:23-24; 2Corinthians 5:15; Philippians 2:4, Galatians 6:2; 2Timothy 3:2-4; James 2:15, 16; 1John 3:17.