

# The Ugliness of Selfishness

*by Bryan Gibson*

Here is God's case against selfishness, at least in outline form: 1) He specifically condemns it (Romans 2:7-8; Galatians 5:20; James 3:14-16). 2) He shows us its ugly fruits, through men like King Saul (1 Samuel 18:8-9), and the rich fool depicted in the parable (Luke 12:13-21). 3) He specifically commends (and commands) the opposite virtue of unselfishness (Mark 8:34; 1 Corinthians 10:23-24; 13:5; Philippians 2:3-4). 4) And He provides us some great examples of unselfishness, of Christ Himself (Philippians 2:5-8), and men like Timothy (Philippians 2:19-24), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30).

It's time then, with God's help, that we rid ourselves of selfishness, and all its ugly fruits. But that's not really the focus of this article. Our children, too, need to learn the ugliness of selfishness. We need to demonstrate the unselfishness of Jesus Christ, and we need to train them to do the same.

Let's imagine, for a moment, at least some of the potential consequences if we don't—if we let our children grow up with a self-centered approach to life. They won't give liberally (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), which means the needs of others will go unmet. They'll have a difficult time enduring the hardships of life (2 Timothy 2:3; 3:12). They'll likely develop some other ugly fruits of selfishness, like envy and revenge (James 3:14-16; Romans 12:17-21). They may have trouble holding down a job (1 Timothy 5:8), unless, of course, the conditions are just right. And they may not give enough time to their families. Can we see just how ugly this business of selfishness can get? Don't most sins have selfishness as their root?

So how can we teach them to be unselfish?

- Point them to a cause much greater than themselves—the cause of Christ, a cause dedicated to seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). Make sure they know what Paul meant when he said, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).
- Set a good example—demonstrate unselfishness toward brethren, neighbors, and toward the children themselves.
- Point out other good examples—from the Bible (e.g. Dorcas—Acts 9:36-39), and from people they may know personally.

- Teach them to share—their time, their possessions, their money, etc. (Hebrews 13:16). Teach them that ultimately, these things don't really belong to us, and that one day, we will give an account for how we've used them.
- Point out to them some good things they can do for other people, specific acts of unselfishness they can perform (Matthew 25:34-40). Willingness is not always the problem; sometimes they just don't know what to do.
- Don't always take their side, with teachers, coaches, administrators, etc. "The other person is always wrong" is a dangerous (and sinful) attitude for them to develop.
- Teach them everything the Bible says about unselfishness—the passages we've already noted, plus a whole lot more. Here's a good one for them to memorize: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).