

ALMOST TRUE – 2 of 5
When Self-Love Is Selfish
June 8, 2025

INTRODUCTION I walked into a grocery store, and I was on an assignment from Laura. My assignment was simple, get a ½ gallon of chocolate milk and regular milk for Collins.

But as you know, in today's culture, that's not as easy as it sounds. Way back in the olden days when I was a kid, milk was mostly milk.

Anybody remember? Your options, whole milk, skim milk, 1%, 2%. I always wondered about 1% and 2% milk. I always wondered, what's the other 98, 99%. Who knows? But today is so much more confusing.

Then, there was no such thing as plant-based, lactose-free, vegan non-GMO milk. Today, not only do you have cow's milk, but you got goat milk, and oat milk, and rice milk, and soy milk and coconut milk, and almond milk.

And I'm wondering like how do you milk an almond? A coconut? I can see that. But an almond? How do you do that? And so, I walked into the grocery store, I'm scanning the aisles from a distance, looking for the exact type that my bride desires.

And I saw it. There was only one ½ gallon of each left of the exact right kind. And as I took a step forward, I looked over to my side, and I saw another gentleman, very likely on an assignment from his wife, eyeing my very same ½ gallon of each that Laura wanted. So, what do you think I did?

As a man of God, as a Christian, as a pastor, I said, **"Sir, you take this last ½ gallon of milk for your wife so she can be proud of you, and my wife can be disappointed in me."** Of course not. What do you think I did?

I pushed a 5-year-old out of the way. I fast walked down, put my shoulder down into him, nudged him in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, out of the way, grabbed the milk, and walked away victorious.

You say, **"Are you exaggerating at all, Joe?"** Just a little bit. I didn't push the 5-year-old, but all the rest is actually true.

ILLUSTRATION Recently I asked Laura to order me 2 pair of shoes on Amazon. I've never done that before, but I couldn't find the shoes I wanted in the store.

I went to Dillard's and found some that were similar that were made by the same company and tried them on. Thinking I knew the right size to get, we ordered the shoes. They ended up being the wrong size.

Now our daughter, Elizabeth buys everything on Amazon, and she knows how to return things if they don't fit. Laura and I did not know how to return the shoes. So, she did a little research and found out I could take them to UPS.

Laura told me to go to the specific UPS store close to the church down by Carrabba's. So I set out to drive 2 miles from the church in all the construction on HWY 98. Eventually I made it to the store, which was busy, and waited my turn.

Finally, a wonderful woman named Patty helped me. She asked me if I had a label to return the shoes? I did not. So, I called Laura and Patty explained to her what she needed to do. Laura found the label and emailed it to the store.

And patient, kind, Patty put the label on the package and soon she had completed my transaction. There were several people in line behind me, so I thanked Patty for all her help and got out of the way.

So today I'm giving Patty an honorable mention in my sermon, and I want all of you to do me a favor. If you have to go to that UPS Store, I want you to tell Patty that you heard about her in your preacher's sermon!

She was patient and kind and helpful to 2 old people who did not yet understand about Amazon returns. We'll know better next time.

After I left the store, I had to return to the church. Since it's only 2 miles how hard could that be? But as you know if you want to head east out of that parking lot you have to turn right on the by-pass then make a U-turn to get back to the traffic light on 98.

As I was waiting for a good Samaritan to let me out, a car (a Volvo) slowed down, and I thought the woman was going to let me out. It looked like she had her daughter in the car. But when I tried to pull out, she shook her head, **"No,"** and sped up!

I couldn't help but think of the difference in the attitude of Patty at UPS and this blonde headed woman in a Volvo who had the opportunity to teach her daughter to put others first.

So, I knew I had to mention the lady in the Volvo in my sermon today as an example of what not to do in that situation. Although I am mentioning the woman in the white Volvo with Florida tags and blonde hair and white frame sunglasses, she will not receive an honorable mention! Like Patty.

Someday I hope that woman has to go to that UPS Store and then head back east out of the parking lot. I couldn't help but notice she traveled east as I followed her out of there. Maybe Patty will have an influence for good on her!

As I pulled back into the church parking lot, I couldn't help but notice a few cars that had been parked in prime parking spaces while the owners were out of town for a week.

At first, I looked around to see if there was a white Volvo in the parking lot, but there was not. Once again, my sermon for this week came back to me as I searched for an open parking space. And I couldn't help but laugh at the illustrations God was giving me for my sermon!

Why did I do that? Why do we do things like that? The answer is because **putting ourselves first is one of the most natural things that we do.**

I can prove it to you because anytime there is a group photo with you in it and five other people, who do you look at first? You look at yourself, don't you? And how do you determine if it's a good photo or not?

If you got one old boy like blinking, and another girl has hair in her face, and some guy's staring off in the distance, but it's a good photo of you. Is it good or bad? It's a good photo because putting yourself first is the most natural thing that we do.

And I can't speak for you, but the world encourages myself obsession. Over and over again, culture tells me, do what's best for me. I deserve my me time. My needs come first. Therefore, I'm going to focus on myself right now.

Yet, Philippians chapter two, verse 3 says, ³*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,* ⁴*not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Think about that for just a moment. God's Word tells us, do nothing out of selfish ambition, and culture preaches the exact opposite. Putting myself first, it sounds good, it feels true, but it's not good, it's not true. It's almost true.

And what's interesting is there's kind of a very common and almost popular teaching today that people will tell you, **"Well, you can't truly love others until you love yourself."**

So, you have to put yourself first. Treat yourself. You deserve it. Self-care is not selfish because you can't pour from an empty cup. So, what should you do? You should live for yourself.

You don't need to justify your actions to anyone and cut anyone out of your life that doesn't add value to your life because you don't owe anyone anything, and don't feel guilty. Why? Because you come first.

And this is a heartbreaking and very popular and pervasive message from culture today. We have become, for the most part, a generation obsessed with ourselves.

And what does God say about that? 2 Timothy 2:3 says, ¹*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.*

²*People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud ...* ⁴*... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—* ⁵*having a form of godliness but denying its power. ...*

Having the illusion of being Christians but not walking in the spirit. There is a phrase that haunts me. They will be lovers of themselves. The reason that's hard for me to read is because, like, I am a lover of myself.

I can be very obsessed with myself. Like, what's in it for me? What do I have to do? What am I going to get out of this? What do they can think of me?

And if we're not careful, this self-love can creep into the culture of our churches. And before long we can start serving what I would call a self-centered Christianity.

It's where we may know in our heads that we're called to love God, and serve God, and lay down our lives to love him, and to love others. But we live as if God exists to serve us.

And we may believe in God, but is often this self-centered belief where we claim to love him, but in reality we really love ourselves.

If God doesn't do what we think he should do, then **"God, I'm not going to have anything to do with you."** It becomes a self-centered version of Christianity.

And what's interesting is it's really mind-blowing when you think about it. I mean, think about this.

We are a generation, a culture obsessed with self-care. We're going to prioritize ourselves, and we're going to guard my me time, and we're going to protect our mental health, and we're going to do what's best for us, and we do.

Yet, we're more anxious, we're more stressed, and we're more depressed. Why? **Maybe our problem isn't that we don't love ourselves enough. Maybe our problem is that we love ourselves too much.**

What do we do when we find ourselves completely opposite of what Jesus says? We look to the words of Jesus. When someone asks Jesus, **"Hey, what's the greatest command of all,"** this is what Jesus said.

Mark 12, Jesus says there's two things. How many are there? There are two things.

What is number one? ³⁰***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."***

³¹***The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."***

Two commands. Love the Lord, your God and love your neighbor. How do you love your neighbor? You love your neighbor as yourself. **"There is no command greater than these."**

The first one is what? The first one is, love God. The second one is, love your neighbor. How do you love your neighbor? As yourself. Here's where it gets weird.

Some people conclude that Jesus is commanding you to love yourself. And the self-centered version of Christianity will preach a false gospel that goes like this. You can't really love others until you love yourself.

So, if you can't love others until you love yourself, you have to put yourself first. You have to focus on yourself. And I want to remind you, Jesus didn't tell you to love yourself. Why?

Because loving yourself is not a command. It's an assumption. Jesus said, **"Love your neighbor as yourself,"** because he assumed you already do love yourselves. Jesus didn't have to tell me to love myself. I already do.

When Jesus says, **"Love your neighbor as yourself,"** he's not saying love yourself, prioritize yourself because he's assuming that you already do.

Now, some of you may say, **"But there are things I don't like about myself."** Maybe I don't love myself. I don't like certain things.

So, does that mean that I don't love myself? What we don't like about ourselves usually isn't due to a lack of self-love. It's usually a result of self-obsession. I'm obsessed with myself; therefore, I don't like this about myself.

If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, he doesn't say, whoever wants to be my disciple must pamper himself. Culture says that Jesus doesn't.

Now, I'll show you what Jesus says. He explains that he's going to go to Jerusalem, and he's going to suffer horribly, and he's going to die on a cross, and three days later, God's going to raise him from the dead.

And Peter says, **"No, that's not going to happen. We love you too much. That's not going to happen."**

And Jesus says, **"Get behind me Satan."** He calls Peter Satan.

And so Jesus responds in Matthew 16, verse 24, ***²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

If you want to be my disciple, you deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. Now, when we read that in our culture today, we just kind of blow by it.

But whenever Jesus said, **"Deny yourself and take up your cross,"** the disciples probably gasped.

And I'll tell you why. If you understand the context, they would've been besides themselves. And the reason is they were hyper aware of the most bloody uprising in Jewish history. It's actually mentioned in Acts 5:37.

But for context, less than 30 years before, the Jews revolted against the Roman government. Their taxes are too high.

So, this guy named Judas, not the Judas that betrayed Jesus, another Judas said, **"Hey, let's go and charge the Roman government, and we're going to take 'em over."** Big, big, big mistake.

Sadly, hundreds of Jews were slaughtered, and the remaining people were captured. And the Roman soldiers said to them, and this is where the phrase became famous, **"Take up your cross."**

And these Jewish people had to take up their cross, drag it across the city street in front of other Jewish people. And then the Roman soldier would say, **"Lay it down."**

Wherever they'd lay it down, they would crucify publicly, hanging naked before the other Jews, their fellow Jews to say, if you ever come against Rome again, this is what's going to happen to you.

Then the Roman government prohibited, forbid, the soldiers from taking the dead bodies down. So, the Jews saw their relatives hanging on the cross as their bodies were rotting. Historians tell us they left them there for years.

Some scholars say when Jesus said these words, **"You must deny yourself and take up your cross,"** it's possible that he said those exact words near the exact spot where some of the disciples' relatives were very likely crucified on a cross.

And it all started with the words, **"Take up your cross."** Jesus said, **"If you want to be my disciple, you deny yourselves."**

Don't pamper yourselves. Don't put yourself first. Don't say I'm treating myself. You deny yourself, take up your cross, and then you follow Jesus.

When you come to Jesus, you don't celebrate yourself. You don't promote yourself. You don't indulge yourself. You actually die to yourself.

The Apostle Paul, the guy that at one time was persecuting Christians, but was changed by Jesus, he said this in Galatians 2, verse 20,

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

He said, I no longer live. My old life died. He's dead. He's gone. Now, Christ lives through me.

In other words, life isn't about me. It's not about my wants and my desires and my hopes and my dreams and my wishes. I'm dead to that sinful, selfish nature. I die to myself. Now, Christ lives in me.

Shall we go on sinning, and living for ourselves that grace may increase? Paul said, **"By no means. We died to ourself."** I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, but it's not my life, my desires. It's Christ living in me.

So, I want to give you a moment for the Holy Spirit to work in you. And I'm going to ask you a question.

The question I want you to answer is this. **IN WHAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE ARE YOU LOVING YOURSELF MORE THAN GOD AND OTHERS?**

And then ask yourself, **what is God calling you to do about it?** In what area of your life are you loving yourself more than your loving God and others?

When I look at the life of Jesus, I actually noticed that he did take care of himself. He did disconnect from the crowds, and he did go and spend time with the Father. He did that.

But when he did that, it wasn't for selfish reasons. He went away to fill up so he could give out.

And then as I watched Jesus, every time something special happened, he'd pray for somebody, or heal a woman. Or he would let little kids come up and hop in his lap, or he would cast out a demon,

or he'd pray for some dad's son, or he had raised a dead person, it was never planned. It was never on the schedule. It was always when he was going somewhere else.

And then I realized that some of the most special moments with God and with God's people are actually interruptions.

The most important thing I do isn't what I accomplish, but how I love.

Think about what Jesus called us to do and think about what Jesus did not call us to do. Culture says, treat yourself, put yourself first, it's all about you. Don't let them get in the way of your schedule.

What did Jesus call us to do, and not?

Jesus didn't call us to...

- 1. Promote ourselves, but to humble ourselves.**
- 2. Pamper ourselves, but to deny ourselves.**
- 3. Serve ourselves, but to serve others.**
- 4. Put ourselves first, but to put ourselves last.**
- 5. Seek our pleasure, but to pursue God's purpose.**

Our calling, the calling of those who follow Jesus, it is not self-love. It is not self-affirmation. It's not self-justification. It's self-denial. This doesn't mean we don't take a day off. Doesn't mean we don't take care of ourselves.

If the motive of self-care is only yourself, you are being selfish. Listen to the Holy Spirit, not me. Let him say it to you better than I can. If the motive is only for you, it's selfish.

But if the motive of self-care is to be mentally healthy, emotionally strong, physically honoring to God, and spiritually healthy,

so that you can love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and so that you can love others, then self-care isn't selfish.

And Jesus told us to deny ourselves. Self-love will never, ever fill us like God's love. So, I die to myself to love the Lord my God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength and love my neighbor as myself.

What is love? Love is patient, and love is kind, and it doesn't envy, and it doesn't boast, and it's not proud, and it's not rude, and it's not self-seeking.

It's not easily angered, and doesn't delight in evil, but it always rejoices in the truth, and love always hopes, and always trusts, and always protects, and love never fails. So therefore, I'm not going to love myself. I'm going to deny myself.

I'm going to love God with everything in me and love my neighbor as myself because I already do love me.

Question - In what area of your life are you loving yourself more than loving God and loving others? And what is God calling you to do about it?

Father, speak to us. We thank you for your loving conviction, and we thank you for your correction.

God, I know there's no way I can overcome the force of culture and the lies of the enemy, but you can, your word can, so do it, God, do it. Do it in us. God, do it in your church.

God, cleanse us from selfish Christianity. God, in view of your mercy, may we be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you as the perfect act of worship.

Today, I'm denying myself. I'm turning from my sins. I'm calling on Jesus. God forgives your sins. You're born anew. You're no longer the same because of the perfect work of Jesus on the cross.

Today, those who say I need that. I want to know Jesus. I want to follow him. I'm denying myself. I'm dying to myself. I give my life to him.

Heavenly Father, I receive your forgiveness. I don't deserve it, but I receive it. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your love. Thank you for salvation.

I offer my life as a living sacrifice. I give it all to you because you gave it all for me. Take my life. Fill me with your spirit. I choose to follow you. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

THE END