

OTHER-CENTEREDNESS

A devotional posed the following Scripture and thoughts: *“Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.”* (Ephesians 4:2 NLT)

Your friends are not perfect. Your kids, people you work with, your spouse are not perfect. You are not perfect either. So, don’t worry so much about it!

- Whose faults bother you more – yours or others? Why?

What bothers me most is my own faults. My problem for years has been my tendency to focus on myself too much. When I feel down I wallow in negative feelings. I very quickly start feeling bad about myself and the kind of person I am. When I’m feeling up I’m consumed with thoughts about my various plans and projects. I get together with friends and it seems like that’s all I know how to talk about. I really don’t like this about myself and often pray for better other-centeredness.

Self-centeredness always seems to be a problem when we’re stuck in unnaturally low or high moods.

- Is there anything at all we can do to escape this?
- Is there any way we can escape being a victim (of depression especially), needing other people’s care?
- Can we possibly persuade ourselves to think of other people’s needs when we are so self-consumed?
- Can we possibly put ourselves in other people’s shoes and care about *their* needs?
- What can we do to start thinking about the needs of others, to empathize, or to have compassion?

There have been times when I’ve been so depressed that all I can think about is how miserable I feel. But I recall vividly something that helped elevate my mood, though only temporarily. I was reading a book and this sentence spoke to me and briefly snapped me out of it: “We don’t live for ourselves alone.” This helped me realize that life isn’t all about me. It made me feel better. I felt the hope that one day I would escape the depression and I could go back to helping others. I could escape the victim role – escape being a person needing others. I could help others instead.

- And if caring about others’ needs and helping them is an escape from depression, would it help us to stabilize?

- Would thinking of other people's needs and helping them help prevent depression from descending on us?

According to Eugene Peterson's Message, Jesus said:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

*I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'*

"Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.' (Matthew 25: 34-40)