

Selfishness 101

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ABSTRACT: Individual greed and selfishness have been the basis of modern society. They have become social norm. Selfishness is not caring for others or at least showing it to them. It is acting for the gratification of one's emotions. It is a trait nobody wants to have accredited to them. A selfish person is the one who keeps himself at a priority and is only concerned with himself. People are selfish because they benefit from selfishness. They are hardwired for both self-interest and other-interest. The purpose of this paper is to present a clear, comprehensive analysis of selfishness.

KEYWORD: selfishness, altruism, self-care, self-love, selflessness

INTRODUCTION

Selfishness is a major challenge in marriages, friendships, workplace, and even in the church. Although we are all selfish to some degree, we can recognize people who are selfish and self-centered. We are all familiar with people who are overtly selfish. Many of us are more refined in our selfishness. We see a horrific display of selfishness everywhere. For example, drivers are aggressively competing to get ahead of each other. The world we live in today is fixated on the idea of being selfish, especially as shown in the social media channels. Selfishness goes against our universal ethical grain.

Many people are confused as to what selfishness is all about. Some see selfishness as an undesirable or even immoral characteristic. Modern culture is pervaded by a taboo on selfishness. People have learned to believe that putting their needs ahead of others is an act of selfishness. Men have been taught that selflessness is the ideal of virtue. In some cases, people benefit materially, socially, or emotionally from their actions. We are used to describing the good behavior as that which is selfless. This might leave you feeling a little selfish or guilty. When selflessness is the norm, encouraging people to make decisions quickly can bring out their better angels.

Scientists and philosophers have long wrestled with the concept of selfishness. Are people basically selfish, or do they genuinely care about others? This question is at the heart of what it means to be human. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, and social scientists have theorized that all humans are inherently selfish due to our desire to preserve our genetic lineage. Experts claim that most humans fall somewhere on a spectrum between pathological selfishness and extreme altruism. It is expedient that we describe the two terms and the related concept of selflessness:

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- *Altruism*: This is defined as care and concern for the happiness of others. It is on the selfless end of the selfish-selfless spectrum. It is the selfless act of giving for no reward. Altruism appears to be seen in the light of positive emotions, like empathy and benevolence.
- *Selfishness*: This is being concerned excessively or exclusively for oneself or one's own advantage, pleasure, or welfare, regardless of others. It may be regarded as excessive concern for one's profit or pleasure. Selfishness is the trait that leads people to frequently act in their own interests without any regard for how their actions could impact others. Selfishness is the opposite of altruism or selflessness. It is the tendency to prioritize one's own interests and needs over those of others.
- *Selflessness*: It is the giving of oneself in the serving of others and the giving of oneself in being served by others. Selflessness empowers love, sureness, and trust. It is considered to be a virtue. Selfishness and selflessness are two opposites that we should be aware of.

Altruism and selfishness are compared in Figure 1[1]. Selfishness is often regarded as an undesirable or even immoral characteristic, whereas altruism is typically considered universally desirable and virtuous. We tend to think of altruism as unselfish and beneficial, with minimal tradeoffs, and selfishness as generally bad and glutinous, negatively impacting on others. But as we will see later in this paper, not all selfishness is necessarily bad, and not all altruism is necessarily good.

WHAT IS SELFISHNESS?

Selfishness is lacking consideration for others; concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure. Selfishness is the desire to serve self without consideration for others. Figure 2 shows how children demonstrate selfishness [2]. Some of the characteristics of selfishness are shown in Figure 3 [3]. Figure 4 describes SELFISHNESS as an acronym [4].

Ahab, the king of Israel, is a good example of a selfish individual (1 King 21). His action is an example of what happens when we think of nothing but our own satisfaction. He was a very rich ruler who loved himself more than he loved his people. In spite of his magnificent estate, he craved a nearby vineyard owned by Naboth and wanted it desperately. When Naboth refused to sell it, Ahab was angry, miserable, and self-pitying. Ahab's wife devised an elaborate plan involving a banquet, accusations, and murder for Naboth. God eventually punished Ahab's family for their crime, motivated by selfishness. We should learn from Ahab's selfish behavior and strive to be less selfish in our actions.

Selfishness can manifest itself in various ways, and it is crucial to recognize these patterns within ourselves to foster healthier relationships. Examples of manifestations of selfishness include [5]:

- Not listening to others
- Withholding necessary information
- Avoiding any responsibility when things go wrong
- Taking all the credit when things go right
- Criticizing other people while praising oneself
- Loving things and using people
- Living life the way you want
- Having no empathy for the suffering of other people
- Using others or manipulation to get what they want

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- Controlling others to achieve our goal
- “Me” is more important than “we”

SELF-CARE AND SELFISHNESS

In marriage, there are two types of selfishness: healthy and unhealthy selfishness.

- *Healthy Selfishness*: This is self-care, which is a positive action in a marital relationship. This type of selfishness is a mutually-beneficial, win-win situations for both parties involved. Prioritizing yourself and building a strong foundation for your life is one of the healthiest pursuits that any human being can undertake. Healthy selfishness enables us to pursue our dreams and give back to our communities. Healthy selfishness is invariably known as self-care, self-love, self-esteem, self-interest, self-awareness, self-determination, self-actualization, self-sacrifice, self-praise, self-sufficient, and altruism. We should embrace and cultivate a healthy level of selfishness.
- *Unhealthy Selfishness*: This is lacking consideration for others; concerned chiefly with one’s own personal profit or pleasure. The selfish person is only interested in himself and wants everything for himself. This behavior is bad for both the selfish person and the people victimized and exploited by the selfish person. Unhealthy selfishness is often regarded as being self-centered, self-seeking, self-serving, self-involved, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-possessed, self-important, self-focused, self-indulgent, self-preoccupied, self-obsessed, self-conceited, self-concerned, and proud. Selfishness is the arch-evil that one must avoid.

We often have a hard time differentiating self-care from selfishness. We already addressed unhealthy selfishness in the previous section. Being selfish in a positive way can mean caring for yourself. Altruism or self-love is manifested in a desire to serve others without regard for any individual rewards. On the other hand, selfishness is the natural human desire to protect the individual and act in his own interests. The altruistic person gives of their time, talents, and material goods without looking for a reward.

People have learned to believe that putting their needs ahead of others is an act of selfishness. They fail to distinguishing between selfishness and self-love. Selfishness is the act of taking from others and using others in order to get what we want without consideration for their wellbeing. Self-love is taking care of our needs and wants without taking advantage of others in the process. As shown in Figure 5, putting your needs before others is not selfish [6]. We are only at our best to serve others once our needs have been met [7].

While prioritizing our own well-being is important, it is equally essential to recognize the boundaries and responsibilities that come with fostering healthy connections. It is crucial to recognize the potential consequences our actions may have on those around us and how our actions impact our relationships with family members, friends, and work colleagues. We must strike a balance between self-care and selfishness or between selfishness and caring for your own needs. By cultivating empathy, practicing effective communication, and respecting boundaries, we can prioritize our well-being and strike a balance between self-care and selflessness. Open and honest communication helps establish clear boundaries [8]. The balance of give-and-take is especially important in marriage.

Just as selfishness manifests itself in many ways, self-care manifests itself in the following ways [9]:

- Anything that you need to do for you
- Putting your health, mental and physical, at the top of your list
- Taking care of yourself
- There is no reward sought after other than doing good.

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- Saying yes to things you do want to do
- Saying no to events you do not feel able to be your best self at that day
- Forgiving someone
- Treating yourself to your favorite meal or buying yourself a present
- Focusing on what you enjoy doing
- Letting go of relationships that no longer serve you

QUOTES ON SELFISHNESS

We all appreciate a quotation because it is wise, rich, beautiful, or funny. It is sometimes a source of inspiration. Selfish people quotes gives you a new perspective on selfishness and its impact on relationships and society. We present the following powerful quotes on selfishness [10].:

1. "Selfish people are hard to love because so little love comes out of them. - William Nicholson
2. "Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live." – Oscar Wild
3. "Selfishness is thinking more of the benefits you will get on helping someone." – Unknown
4. "The real measure of selfishness is by asking a person how much he is willing to sacrifice." – Unknown
5. "Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race." – William E. Gladstone
6. "Selfishness is the most unattractive virtue a mortal can possess." – Suyasha Subedi "Marriage is not designed for selfish individuals." – Unknown
7. "The most miserable people are those who only care about themselves, understand only their own troubles and see only their own perspective." – Unknown
8. "Almost every sinful action ever committed can be traced back to a selfish motive. It's a trait we hate in other people but justify in ourselves." – Stephen Kendrick
9. "Selfishness is when you only remember a friend if you need something from them." – Unknown
10. "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." – Martin Luther King Jr.
11. "I am thankful for the selfish people in my life. They have shown me, exactly who I don't want to be." – Unknown
12. "In order to be happy, one must first let go of all pettiness and selfish attachments." – Dee Waldeck
13. "He who wants everything, loses everything." - Anonymous
14. "Self is the great antichrist and anti-God in the world, that sets up itself above all else." Stephen Charnock
15. "Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself." – Khalil Gibran
16. "Selfishness keeps man blind through life." —Hazrat Inayat Khan
17. "It is impossible to be both selfish and happy." - Joyce Meyer
18. "Selfishness is thinking more of the benefits you will get on helping someone." – Unknown

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19. “Great achievement is usually born of great sacrifice, and is never the result of selfishness.” – Napoleon Hill
20. “If you wish to travel far and fast, travel light. Take off all your envies, jealousies, unforgiveness, selfishness and fears.” - Cesare Pavese

WHAT IS WRONG WITH SELFISHNESS

The selfish people who engage in hurtful behavior never understand how their behavior affects others. They do not feel selfish for putting themselves first. They just assume that because they are happy that the ends justify the means. Selfishness is a harmful trait that can affect various aspects of life. It has costs for relationships. The negative effects of selfishness are many. Here we consider seven of them.

1. *Bad Reputation:* Selfishness is bad. Although selfishness might not be the worst human flaw, but it certainly is one of the most detested trait. It has a very negative reputation. This is due to the fact that we are all selfish to some degree, and we need selfishness to survive.
2. *Enemy of Marriage:* Selfishness harms relationship, especially marriage, as illustrated in Figure 6 [11]. Selfishness is the greatest enemy or number one enemy of your marriage. It is greatest threat to our marriages. Selfish people are not good material for a healthy, happy marriage. They often have difficulty maintaining healthy and satisfying relationships with others because they lack empathy, compassion, and generosity. A selfish partner is someone who constantly puts their needs and desires above those of their partner. They prioritize personal gain without considering the impact on the relationship. Being in a relationship with a selfish partner can take a toll on your emotional well-being and the health of the relationship. It is difficult being in a good relationship with a selfish person because it can lead to disappointment, manipulation, abuse, and even divorce.
3. *Enemy of Joy:* Selfishness is the real enemy of joy. By “joy,” we mean something that enlivens the heart and brings a deep and lasting sense of fulfillment. For many people, ours is a joyless society for want of good relationships. When we choose to be selfish in any way (e.g. being greedy, being jealous), we will continue to be stuck in frustration and unhappiness. Joy comes from giving life by giving self [13].
4. *Enemy of Career Success:* Selfishness stands in the way of your personal success and fulfillment. It is a poor approach to effective personal branding. It makes work less interesting. Although we live in the information age, relationships are still the currency of business. Relationships are the key to your career success and upward mobility. In the workplace, a self-centered approach can undermine teamwork and collaboration, diminish productivity, and cause friction among colleagues. If you selflessly refuse to take credit for the good work you have done, your boss might let you go when the company hits a rough patch, instead of the colleagues you shared the merit with. Selfish people tend to be narrow-minded, arrogant, and resistant to change. They are difficult to live or work with. They may think that they know everything and refuse to learn from others or admit their mistakes. They focus on their own self-gratification, prioritizing their needs over others’, wanting to always be right, taking sole credit for the work of many, and demonstrating “me first” behaviors. Selfishness in a leader impacts the team’s morale, engagement, retention, efficiency, and productivity.
5. *Hindrance to Prayer:* Selfishness hinders prayer because it breaks all the commandments of God and God does not listen to those who break His laws (Proverbs 28:9, TLB). James 4:3 says, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

6. *Win-lose Thinking*: Whether choosing goals, deciding your beliefs, or making decisions, it all comes from our thinking process. Selfishness comes in the way of thinking win-win. Pure selfishness is win-lose thinking. Thinking win-win can ultimately help us gain more than thinking win-lose. A person is selfish when they meet their needs at the expense of others; when they harm others for personal gain. A selfish person who does not help others cannot expect any favors from others [13]. As Dalai Lama rightly said, “Foolish, selfish people are always thinking of themselves and the result is always negative. Wise people think of others, helping them as much as they can, and the result is happiness. Love and compassion are beneficial both for you and others. Through your kindness to others, your mind and heart will open to peace.”
7. *Self-Destruction*: Selfishness is essentially self-destruction in slow motion. At our core, we are social beings with an innate drive to connect and cooperate with others. A selfish person is unable to build and maintain connections. No one enjoys spending time with selfish people. Determined to walk in his own way, the selfish person often persists to the point where his conscience is unresponsive and numb. As Hazrat Khan rightly said, “Selfishness keeps man blind through life.” He is incapable of having genuine love for others. He is a lover of himself (2 Timothy 3:1,2). Such are the consequences of selfishness.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELFISHNESS

Selfishness lies at the heart of the fallen human condition. It is the attitude of being concerned with one's own interests above the interests of others. Sin grows from the seeds of selfishness. Almost every sinful action can be traced back to a selfish motive. Sin is enmity against God that is punishable by eternity in hell. All sin is actually selfishness; all sin is choosing to give into something that *you* want, that you feel serves you in that moment. Making selfish choices may result in a lost connection with God [15]. Selfishness is worshipping self rather than God. It is a form of self-idolatry. God understands and knows that selfishness is a struggle for us, and freedom from selfishness can only come through Him.

The word of God helps us when we are struggling with feelings of selfishness. The Bible uses a variety of words and constructions to describe selfishness, including arrogant (Titus 1:7); selfish ambition (James 3:14-16); vain conceit (Philippians 2:3); lovers of themselves (2 Timothy 3:2); self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:5); pleasing ourselves (Romans 15:2); seeking our own good (1 Corinthians 10:24) [15]. Selfishness caused the children of Israel to “willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved” (Psalm 78:18). Selfishness ruins friendships (Proverbs 18:1), hinders prayer (James 4:3), and is the product of earthly wisdom (James 3:13-14).

There are many Bible verses that explain how selfishness is something that we should avoid. They include the following:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Philippians 2:2,3).

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice,” (James 3:16).

“I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:33).

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“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy” (2 Timothy 3:1,2).

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32).

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25).

“For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me’” (Romans 15:3).

“And He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:12-14).

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matthew 17:24,25).

CONCLUSION

Selfishness is an evil that has taken root in our society, but it varies from person to person based on our personal experiences and relationships. It focuses on the optimal enjoyment of one’s own life to the neglect of loving God and others. It is true that selfishness is part of human nature. All of us have tendency toward selfishness. People naturally act in ways that benefit themselves. However, selfishness is not always bad. It can be healthy. Self-care is the opposite of selfishness. Self-care increases our ability to love God and others. It is only by God’s grace we can learn to put others before ourselves. We must respond to selfishness with biblical love and treat others in a Christ-like manner. We should always pray to the Lord to help us notice the places where we choose selfishness over selflessness on daily basis. More information about selfishness can be obtained from the books in [16-34].

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Altruism vs Selfishness

Altruism	Selfishness
Desire to serve others with no regard for self.	The desire to serve self with no regard for others.
Giving unconditionally to different needy causes.	Keeping everything to themselves to benefit self
Driven by moral and social conscience.	Driven by thoughts and desires for self.

Figure 1 Comparing altruism and selfishness [1].



Figure 2 How children demonstrate selfishness [2].



Figure 3 Characteristics of selfishness [3].



Figure 4 SELFISHNESS as an acronym [4].



Figure 5 Putting your needs before others is not selfish [6]



Figure 6 Selfishness hurts marital relationship [11].