

Series: **SHADES OF GREY—April 20,2008**

**GREY 4: IS IT MOSTLY ABOUT ME?
1 Corinthians 9, Philippians 2:6-8**

I. INTRO

A. I had **always** envied my brother's cool sound system when we were in college. I had this little glorified boom box—his could make enough noise to part your hair and make you bleed from the ears!

-I spent a year touring US and Canada with a band that sang Christian music and wore **leisure suits**. How dorky can you get! When I finished, I had a little cash. So, went down to a stereo shop and blew \$600 bucks on a stereo. I had just brought it home, when my Dad began asking questions. Really embarrassing questions. He said, "Ken, you know you're going to be going to grad school in the Fall—and then you'll need a car. Are you expecting me to pay for all that—while you get yourself a stereo?"

1. Gray area. Buying a stereo isn't a bad thing. I mean, I would enjoy it, I would play **good** music on it, right? I felt that I had put buying a stereo off for quite a while—did the **delayed gratification** thing. Some of the components were used—I mean, I didn't go over the top with it—and it **was** my money.

-What hit me after that conversation with my Dad was how **totally** self-absorbed I was. It was **all** about me! I thought, "**How self-centered can you be, Ken?**" I had just traveled all over North America singing songs about Jesus! So, I kept the stereo and occasionally felt bad—especially when I played Jesus' songs on it. Actually, I took the stereo back.

Actually, my Dad took it back for me, cause I was too chicken—too ashamed to do it myself.

-If I had asked the question first, **Is this mostly about me?** I would've saved myself a lot of trouble.

2. Unfortunately, 1976 wasn't the last year I did something profoundly self-centered. This principle—Is this mostly about me...am I willing to lay down my rights—or am I pretty much about insisting on them—friends—**this** stuff gets right down into the guts of life.

B. Is this **mostly** about me? Is this about me getting my rights? I'm absolutely convinced, looking back over my life—if I had asked that question more, I could've saved myself a lot of pain and humiliation—and helped a **lot** more people than I have. -Here's the problem: Making things **mostly** about **me** comes so naturally and effortlessly—it's scary. Can anyone relate? And yet, when I do—it always backfires.

-I think this final principle is the **toughest** principle to be honest about—and the toughest to live out. But ultimately—it brings incredible rewards—and it clearly reflects everything Jesus was about. And that's why we have to talk about it.

II. MY BILL OF RIGHTS

- A. For those of you who are playing **catch-up** we've been studying an ancient letter written by Paul, an early church leader, to Corinth. He's been dealing with principles in knowing how to make good decisions in the grey areas of life. So far we've talked about three different principles.

#1—Will this help—or hinder? There are a lot of things you and I are free to do—but what's the long term effect? Does it have a good ending—or bad ending? Will it get its hooks in me and damage my body, my life or my friendships?

#2—Does it show love? Jesus said that all God wants of us can be summarized as "Love God"—and "Love others." Does what I'm about to do really show love for God and others?

#3—Will it be pleasing to God? Life is intended to be an act of worship. What would Jesus do? Am I okay with him watching and listening to me?

#4—Is it mostly about me?

1. How many of you can pretty much learn something by just reading manuals? How many of you learn **much** better when someone **shows** you how to do something? They do, you watch. They do, you help. You do, they help. You do. That's how I learned to make fudge. See, making fudge is more technique than recipe—so I became a disciple of Lottie Lindsey!
2. Here's my point. I think Paul knew that this principle of laying aside your rights—was **so** critical to them following Jesus—they would need a personal example. So, he reaches back into this history with them over a 2 year period. He says, "Remember how, when I was with you—you never supported me while I was there? That was my right—and then he goes into a whole pile of examples, both from nature and from the Old Testament. Soldiers don't serve at their own cost. Shepherds are allowed to drink milk from the sheep. Oxen can eat grain while they're milling it. But I didn't do that. I made tents to support myself.
3. He said, when I was with you, I laid aside all the rights I had as an apostle—to be supported, to bring a wife with me. You didn't understand it at the time—but I did it so that I wouldn't hinder my ultimate goal. You coming to Christ. My rights are **nothing** compared to that!

What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News. Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:18-23 NLT)

4. Just like us—Paul had a choice: “Will I cling to my rights—my right to a great career, a great income, prestige, perks, stability and comfort—or will I lay aside those rights for a cause that’s infinitely bigger than me? The souls of **OTHERS!** And we all know which way this went, don’t we?”

B. Let’s talk about **rights**. Rights are an **amazing** gift to us in a country like ours, aren’t they? In 1960, Prime Minister Diefenbaker presented to Parliament a proposal for the Canadian Bill of Rights. The Canadian Charter of Human Rights followed in 1982. In any country, these laws make sure that humans have the basic rights for freedom of speech and religion and press—and the right to a fair trial if a person is convicted.

1. There’s another set of rights we have in the interior of our lives. It’s the right to live our lives the way we **want** to live them. “If it’s not illegal, I can **do** what I want, **go** where I want, **say** what I want and **buy** what I want.”
 -Unfortunately, this has sometimes turned into a sense of entitlement. Kind of the **First Church of Me!** The philosophy of **The customer is always right** is a good when it comes to giving good service, but it can get pretty ugly when it becomes the dogma of the customers, right? Any of you work in the service industries where you’re waiting on or helping people? Anyone ever been treated rudely, or talked down to—yelled at?
 -As I thought about this attitude, a visual image crossed my mind: The Canada geese who have taken over our parking lot. I drove in a couple of weeks ago, and there’s this obnoxious Canada goose—neck stretched out, beak open—wings in the upright position—**honking** at me cause I had dared pull in the driveway. The gas pedal was **very** tempting! “You pompous, ignorant goose! I’ll show you...!” Don’t worry. No wildlife was injured in the writing of this message.
2. Now, people **do** set their rights aside in our world. Not at first, though. We come into this world literally screaming for our rights. “**Waaaah!** Aka—“I demand to be fed **now!** Not in 30 minutes, not even in 2 minutes. **Now!** I demand to be held...**now!** I demand to changed...**now!** **Waaaah!**”
 -If a baby isn’t going to continue to scream—who has to set aside their rights? I won’t get gender specific on the person—but a **parent** does! Out of sheer desperation, parents are the ones who have to teach that child that they are not the center of the universe. We call that...**growing up**. This is where we as adults sometimes, for the **very** first time, have to grow up—and lay your rights on the line. How many of you enjoyed that process? How many of you would have been okay with it if **someone** had **helped!!!**
3. There is a certain amount of laying aside your rights you have to do to survive, right? You have to set aside some rights to hold down a job, or pay off a mortgage.

-Actually, to get along in the world, to be a decent neighbor, to have a marriage, to have kids that even like you—you have to be able to set aside your rights. Now—we get that, right? To get a paycheck—we can stifle lay aside our rights

for a while. To help our kids, to have a good reputation, to maintain decent relationships—we can lay aside our rights.

-But what do you do when there seems to be **nothing** in it for you? What about laying aside your rights for others—who may not even care or notice?

See, that's what Paul is talking about—and what he did! He said, "If you look carefully, if you see life through God's eyes—there is something way, **way** higher than living in your own comfort zone—and having a good income, a good life—and then a good burial. And that something is, as Paul puts it, so that **many** can come to Christ. So that **many** will have their eternities change. So that God can transform this world—one person at a time.

III. A CROSS-SHAPED LIFE

- A. Now, here's the deal. You don't give up rights, give up money, give up time—or really give up anything just for the sake of the experience. Paul didn't do that. He gave his rights up for others—and when he did, He was imitating Jesus and how **He** lived. At the end of this whole section he says:

I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved. And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.

(1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1 NLT)

1. In a letter to another group of people, Paul is urging them to get along—to love each other and encourage each other—to work together. To be humble. To not be selfish. And then he lays this on them:

Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges, he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2:4-8 NLT)

-I want you to think, for just a minute, about what the Spirit of God, through Paul, is asking of us. He says, "Our calling is to be like Jesus. To have **his** attitude. And his attitude was? **Though he was God—he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.** We get all caught up in our little promotions and demotions, how important we are, and why should **I** have to clean the toilet?!!

-Think about Jesus. He had always existed. He created everything—and was worshipped by angels. This passage is **very** clear that He didn't feel the need to get a death grip on his identity as God. Instead, He gave up his divine privileges and went from the premier place in the universe to the womb of a teenage girl.

- a. We can't even **begin** to imagine that kind of descent. The wording in Greek says, simply, He **emptied** himself. He had all the honor and privileges and power as God—and He dumped it all out—like you would empty a cup.

- b. But Jesus—didn't stop with his descent to earth. He kept going down. Down to the humble position as a slave. And then—down some more. Down to a criminal's death on a cross. The cross was, by far, the most degrading, de-humanizing, painful way to die. It was invented by the Greeks, perfected by the Romans—reserved for people they considered to be the lowest of the low.

2. **Why?** Why would *anyone* do that? Well, it's pretty clear. For *me...for you!* He did it for us! It was the only way to show us what the Father was like. It was our only hope of escaping the death sentence of sin. So He entered our world. He was indistinguishable from any other human being. He had the same physical weakness and vulnerability as us; ate our food; wore our clothes; took on our limited lifespan—our limited ways of getting around—our limited words. God—**incarnate**. God with skin.

-And that is **precisely** what Paul is talking about when he says things like, **Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:19 NLT)**

I have entered the world, taken on the likeness of the Jews—the Gentiles—those under the law—those not under the law—**so I could have the privilege of seeing their lives transformed!**

-Paul wasn't wishy-washy—just trying to fit in and create as few ripples as possible. His goal was to live out the Good News for the sake of others—**even when it meant giving up his right to do things the way he wanted to do things!** Bottom line message? It's **not** about me! It's **not** about my freedom, my comfort, my financial independence or my rights. I've **already given up all my rights—to Jesus, for Jesus.**

3. And that's **our** calling as followers of Jesus—to lay aside **our** rights. It's not just for a few Bible super-heroes! This is **not** some kind of **grit-your-teeth-and-bear-it** thing. It is a privilege to offer up stuff that ultimately makes us increasingly self-absorbed—to change eternity for others. It's our chance to grow!

- Let me put it like this: Do you and I have the right to keep **all** of our blood in our bodies? Do you and I have the right to go to a restaurant whenever we want? Do you and I have the right to use our spare time however we please? Do you and I have the right to use our money however we want? We do, right?

-So:

Q: Would you give a pint of your blood every year if you knew it would save someone's life?

Q: Would you give up one meal a month at a restaurant a month if you knew it would save someone from starvation?

Q: Would you give up two hours a week to tutor a student if you knew it would change the entire direction of his/her life?

Q: Would you give up two golf games a year if you knew that it would enable a crippled person to walk again?

4. Why am I saying all that? It's because we tend to think solely in terms of what we're giving up—the **loss** we feel—instead of the **incredible** difference we could make—the **why!**

And if you think of laying your aside your rights in terms of loss—giving up, giving up, giving up, giving up—not **making a difference, making a difference, changing a life, saving a life, transforming an awful situation**—you won't do it.

-In the movie, **Amazing Grace**, Wilberforce's perspective on slavery was changed when a group of abolitionists came to his house—showed him the chains captured people wore—and heard the story, saw the face, and the scars of a man who had experienced the horror of slavery.

-He then took a group of Parliamentarians on what they thought was a cruise of the harbor. But instead they were brought to a slave ship—where the stench of death was still in the ship. He said, "Don't you **dare** hold your noses! Smell the smell—and **remember** the smell of death, not sugar cane plantations, when you think of slavery." Suddenly, slavery took on a smell.

5. Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the horror he experienced for the **joy** that lay before him. What was that? Well, it was seeing the movement of restoration and transformation that would start sweeping over this planet the moment the stone moved away from his grave. He saw that same joy before He **ever** stepped out of Heaven to be laid in a filthy feeding trough. He could see the victory of the cross over slavery, over rape, over murder, over disease, over selfishness, over greed, over injustice and oppression, over poverty and starvation and ethic purging.

-And He could see us. That's right. You and me. He could see that, if He didn't come, Ken Davis would go down, down, down—and do more harm than good—damaging the souls of his children. He could see the sadness of yours and my unredeemed life—a life where, despite a few flickers of happiness—it **all** gets drowned in stupidity. He could **see** that.

-And He obviously thought, "It's worth it! It's worth the humiliation! It's worth the people I've made not even **recognizing** who I am! It's worth getting slapped around, spit on, beaten, and tortured to death—pried off the cross and dumped in a grave. I'd do it—for **them!**"

-And so—He **emptied** Himself. And that's what Paul did. That's what every follower of Jesus who's made a difference in this world has done. That, friends, is legacy we've been left by my parents, Paul, Peter, Moses, John—and all the others who watch our race from the grandstands. That's why in **every** area of life—we are called to ask ourselves the question: **Is this mostly about me?**

-Is this about my financial well-being and comfort—to hell with the world?

-Is this about me getting my way and feeling powerful and in control and being **right!**

-Is this about me getting my pound of flesh and making them **pay** for what they did to me?

-Is this about me getting more and more and more and more—even when people in the world are getting less and less and less and less?

-Is this about **me** trashing the world because I'm too busy to lift a finger to save it?

-Is this about me having church **my** way, so that it's convenient for **me** and gives me what **I** want?

6. The message of Jesus, the message of Paul, the message of the Bible is—**that is NO way to live! To live for yourself, for your rights, for your comfort, for your—just to make sure you cling to your rights is the single most unproductive, unhappy, unsatisfying way to live that you can choose!**

-That's why this is such a powerful question to ask in the gray areas of life. It cuts right through the selfishness—the **it's-all-about-me-and-my ego** attitude that lurks under the surface of all of us.

- B. How do we escape the subtleness of selfishness? I don't know about you, but I can justify almost ever selfish, self-centered, self-preoccupied, narcissistic thing I do. Our minds are **brilliant** when it comes to making excuses! Can anyone identify with that?

1. I think the first thing we may have to do is identify—and **own** some of the defeating attitudes that lie buried in our hearts. In this passage in Phil. 2 Paul talks **so** clearly about the cross-shaped life. Following Jesus in the way He descended into greatness. And he identifies some of the obstacles.

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 2:3-4 NLT)

- a. Know what the specific reference to **selfish ambition and vain conceit** is about? It's the pecking order in our world. It's all the stuff we are tempted to do to let people know how important we are, how right we are—how much we have—anyone here ever seen this stuff?

-It's what drives a good bit of our world. Stack it all up—and compare it to changing a person's life forever. What's it worth? Absolutely nothing! And when you play the game of "who's first?"—it doesn't just humiliate and destroy others; it destroys you because, see, it's a **lie!**

- b. That's the negative. The **positive** is humility. Humility is not **pretending** to be less than you are—it's **understanding** who you are—under all the veneer of cosmetics and hair coloring and Rogaine; behind all the degrees and trappings.

-Humility only comes when you recognize that, apart from God's power and grace, you don't have a **thing** to offer. It's realizing the beauty and value of others.

It's understanding that your interests and needs are not at the center of the universe. It's looking in the mirror and saying, "I'm not God!"

-It's looking at the others around you in your home, and saying, "How can I serve them with the kind of heart that makes them better? How can I love my wife as Jesus loves the church? How can I honor my husband in a way that honors God? It's looking at the others around you and saying, "How can I help them, manage them, lead them in a way where it's clear that I'm their biggest fan—and want their best, not mine?"

2. But, to be honest—this is not just about getting rid of the bad stuff, the selfishness, the pecking order, the **lookit me!** attitude. We can't do that on our own. It has to go deeper—if we want to truly make the difference we were created to make.

-It's very easy to look at the outside of the tragedy in our world and say, "If I can just go make a difference in some cause, if I can just give a chunk of my money to help the poor, if I can just do my part in the environment to stop global warming, if I can just help one AIDS family, if I can just rescue one 13 year old girl from teenage prostitution in Bangkok—**then** I'll be pleasing God. Those are **wonderful** thing—**amazing** things to do. But it misses a step Jesus had to take. Death.

-Now, don't hyperventilate on me—breathe into the paper bag!

It's just clear that following Jesus **always, ALWAYS** leads to a cross. Really. Jesus said to his disciples:

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. (Luke 9:23-24 NLT).

-Paul's teaching is saturated with this understanding. He says in Galatians 2: **My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:24 NLT)**

3. Selfishness, self-centeredness, self-preoccupation goes so deep in me, probably in you, we don't even spot it. Our thought is, "Well—if I **die** to this—that could be painful!" There **is** pain associated with it. That's why you have to see this **self** stuff as a crippling disease that is currently spreading all through your life.

-It's like cancer. It's insidious—usually hidden. It creates the occasional pain and discomfort. The thought of surgery and chemotherapy or radiation is frightening. Who chooses pain on purpose? Well, usually those who want to live; who want to avoid the greater pain and disfigurement of waiting.

4. Here's the deal in life, friends. The way up...is down. It's true.
 *The story of Moses, the leader God chose to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, is that same story. He was condemned to die as a child—but raised in Pharaoh's home with all the wealth, perks, training and power that went with it in Ancient Egypt. When he tried to act on behalf of his people—he was banished. He spent the next 40 years of his life raising sheep on the backside of the desert until he lost all confidence in himself—and then God used him in amazing ways to bring Israel out of slavery. Up—is **down**.

*This happened to Paul. Before he met Jesus—man, his career was up and to the right! A Roman citizen; a member of the ruling party of the Jews—the right education, the right degrees. Then Jesus knocked him off his horse. Which would be **down**. He was let down over a wall to escape being assassinated, and then hurried off to his hometown. He spent **years** there—probably making tents. And **then** God could use him!

-At the close of this passage about Jesus humbling himself—giving up his rights, Paul says these words:

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11 NLT)

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. It's counterintuitive, isn't it—this teaching of Jesus and his followers? Sounds **crazy** in a rights-driven world like ours. It seems **really** odd. It sometimes feels awful—and unnecessarily humiliating. But I'm telling you, friends—the way to everything you dream of for your life, the way to joy, the way to becoming the person you long to become—is **laying aside your rights**.
- B. **Is this mostly about me?** It's a demanding question. It cuts through all the fog of life. And now you have to decide who you'll believe—and what you'll do about it. You will either make more of a difference than you'd ever dream and find **true** greatness. Or you'll claim what you *think* is yours—and ultimately take a path that leads nowhere. It's your move! Choose well.