

Me, My "Selfy" & I

It seems to have happened over night. What once was considered conceited or bragging is now regarded as being hip, cool and with it. What once was regarded as a big turn off is now seen as the thing to do. It seems like only yesterday our parents of the World War II generation did everything they could to model and teach us the virtues of building up others before mentioning ourselves. Back then there were even penalties in sports for pounding one's own chest to make sure everyone knew the real reason the team just scored.

Humility was once a common virtue; now pride has become the norm. Because many people are viewed as only taking pictures of themselves, hardly noticing the beauty of others and the world around them, a new word has been introduced to the vernacular -- selfie. The Urban Dictionary defines selfies as "pictures taken of oneself while holding the camera at arms length." If we are not careful, "selfy" might become a new way of life.



Jesus warned about the dangers of exalting ourselves. In fact, according to our Lord's gospel, there is nothing more dangerous than self-promotion and preoccupation with one's self. Apart from God, we are an abyss, a puzzle with missing pieces, mazes with no endings, darkness with no light. For this reason, God sent his son, Jesus, into the world to set us free from the tyranny of ourselves. And thus, Jesus taught his disciples; "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, 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." (Matthew 16:24-25) In other words, no more selfies.

At the core of Christianity is the belief that discovery of our true selves is only possible through an active love of God, glorifying him, not ourselves. Our present-day society is filled with land mines in these regards. Social media can be good or bad - good for instant communication but bad if only used for self-aggrandizement. The great temptation of social media is to promote the kind of self one wants to be, thinks they are, or hopes to be. We can post photos, phrases, or slogans, which we think best depict who we are. But, unfortunately, our view of ourselves is marred terribly by our deep insecurities and fallen nature.

Only God can see us for who we really are. When we choose to follow him and worship him as our creator, we are given glimpses that can turn into deep insights of who we were created to be. Daily prayer and a vibrant relationship with God will

accomplish all and more than our hearts often seek through endless hours on social media websites. God is light, and he shines that brightness on us when we are willing to entrust our lives to his care. The prophet Isaiah could not have said it any better; "And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand." (Isaiah 64:8)



Yet, there is another side to the story. Pope Francis recently explained that the Internet is a gift from God. The truth of the gospel and its freedom is traveling around the globe at a speed never seen before. Oppressed people are now able to communicate with others in free countries who can help them. The world is shrinking and evil practices are now more easily exposed. For this reason, North Korea is trying to block its citizens from having access to the Internet. But in the Middle East, there is no such blockade. Average Arabs now turn on computers and are in instant conversations with Christians and others who are promoting a freer society and the ultimate freedom, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In the last year, I've been very involved in a ministry called, Global Media Outreach(GMO). It was founded by Walt Wilson, who originally was on the ground floor with Steve Jobs in creating Apple computers. In recent years, Walt created GMO to help people all over the globe gain access to the Good News. GMO floods markets with advertising on computers and hand-held devices with simple questions such as, "Would you like to know more about God?" If people respond "yes," they are put in contact with an on-line missionary who stands ready to respond to whatever questions they have.

In 2013, GMO gained tremendous traction in the Chicago area and now there is a large cadre of on-line missionaries here in my city. GMO leaders recently asked if I would teach them more about the Middle East. I suggested they focus solely on Egypt. I believe, as many do, that as Egypt goes, so goes the rest of the Arab world. All Arab countries look to Egypt as a "big brother," the hub of intellectual and cultural life. My Chicago on-line missionary friends agreed and raised a large amount of money to saturate hand-held mobile devices in Egypt with advertisements about the Good News. The results are phenomenal. Last December, five-and-a-half million Egyptians clicked on apps that asked people if they wanted to learn more about God. Approximately 650,000 people replied they wanted to know Jesus and his life-giving gospel. And 24,000 people indicated they wanted to meet face-to-face with a



Christian to be disciplined and taught in their new faith! I am now helping connect these people with Egyptian Christians. Praise God.

Life has many ironies, such as the best way to learn more about ourselves is to think less about ourselves and more about God and others. This is the salvation message in a nutshell. Life is often not what it appears to be. Promoting, photographing, exalting self seems so natural and even fun. But, it is God who is to be adored the most, not us. Many of our World War II-era parents learned that lesson through deep sacrifices and by putting others above themselves. For this reason, churches flourished in America during the 1950s and '60s. Now it appears the pendulum is swinging the other way. As a result, the lessons to be learned from the "Selfy-era," won't be any easier. Each one of us needs to come to that precious point in time when we are exhausted with just focusing on ourselves, unable to take one more sip from the cup of self-centeredness.

Life is bankrupt apart from God. Saint Augustine said, "My soul is restless until it rests in Thee." As we approach Spring and the days of Lent and Easter, let us put down the endless pursuit of self apart from God. In the end, it never works; it is always fruitless. May we be patient with God. If we give him our lives, he gives it back to us, redeemed and beautiful in his grace. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Save us from ourselves, the very thing we are tempted to pursue, all day long.