

Look beyond Yourself

Lesson 36

Purpose To help class members understand that they can grow closer to the Savior by thinking of others' needs before their own.

Preparation 1. Prayerfully study Ruth 1–2; 1 Samuel 19–20; Matthew 7:12; Luke 23:34.

2. Materials needed: A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member. Continue to encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.

Note to the teacher According to an old saying, "The smallest of packages is a person wrapped up in himself." Many people in the world give little thought to what others think and feel. Selfishness seems to come easily and naturally, and it is the cause of many problems in the world. Remind class members that thinking of others is the Savior's way.

Suggested Lesson

Development **Thinking of Others First**

Story and discussion Write on the chalkboard $1+1=0$ and $1-1=2$. Ask class members to try to figure out how these mathematical formulas can be true.

After class members have had a chance to respond, tell them the following parable:

One Monday morning when Rob and Janet arrived at school, they noticed that their teacher, Mr. May, had an interesting smile on his face. "I wonder what Mr. May is going to do today," Janet whispered to Rob. The other students in the class also seemed curious about what was behind Mr. May's intriguing smile.

It seemed to take forever for class to begin. When the bell signaled the start of class, Mr. May said, "Today I am going to give each of you three gifts. You may do whatever you wish with the gifts. But the object of receiving these gifts is to get more of them by the end of the week."

With that short explanation, Mr. May gave each student three small pieces of paper. Rob quickly looked at each one. On one piece of paper was the word "Smile." A second piece of paper read "Sincere compliment." The third simply read "Help."

A student raised her hand and asked, "What are we supposed to do with these?"

Mr. May smiled again. "You can figure it out," he said.

Determined to get more gifts, Rob stuffed the pieces of paper into his pocket so no one would be able to take them from him. Then he spent the rest of the week trying to get gifts from other people. He poked fun at one of the students in the class and then looked around to see how many people had smiled at him.

When he got a good grade on a spelling test, he showed his grade to several people, hoping that someone would give him a sincere compliment. And he reminded Tom of a favor he had done for him once, saying, "We'll be even if you will help me with my book report." By the end of the week, all Rob had was three crumpled pieces of paper in his pocket and a sick feeling in his stomach.

Janet didn't really think about Mr. May's assignment. She just went about her week as she always did. She greeted everyone with a smile. When she noticed that Emily had done especially well on a math quiz, she congratulated her. Later that week she noticed that Loren was having a hard time with his science project. She helped him with the problem that was frustrating him. By the end of the week, Janet was happier than she had been before, even though she had forgotten about Mr. May's challenge to get more gifts.

Rob was confused. He had tried hard to get more gifts, but he had failed. Meanwhile, he noticed that even though Janet had not done anything different, everyone smiled at her. People were always giving her sincere compliments. And when she needed help with something, someone always seemed to notice and offer assistance.

- For Rob, how did one plus one equal zero? (After trying all week to add to his own store of "gifts," he seemed to have less than he had when the week began.) How did one minus one equal two for Janet? (Rather than trying to get smiles, compliments, and help from others, she gave those gifts away. However, in the process, she received those gifts from others and felt even happier than she had felt when the week began.)

Explain that Rob approached Mr. May's assignment selfishly but Janet was selfless, spending the week thinking of others. Although she gave her gifts away, she never lost anything (for example, she didn't lose her smile when she smiled at others). Likewise, when we give of ourselves, we often find that we don't lose anything at all. Instead, we receive gifts of love, friendship, and greater happiness.

Selfishness versus Selflessness

- What does the word *selfish* mean to you?

Following the discussion, read the dictionary definition of *selfish*: "Seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "selfish").

- What are some characteristics of a selfish person?

List class members' responses on the chalkboard, including some of the following characteristics:

SELFISH

Self-centered
Greedy
Unkind
Insensitive
Lustful
Unpleasant

Chalkboard
discussion

- What are some results of selfishness?

Write class members' responses on the chalkboard. Answers may include the following:

RESULTS OF SELFISHNESS

Dishonesty (lying, cheating, stealing)
 Jealousy
 Poor family relationships
 Unwillingness to serve in the Church
 Immorality
 War and crime

- How does selfishness bring these results?

Point out that the opposite of selfishness is selflessness. Selfless people think of others before they think of themselves.

- What are some characteristics of a selfless person?

You may want to list class members' responses on the chalkboard, or you may simply help them see that a selfless person will have characteristics opposite to those of a selfish person. For example, a selfless person is generous and kind rather than greedy and unkind.

- What are some results of selflessness?

Help class members see that just as the characteristics of selflessness are opposite to those of selfishness, so are the results of selflessness opposite to the results of selfishness. Selflessness leads to love, service, and peace.

Situations and discussion

Discuss with class members the following situations:

1. Max knew that his mother had made a pie for dessert. Because he was hungry on his arrival home from school, he cut the pie and ate nearly half of it. When his mother confronted him, he said that he had wanted his pie early and that since he was the biggest in the family he deserved the biggest share.

- Who was Max thinking of?
- What could he have done differently?

2. One Saturday afternoon six girls decided to go to lunch and see a movie together. Five of the girls chose to see a certain movie, but Joan insisted they attend the one her favorite actor was playing in at a theater across town. When the other girls outvoted Joan, she said that if they wouldn't go to her movie she would not go at all. Angrily she stomped out of the room.

- What do you think of Joan's behavior?
- How might Joan have been more considerate of her friends' feelings?

Ask class members to think silently about the following questions:

- What would you do in the same situation as Max or Joan? In what ways are you a selfish or selfless person?

Developing a Selfless Attitude

Quotation
and discussion

President Spencer W. Kimball spent his life thinking of others and the Lord instead of himself. Have a class member read the following advice from President Kimball to young people:

“To do the special things given to this generation, you will need to guard against selfishness. One of the tendencies most individuals have which simply must be overcome is the tendency to be selfish. All that you can do now while you are young and are more pliant to become less selfish and more selfless will be an important and lasting contribution to the quality of your life in the years, indeed in the eternity, to come. You will be a much better wife or a much better husband, a better mother or a better father, if you can curb the tendency to be selfish” (“President Kimball Speaks Out on Planning Your Life,” *New Era*, Sept. 1981, 51).

- Why did President Kimball emphasize the importance of learning to be selfless “while you are young and pliant”? (*Pliant* means “easily influenced.” President Kimball was saying that it is easier to change when we are young than when we are old and may have established bad habits.)
- How can being selfless improve our lives now and in eternity?

Scripture
discussion

Have class members read and mark Matthew 7:12. Explain that many people refer to this teaching as the Golden Rule.

- How can this teaching help us be more selfless?
- What are some specific things we can do to overcome selfishness?

Help class members see that we can do such things as:

Show courtesy and kindness.
Compliment others sincerely.
Avoid sarcasm.
Put ourselves in the other person’s position.
Avoid thoughts of resentment, envy, or jealousy.
Be genuinely interested in other people.
Show love for others.

Following the Examples of Selfless People

Scripture stories
and discussion

Tell the class that there are many great examples in the scriptures of men and women who were unselfish. Instead of thinking of themselves, they thought of others. Many of these people suffered danger, trouble, pain, and disappointment to be able to help others.

Relate the following scripture stories. After each story, have class members discuss the person’s example of unselfishness.

Jonathan

Jonathan was the son of King Saul. Normally he would have been next in line to be king. However, the prophet Samuel anointed David to succeed Saul as king.

In 1 Samuel, chapters 19 and 20, we read that Jonathan protected his friend David when Saul tried to kill David.

- How might Jonathan have acted if he had been selfish? How did Jonathan show that he was unselfish?

Ruth

When Ruth's husband died, she decided to leave her homeland and go to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was also a widow. When they arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth provided food for Naomi by picking up, or gleaning, corn or grain that was left in the fields after the harvest. (See Ruth 1–2.)

- What reasons could Ruth have had to stay in her homeland rather than go with Naomi?
- How did Ruth show that she was unselfish?

Joseph Smith

The Prophet Joseph Smith suffered humiliation and abuse from enemies of the Church while he translated the Book of Mormon and established the restored Church of Jesus Christ. He later gave his life for his testimony.

- What blessings have we received because of Joseph Smith's selflessness?
- How can we, like Joseph Smith, give more of ourselves in the Lord's service?

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ taught us to be unselfish, and he always practiced what he taught, giving us an example to follow. One great example of his selflessness was shown on the cross. Referring to the Roman soldiers who had nailed him to the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

- Who was Jesus thinking of at that moment of personal agony?
- What are some other examples of unselfishness from Jesus' life and teachings? How was the Atonement of Jesus Christ a selfless act?

Testimony

Testify that Jesus Christ gave us the perfect example of selflessness. Encourage class members to follow that example, working to become less selfish during the coming week.

Enrichment Activities

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. Have class members sit in a circle. Explain that seeing good in other people is part of being selfless. Then have class members take turns sharing one thing they admire about the person to their left.
2. Invite class members to talk about how they felt when they performed an act of service as they were asked in lesson 35. Be sure they talk about things they *felt* rather than specific things they did.

3. With class members, sing or read the words to “Have I Done Any Good?” (*Hymns*, no. 223). Focus on the words in the chorus: “Then wake up and do something more / Than dream of your mansions above.” Ask class members the following questions:

- Why is it selfish to focus only on our own salvation in “mansions above”? How could this attitude prevent us from reaching those mansions?