

## Letting Go of Entitlement to Be Set Free

February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018

A few years ago a survey was conducted of corporate executives concerning the recent college graduates entering the work force. One of the questions revealed a tremendous amount about recent college graduates. They were asked to describe these graduates in one word. The word they overwhelmingly selected was: **entitled**.

Then they turned it around and asked the college graduates to guess what one word the corporate executives chose to describe them. And to help them they gave them the hint that the word starts with the letter "E". They guessed: **exciting**, **enterprising**, **entrepreneurial** and **energetic**. None of them guessed correctly how they were perceived.

Entitlement is pervasive in our culture and has been for quite some time.

One of the definitions of **Entitlement** is: *a belief that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges.* And a key phrase used by those who believe they are entitled to something is the phrase, "I deserve this."

Perhaps we can blame this pervasive sense of entitlement on McDonalds who has made famous the slogan: "You deserve a break today, so get up and get away to McDonalds."

We see this sense of entitlement on almost every level of life.

- **Children are often raised in child centered families** where the ultimate goal is to provide happiness to their children. So, there's very little distinguishing between their needs and wants. They are given pretty much whatever they want. And as they grow up and begin to participate in various competitions we don't want any of them to feel bad so rather than just awards given to the winners – everyone is given a "participation" trophy. Many sociologists point to these participation medals as a major contributing factor to this entitlement culture.
- Within **schools discipline is often avoided** because of the anger of parents causing a problem that their kids weren't treated fairly. (Vonnie Blount worked in the schools for many years and has related an incident several years ago when she was walking through the lunch room and a group of kids were shooting peas from the school lunch across the table at each other. She marched over there and told them to stop that right now and to get down on the floor and pick up every last pea. The next morning she was called into the principals office and told that we don't do that around here and that one of the parents had called the office and complained).
- With this backdrop – many children as they grow up in this culture of entitlement graduate from high school or college and **move back home** and expect that mom and dad are required to continue to provide for their needs and wants with doing very little to help out.
- Or college graduates believe they deserve a great paying job and are often unwilling to settle for anything less.
- And when these young adults **get married** they are still under the belief that the ultimate goal in life is to be happy and they deserve it, so if their spouse is not making them happy, then they will go find someone else who will rather than taking their vows seriously and showing God's love to your spouse ahead of you being happy.
- And often this belief of happiness and entitlement is carried over into the **church** and their relationship with God. People will jump around from church to church until they find a church that will best meet their needs. Or individuals feel slighted within the church because someone else has been asked to sing or teach or serve in some capacity other than them and they get mad.
- And **God** is expected to continue to provide for their happiness. And if their needs and wants are not being met – then it's God's fault and they become disappointed or mad at God and accuse Him of not doing His job.

Many of the school shootings are triggered by an angry student who had this expectation that people should treat him better than what they were so they feel they are entitled to get even with them.

Family speakers **Richard and Linda Eyre** state that *entitlement refers to the growing trend in children (and adults) to think that they **can** have, **should** have, and **deserve** to have whatever they want, whatever their friends have – and that they should have it **now** and not have to earn it or give up anything for it.*

Later they add – *“This attitude of entitlement is characterized by a lack of gratitude and personal responsibility which leads to a lack of satisfaction and an overarching propensity to blame others for our troubles. It is also characterized by an inability to delay gratification which fosters laziness and encourages the accumulation of debt. Figuring they will pay it off later because they are entitled to it NOW!”*

We all have a sense of entitlement that creeps into our lives or becomes an ongoing attitude in our lives. Where we believe we're entitled to something or deserve to be treated better than I'm being treated. That's the core of unforgiveness. We are hurt because we strongly believe that we deserved to have been treated better than how they treated you.

- What about when you give someone a gift. Are you hurt when they don't reciprocate and give you a gift. That's entitlement – you have an expectation on how you should be treated.
- What about when you're driving and someone cuts you off. How you respond is based on your expectation of how everyone else on the road should behave and treat you. Or how about driving the speed limit – do you believe that should apply to everyone else but you, that's entitlement.

This sense of entitlement is not a new development. It can be traced all the way back to before this world was even created.

- **Satan** wasn't content being a high ranking arc angel. He believed he was entitled to more. He wanted to be god. So, he led an unsuccessful rebellion with a third of the angels against God that failed.
- Then we see Satan popping up in the Garden of Eden and creating this sense of entitlement in **Eve** when he suggested that God was holding back on her. *You won't really die when you eat that forbidden fruit but what will really happen is you'll become just like God.* This made sense to Eve and so it became more important to get what she felt she was entitled to rather than obey God. And Adam went right along with Eve as well.
- Right after that their son, **Cain**, felt that God should have accepted his sacrifice just as much as his brother Abel's and out of anger he killed his brother.
- The **Israelites** just a few short days after God miraculously rescued them out of Egypt, began to complain that they had no water and then later that they had no food. They felt entitled to better treatment by God.
- **King David** rationalized that, as king, he was entitled to sleep with Bathsheba because she was beautiful and he was king.
- **Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-12)** This man had leprosy and was instructed to go to the prophet Elishah for healing. However, when he arrived he was told by Elisha's servant to go wash himself in the nearby river and he'd be healed. Naaman was put out because Elisha didn't come himself and tell him that. He apparently felt that someone as important as himself was entitled to have Elisha come himself.
- **Abraham**, the great father, of the Israelite nation, felt that he was entitled to not be harmed or killed, and rather than trusting God, he instructed his wife, Sarai, to lie twice and tell everyone that she was his sister instead of his wife.
- **Jonah** felt that he and the whole Jewish nation were entitled to have their enemies, the Ninevites, wiped off the face of the earth, so when God called him to go to them and tell them to repent or God would judge them and kill them all, Jonah tried to take matters into his own hands and fled in the opposite direction from Nineveh.
- **The Pharisees and Sadducees** felt that they deserved to be treated better by Jesus so they resented him and ultimately plotted to have him killed.
- **James and John's mother** felt that he sons deserved to have the best seats in Jesus' future kingdom and so she asked Jesus on behalf of her sons for them to sit on his left and right.

- **The Prodigal Son** – This son felt entitled to his portion of dad’s inheritance prior to him actually dying.
- **The eldest son** (Luke 15:28-30) when the prodigal comes home dad throws a party for him and the eldest son is offended because he felt that after all his faithful service to his father that he should be the one entitled to a party.
- **Ananias and Sapphira** felt that they deserved the kind of recognition that Barnabas received for giving generously to meet needs within the church, so they sold some property and then lied about how much they had given and they were struck dead by God.

The list could go on and on of individuals in the Bible and outside of the Bible who’s actions have been motivated largely by feeling entitled to something better than what they currently are experiencing.

What about you – in what sense has this pervasive sense of entitlement crept into your life? This feeling of entitlement is a subtle yet powerful tool of the devil because it will rob you of your joy and replace it with feelings of resentment and bitterness. If you allow it to creep into your life it can produce depression in you because you become convinced that the universe is treating you unfairly. And do you see what slowly happens. The universe revolves around YOU and your focus is taken off of God and onto YOU.

**John Piper** goes so far as to claim: “*A sense of deservedness or entitlement will keep you from knowing Christ.*”

I can’t find the word “entitlement” in my Bible, but it’s addressed many times.

James talked about entitlement when he wrote:

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3 (NIV))*

Jesus told a whole parable about entitlement. It’s often referred to as the parable of the workers. It’s recorded in Matthew 20 and tells about a landowner who hired individuals to work in his field early in the day for a predetermined amount. And then throughout the day he continued to hire individuals. At the end of the day they were all a bit surprised when the landowner paid them all the same amount. Those hired first complained because they felt they deserved to be paid more. The point of the parable is that God doesn’t necessarily operate under our rules and expectations of how God ought to work. At the end of the parable Jesus delivers the punch line to drive his point home even more. “So the last will be first and the first will be last.” The result of that will produce great gratitude for those in last place but resentment from those who were in first. Imagine if they did that in the Olympics. Rather than those who did the best standing on the podium receiving medals but rather those who ended up in last place. Jesus’ point is that God has the freedom to do whatever He wants because He is God and He determines the rules. And over and over again in his ministry those who were told that they were in last and would never get out of that position, Jesus reached specifically out to them and loved them and recognized and honored them.

So, let’s talk about how to get set free from this trap of entitlement.

## **How to Live Free From Entitlement:**

### **1. Remember what you really deserve:**

**Romans 6:23 (NIV)** *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The point is that if God were going to give us what we deserved, everyone deserves to die (eternal separation from God). But God offers each of us this tremendous gift of eternal life. And the point of it being a “*gift*” is that we don’t earn it – we acquire a gift by accepting it.

**King David** wrote about this prior to Jesus. Try to sense his amazement at how God treats us versus how we deserve to be treated.

**Psalms 103:10-12 (NIV)** *God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

## **2. Humbly strive, with the Holy Spirit's help, to live a life of gratitude.**

Left to ourselves we are very self-centered. We will typically default to what's best for us and what we're entitled to and how we should be treated. But the Holy Spirit is given to every believer as a resource to change that thinking around. And by consistently living a life filled with gratitude you can begin to make entitlement the exception rather than the rule in your life.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 (NIV)** *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit.*

Notice the end. Do not quench the Spirit. I think a strong case can be made that one of the sure fire ways to quench the Spirit is to refuse to pursue God's will for you which is rejoicing, praying and thanking God all the time and in all circumstances. Don't miss the power of this type of life style. All three of these activities focus your heart and mind on God. And as you're doing that you are living out God's will for your life and your walking in step with the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving is the barometer of the heart. When thanksgiving is strong and continual then entitlement will automatically be weak. Entitlement cannot stick to a grateful heart.

## **3. Look for ways to serve others.**

**Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)** *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.*

Whether it's in a marriage relationship, or a friendship, or within this church or out in the world- we ought to be seeking the Lord on how best to show His love to those around us. If we keep serving God by practically showing His love to others, then we will be freed from worrying about whether my needs are being met or not. We'll be filled with God's love as we watch Him touch people's lives through us.

## **4. Remember that Christ gave up His entitlement for you.**

**Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)** *Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

Jesus could have stayed in heaven and forgot about us. If anyone was entitled to think about Himself rather than others, it would be Jesus, the creator of the universe. But he wasn't consumed with entitlement because He was at His very nature love, and because of that nature, He loves you and me and willingly gave up His rights so that we might become sons and daughters of God.

## **5. Concentrate on what you're entitled to as a follower of Jesus.**

- You were chosen by God to be His holy and blameless child (Ephesians 1:4)
- You have direct 24/7 access to the Father (Ephesians 1:18)
- You have been adopted into God's family (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4)
- You are a joint heir, with Christ, of God's many riches (Romans 8:17)
- You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

- You can live in God's peace (John 14:27)
- You are a friend of God (John 15:14-15)
- Your name is written in the book of life in heaven (Revelation 21:27)
- You are spiritually already seated in heaven (Ephesians 2:6)
- You have a home in heaven awaiting your arrival (John 14:2)
- You have the Holy Spirit living inside of you (John 3:3-6; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Rom. 8:9)
- You are free from God's wrath and are reconciled to Him (Romans 5:9-11)
- Your every need is supplied by God (Philippians 4:19)
- You have supernatural power to accomplish God's purposes for you (Philip 4:13; Heb. 13:6)
- Nothing can separate you from God's love (Romans 8:38-39)
- You are more than a conqueror through God who loves you (Romans 8:37)
- You are God's workmanship created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10)
- You are part of a community of believers (1 Corinthians 2:27)
- You are equipped to be used by God and are His work partner (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 3:9)
- You have been given Christ's mind and a tender heart (1 Corinthians 2:16; Ezek 36:26)
- You've been given God's character already living in you (Galatians 5:16, 22-25)
- God will help fight your battles against Satan (1 Peter 5:6-9; James 4:7-8; 1 John 5:18)
- You don't have to fear physical death for you're going to be with God (1 Thess. 4:13-14)
- You have been given the power to overcome sin (John 8:34-36; Galatians 5:1)
- God has anointed you with His Spirit and will help you stand firm in your faith (2 Cor. 1:21)

## Letting Go of Entitlement to Be Set Free

**Entitlement** is: *a belief that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges*

What are examples that you've seen of this sense of entitlement?

**Examples of entitlement in the Scriptures:** (how did they show an entitlement attitude?)

- **Satan** – (Isaiah 14:13-14)
- **Eve:** (Genesis 3:1-6)
- **Cain** (Genesis 4:4-9)
- **David** (2 Samuel 11:1-4)
- **Naaman** (2 Kings 5:1-12)
- **Gehazai** (2 Kings 5:19-27)
- **Jonah** (Jonah 1:1-3; 4:1-3)
- **James and John's mother** (Mt 20:20-28)
- **Prodigal son** (Luke 15:11-12)
- **Eldest son;** (Luke 15:28-30)
- **Ananias and Sapphira** (Acts 4:33-5:2)

**Jesus teaching concerning Entitlement:**

What does Jesus teach about entitlement from the following verses?

Matthew 11:28-30

Luke 1:21-25

John 15:4

Matthew 20:25-28

Philippians 2:5-8

## **Steps to breaking free from Entitlement:**

1. **Remember what you really deserve** (Romans 6:23)
2. **Humbly strive, with the Holy Spirit's help, to live a life of gratitude** (1 Thess. 5:16-19)
3. **Look for ways to serve others** (Philippians 2:3-4)
4. **Remember that Christ gave up His entitlement for you.** (Philippians 2:5-8)
5. **Claim and live in your blessings as a follower of Jesus.**
  - You were chosen by God to be his holy and blameless child (Ephesians 1:4)
  - You have direct 24/7 access to the Father (Ephesians 1:18)
  - You have been adopted into God's family (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4)
  - You are a joint heir, with Christ, of God's many riches (Romans 8:17)
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