

## **The Full Self (part 1)**

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*“No doubt you have experienced brain freeze, the unpleasant sensation of eating ice cream too fast and the cold causing an intense pain in your head. Acting natural is difficult when this occurs. Typically you make an unintelligible sound, tighten your face into an awful contortion, and definitely stop eating the ice cream until the agony passes. During the prolonged burst, you are unable to focus on anything but the pain. Imagine living most of your life with your mind numbed by brain freeze. While you may not experience the physical pain, our culture experiences brain freeze as a continual suspension of deeper thinking. Brain freeze causes us to think of nothing but ourselves” (Smart Faith, J.P. Moreland and Mark Matlock, p. 69). To be sure, we are warned about this kind of selfish living in the Bible:*

- *Philippians 1:17 “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife (selfish ambition)”*
- *James 3:14 “...you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart”*
- *James 3:16 “For where bitter jealous and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing”*

*“What psychologists refer to as the empty self has frozen much of our postmodern culture. The empty self is made up of values, motives, and habits of thought, feeling, and behavior that twist and kill the life of the mind and make spiritual maturity difficult” (Moreland and Matlock, p. 73). The empty self prevents us from realizing our spiritual potential and keeps us locked in a holding pattern around our possessions, status, prestige, appearance, and appetites. And if you feel like life has not amounted to much for you lately, then look no further for an explanation than in your priorities. Putting “self” ahead of others always leads to a sincere lack of fulfillment. “And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them... Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11). So how do I avoid the trap of being an empty person?*

### **Look Out For Others**

*“Do nothing from selfishness and empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). The empty self only looks out for himself. “Watch out for the empty self that defines its values, life goals, and morals as if it were in a bubble isolated from others without responsibility toward the community. Self-contained individuals do their own thing and seek to find meaning only by looking into their own selves. As psychologist Martin Seligman warns, ‘The self is a very poor site for finding meaning’” (Moreland and Matlock, p. 74). Consider also what the scripture says, “He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels*

*against all sound wisdom*" (Proverbs 18:1). Only the fool thinks that self-interest is the ultimate source of fulfillment. And yet, when we step away from the rhetoric (with which even unbelievers would agree), do we not find ourselves being selfish on a daily basis?

- An empty self will resist temptation and obey God, but only to avoid punishment, derision, or alienation. "I obey so that I won't go to Hell." The full self goes beyond this concern and obeys because he is interested in pleasing God. *"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:9).
- An empty self is interested in status, which actually never impresses God (Galatians 2:6, Acts 12:21-23).
- An empty self sees other people as means not ends. "How can I use this person?" "Should I be seen with him?" "What connections does she have?" The full self sees the value of all people, and recognizes that a truly God-like love (John 13:34-35) is only expressed by seeing people as ends not means.