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Childish: Putting Away the One and Only Child

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Sermon by Dr. Matt Hook

(Based on the book “Putting Away Childish Things” by Dr. David Seamands)

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” 1 Corinthians 13:11.

People say I’m a pretty good dancer. But do you know when I became a good dancer? It was my freshman year in college, when I decided to put all my focus on the one I was dancing with, and quit worrying about myself! So I forgot about how foolish I might look, and made it about her, whoever I was dancing with. And in some weird way it worked. I even got invited to a lot of sorority dances, because I could dance! When I took the focus off of myself. If only I could do that in real life...

The fact is, I naturally think about myself more than I think about any of the rest of you... Multiply that by 6.5 billion people, and you see the point. Bringing that home, literally, at my house, we have the Civil War most every morning, when the 4 kids all try to get the bathroom to themselves for as long as they want. **SELF-FOCUS has impacted how we think, how we see ourselves, and how we live.** It’s why we can’t grow past a certain point in our faith, and it’s one of the most difficult things in the world to *katargeo*, or put away.

Our preoccupation with self ripples through every area of our culture: how we do business, how we teach, how we parent, how we vote, how we marry, and how we think about faith.

Self- is the modifier of choice: Self-esteem, self-image, self-actualization, self-concept, self-help, and self-service are all newcomers to our language. Flying solo is *so* much a part of life in America that we don’t realize how novel this condition is.

THE REAL RESULTS OF OUR SELF-FOCUS? We think “I’m all the company I need.” We experience little meaningful contact with others. We’re left disconnected and alone. Remember the slips of paper 3 weeks ago? The lack of praise and relationship (thus a lack of health for others) is a direct result of childish self-focus. It’s hard to dance with someone who’s only into their self. Preoccupation with my self **limits my relationships**, including our relationship with God. Often times I can get so childishly self-centered, I don’t even share my *burdens* and *problems* with God! I’m totally limited in my relationships, and those that I *do* have are constantly sabotaged because I hang on to my self-centeredness.

Another result is that I want what I want when I want it, which is a good thing, right? Because all that self-focus naturally leads to—increased HAPPINESS, right? I don’t think so. It’s exactly the *opposite*: my self-focus breeds discontent. I get bored. I get dissatisfied. I wind up looking for ENTERTAINMENT. We even call it CULTURE now. But “entertainment” today is all-consuming and numbing. Advertisers have NO OTHER MESSAGE. I deserve to be happy! They say it IS about me! They promise me that! And a *twisting* is taking place the whole time, until I begin thinking: What makes me happy is by definition right and worthwhile. It’s the greatest good. We say as parents in America “I just want my kids to be happy.” And I say baloney. When my kids leave the house, I don’t say “Have fun.” I don’t say “Be happy.” I say “Be good.” I want my kids to be good. But we’ve begun to think the pursuit (or purchase) of happiness is not only

one of our inalienable *rights*; it is also our favorite free time activity. (Never mind that half my trouble comes from wanting my own way and not getting it— and the other half of my trouble comes from getting my own way).

Another result of childish self-focus is that it means **I avoid pain and seek pleasure**. That's the normal and acceptable way of doing business for most of us: if it *feels* good. Not if it IS good or right or sensitive or appropriate. We've come to a place where there is almost an *obligation* to do what we want to do. Another T-Shirt said: "Galileo was wrong. The universe DOES revolve around me." *Well, duh. Apart from God, what else CAN it revolve around?*

While we're living out our childish ways, God whispers: **Depend on me. Let me be in control**. The pride that keeps us "on our own" is at odds with God's calling. That pride, that self-centered will of mine that still remains unsubmitted is not only the root sin of all our other sins. It is also the root of our problems and pain. God says a life wrapped up in yourself is no life at all. Jesus said "*No one can serve two masters.*" The only truly sane person in the world says it. We can't serve God and ourselves first and expect to remain sane. (And I want to give a word to STAY AT HOME MOMS and all parents. In some ways, there is no such thing as selfishness when you're a stay at home mom. You may say "I want my schedule kept" but when your husband is late, what can you do?) But really, it doesn't matter what your profession is. The question still remains: **HAVE YOU SURRENDERED YOUR WILL TO GOD?**

We're talking about the surrender of your *will* to the lordship of Christ. NOT something you do once for all, but something you wrestle to do every day. To actualize your surrender is a lifelong process. It is a dance, and we look best when we let God lead.

Surrendering to Christ means we **relinquish control to God**. Now, I know many of you are feeling what I was feeling as I headed down this path: This is oppression! This is giving up my individuality! Domination! Repression! How can I be ME? Because I was saying this for the last week working on this message! As I was protesting, it was like God said "How can I be ME? Can you hear yourself?" (It's as ridiculous as if Ginger Rogers said to Fred Astaire "If I dance with you, I'll be repressed." She did everything Fred did, only backwards and in high heels!) And God quietly replies: **Only in Me can YOU be truly FREE!** Jesus said "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*" Luke 9:23-24. You and I start denying ourselves when we pray "Lord, I am *bound* by my desire to serve myself. Change me Lord. Help me focus on You and others."

If it were easy, we would have done it by now. **WHY IS IT SO HARD** to put our wills away? Because you are going back to right the wrong that was made by your ancestors at the beginning of the world. We think if our will is God's will, what if there's something out there **BESIDES** God's will? I don't want to miss that! Adam and Eve also thought God was holding out on them. As if there was some will out there better than God's! They too thought they could meet their own needs better than God could when they obeyed Him. **SELF-SURRENDER IS THE ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL BATTLE.** Everything else in your life leads to this moment of *katargeo*. It doesn't just happen when you become a Christ-follower. Becoming a Christ-follower is about what God has done for you. But this ultimate self-surrender is a step you take.

SO...what happens when we *katargeo* this childish 4 year old mindset in adult trappings?

First, you lay down your rights. Talk about counter-cultural! *Katargeo* your rights before God alone. Let God take care of your life: your needs, rights, and identity—Let Him handle even your spiritual reputation. "*You are not your own. You were bought at a price.*" 1 Cor. 6:19-20. God calls us to gladly receive all He has for us, rather than be insistent, self-assertive, ready to sue God if things don't go our way. Sometimes it means that old King James' term "long-suffering," still trusting that God's "*grace is sufficient for*" us. (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This next step is also huge: Let God take care of your identity, because when you do, you look at ALL people and ALL relationships differently. **When our #1 source of identity is God, then other people are no longer the means to our ends.** We SO deeply need to be affirmed and accepted and loved. Only when we get

how great is God's love for us, that love delivers us from the need to use others to meet that need in-and-of-themselves. **We don't have to rely on those around us for our sense of worth**, or for meeting those deep needs that are beyond another human's ability to reach. All the love we need, all the acceptance and security we need, comes from above. "*God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Rom. 5:8. Once we have found our well-being in Christ's love for us, we do have the freedom to love and serve others openly. Only then is it possible to "*do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*" (Phil. 2:3).

Finally, put away your childish view of pleasure and pain. *Katargeo* it. Let God redefine your pleasure and pain. As pleasure-seeking individualists, we need to realize something that seems to make no sense: Not all pleasure is good, and not all pain is bad. Much of what gives us pleasure *is* bad. We often find pleasure down all the wrong paths – and the results? Death, brokenness, and isolation. At the same time, much that gives us pain is actually for our own good. God uses our struggles with sin, our losses, and our hardships in two main ways: to deepen our faith and develop our character. And it takes time to develop character. It took 40 years for Moses to develop the character God needed for him to free the people from Egypt. And it took another 40 for God to develop the character of His people, through whom he would establish the nation of Israel. Rick Warren says "God never wastes an experience," when it comes to character. "*We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*" (Rom 5:3-5).

Will you trust Him? Will you surrender your will and your all to God? Some people say it's like taking a sheet of paper and making a long list and signing their name and handing it to God saying "Lord, I surrender all these things. Take my life and let it be." But that's not what the ultimate *katargeo* is. Instead, take the *blank* sheet of paper and sign your name at the bottom. Now hand it to God and say "Lord, you fill it in. And whatever You fill in, my name remains signed at the bottom forever."

And do you know how you can do it? Because it's not just up to you. Take your eyes off of yourself for a moment, and look at your partner. Surrender,...and *dance*—