



Season 1, Episode 4 “Others Focused: What Would Dolly Do?”



Michelle Schroeder:

Hey everybody! Michelle here. Welcome to Episode 4 of Season 2 of the Life on Life Podcast. Today we're going to talk about *considering* one another. So, let's look at Hebrews Chapter 10:24–25. That's the verse we've been focusing on this season as *we become women who are better together, who do womanhood well to the glory of God.*

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as in the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)

Punky Tolson:

Hey Michelle, have you ever heard this? It's been said that there are two kinds of people in the world, those who walk into a room and say, "Here I am!" or those who walk into a room and say, "There you are!" This isn't so much like a verbal expression as it is an expression of the heart. So you guys out there, which kind of person are you?

Some of you know that I worked as an actor for about 12 years. I did film, television, theater and commercials, and God had opened the doors for me to use a talent that he'd given me, in a very interesting arena, *one that is primarily made up of people who are focused on themselves.*

My desire, though, in using that gift was to give a gift to others, by entertaining them in some way, making them laugh or think deeply, or just to give them the gift of temporarily suspending the reality, for about two hours, by taking them on an adventure through the character I portrayed at any given role.

I worked with some remarkable people, some you've never heard of, and never will, and some you've heard of, and know very well, through their illustrious careers in the world of entertainment. And I've learned from them all a great deal more than just how to hone my craft as an actor, but more importantly, I've learned about life and people and relationships, and love and encouragement. In my first lead acting role in a theatrical production, my director, Jim Kelly, did more than just direct me and coach me as an actor. He encouraged the fear out of me.

One week into rehearsals, I absolutely crumbled. I cried and told him I couldn't do it, it was too big a role for me, and I was scared. My fear paralyzed me, and my desire and my love of acting. And Jim, very directly and sternly, looked at me and said, "You're here in this role, because I saw what you did in the audition, and your performance captivated me. I saw the potential you to fill this role, to portray this character. So I don't just know you can do this, but you will do this. Now, dry your face and get back up there." Jim passed away several years later, but his strong exhortation to me resonates with me to this very day.

On another occasion, I had the great delight of working with the remarkable and amazing Dolly Parton, and I do mean, remarkable and amazing. I was cast in a guest starring role in a sitcom Dolly had written, and was producing and starring in, called Heavens To Betsy, where I played opposite her in the role of Helen Bach, her antagonist in the pilot episode.

The very first day of rehearsals always begins with the full cast, the director and all the writers gathered around a table for a readthrough of the full script. There were other well-known actors in the show, and then there was me... *the not well known, or known at all, new kid on the block.*

Dolly Parton walked into the room, a few minutes before we were to begin, just as normal as anyone else. No big entourage with her, no big, "Here I am!" entrance, just smiling and nodding hello to everyone, and as she quickly scanned the room, she zeroed in on me.

Walking directly toward me with her hand extended, she exclaimed in that all familiar voice, "Well, hey there, you must be Helen, I'm Dolly. Welcome to the show, and please let me know if you need anything." And for the rest of the week, as we worked together, I noticed Dolly, and the beautifully consistent, "There you are!" way about her, always talking and laughing with the crew and the rest of the actors.

She even told me the story about losing all of her toes in a bad fall, when she was a young girl, and how her mama actually sewed them back on with a needle and thread. Horrible as that sounds, it was just so cool that she was sharing all these details from her life. She was really interested in the people around her. She asked me about me, about my family, about

my life, and she took note of even the extras on the set, not just seeing them as the blurred background, but as individuals, as people with a life and a purpose and a story.

I watched Dolly walk into the room, and onto the working set, every single day of that week, with the same, "There you are" kind of heart, taking notice of every person around her, and letting us know in her Dolly way, that we mattered, each and every one of us. That experience with Dolly marked me and impacted me deeply, as I saw Dolly actually do what Jesus did, throughout the Scriptures. And that is, to be other focused.

Michelle Schroeder:

You know, Punky, that brings to mind another story that you told me once. Didn't you meet Lyle Lovett?

Punky Tolson:

Yeah. Oh, I did! I did meet Lyle Lovett, on the set of a movie I was working on, with his wife at the time, Julia Roberts. And it was during a break- I was probably at the craft services table or something, but he was there, and standing near enough to me, that we made eye contact. He extended his hand and said, "Hello, I'm Lyle Lovett," and I introduced myself, and I said, "You know, I've been a big fan of your music for years. I think I absolutely wore out the album, Joshua Judges Ruth."

But anyway, he just smiled and just looked straight into my eyes, and asked me about me, and asked me about my family, where I grew up. Just all the things that you would ask a person that you really cared about, and you really were genuinely interested in knowing about. And again, that experience marked me, too. Because it's so refreshing to see people of, let's just say, worldly stature, just be real.

Because they really are real. But we kind of elevate them. But he was just, so down to earth, and so genuinely, sincerely interested, and I've never forgotten that. And so yeah, I've got a lot of experiences like that, that I've had with people in my life, as an actor, and even outside of the acting world. And I've got a lot of experiences with people that were the antithesis of that. But it is refreshing when you come upon somebody like that, who is just real, and down to earth, and very, "There you are" focused.

So, how about you?

When you walk into a party, or a meeting, or just a gathering of women who may be friends of yours, or new to you, or into any kind of a new situation? Are you looking at yourself, or are you looking for the people around you? How about when you walk into the ladies' room

at the airport? Do you notice people there? or do you notice the bathroom attendant that is working there?

When you're checking out at a grocery store or a department store, when you're out to dinner, do you engage the person who serves you? I often say, "They're wearing a name tag, not because they might forget their name, *but so that you know their name.*" Do you take notice of them with your heart? Or are they just the extras in the background?

To be *other focused* is to be humble and kind. Humility is Biblical, and it's what makes us women who are better together doing womanhood well to the glory of God and for his kingdom purposes. And God has much to say on the matter of humility and in being other-focused. Paul writes in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among you yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."

I love how Eugene Peterson phrases it in The Message Bible. It says, "Don't push your way to the front. Don't sweet talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourself the way Christ Jesus thought of himself."

I had a friend one time tell me that she couldn't engage in something that she had been a part of, because she needed to be in a position that was more front and center, so that others would notice her. And y'all, if all we ever do is strive to be front and center, we're never going to be fit for the front lines of battle where the true kingdom service is found. ***That's where the real work is done.***

Furthermore, if all we ever do is look out for ourselves and our own interests, *we're going to miss God*, and we're going to miss the joy of reaching and relating to the people he places all around us every single day. Not just people who need us, but people who need Christ in us. *Remember that Jesus's priority love was and is and always will be people.*

Jesus came to this earth for the people God so loved. Jesus died for the people God so loved. Jesus rose from the dead for the people God so loved, so that through a relationship with him, through Jesus, we the people that God so loved could spend eternity with him.

Therefore, as his followers, we carry around in us the life of Jesus Christ himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is always leading us and drawing us toward people. And as we encounter people, it's his spirit in us that wants to engage with them, and woos us in

that direction, because Jesus has come for us. He's come for people, and he's come for our hearts.

Jesus noticed people, and he hung out with people who are nothing like him, and you know what? People who are nothing like him, *liked him*. Jesus was always looking around for people, seeking them out, going out of his way to reach them. He saw a little guy named Zaccheus up in a tree and said, "Hey, Zaccheus, I'm going to come to your house for dinner tonight. What do you say?"

He had dinner with Matthew and a bunch of his tax collector friends and some of their other quote, "notoriously sinful buddies," and he had a long, long conversation with the Samaritan woman at a well, breaking all gender and racial taboos. He chats her up at a well that day, and blows her heart wide open with his love.

In his powerful little book, [The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness](#). Tim writes,

"C.S. Lewis, in [Mere Christianity](#), makes a brilliant observation about gospel humility at the very end of his chapter on pride. 'If we were to meet a truly humble person,' Lewis says, 'we would never come away from meeting them, thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody, because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually self-absorbed. The thing we would remember from meeting a truly Gospel humble person is how much they seem to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself, or thinking less of myself. ***It is thinking of myself less.***' Gospel humility is not needing to think about myself, not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts, such as, *I'm in this room with these people. Does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?* True gospel humility means I stop connecting every experience and every conversation with myself. In fact, I stopped thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness, the blessed at rest that only self-forgetfulness brings."

Michelle Schroeder:

You know, Punky. I love that book by Tim Keller, and now, I want to go read the C. S. Lewis book as well, but I love what you just quoted, where it says, "Because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person." And that brings me back to what you just read in Philippians 2:3-4, where he says, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others."

Punky Tolson:

Right.

Michelle Schroeder:

To be a person of self-forgetfulness, if you will, is not to become a martyr, right? Not to become a doormat where you don't think of yourself, you don't act or care for yourself. It's to not be focused so much on yourself.

Punky Tolson:

Right, yeah. And I mean, just to be so self-absorbed.

Michelle Schroeder:

Right.

Punky Tolson:

You know, with, "*What about me, what about me, what about me? And by the way, what do you think about me?*" kind of thing. And Eugene Peterson paraphrases that verse, "forget yourselves long enough." So it's not that we just have to, like you said, just flog ourselves, and become a martyr, because God also says, the second part of the greatest Commandment is to love your neighbor *as yourself*.

Like we've said, so many times on this podcast, you have to have a healthy self-love. And so, therefore, you have to focus on yourself. *But when it becomes all about us and that we are, the center of our universe, will implode.* I mean, it never ends well—focusing on ourselves—and there's such freedom, as he titled his book, in self-forgetfulness. It frees us up in so many ways, and it increases this capacity for more of God.

In fact, there's a wonderful verse in Psalm 90, that Moses wrote, and it's verse 14. I try to pray this, almost every single morning, because I need it, but it says, "Satisfy us this morning, Lord, with your unfailing love, that we might sing for joy, and be glad all the days of our life."

I truly believe that, Biblically speaking, when we are satisfied with God, he comes in and fills us up and *absorbs all of our self-absorption*, so that we can then freely give ourselves away, and just splash all over everyone else with the goodness of God. And I think that is really what he tells us, throughout his word, is let me fill you up, so that I can use you to be a dispenser of grace, mercy, peace, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, joy, all of those things and love.

But it always goes back to the same place. It always goes back to our heart and letting God, yes, *fill us*, but also *conform us* to the image of Jesus, by his love and in obedience to his word. Because we're selfish. And where we are selfish, we are not filled. We are not

satisfied in Christ. Jesus was a good listener, and because he listened well, he could hear a person's heart through what they said, and even what they didn't say.

Years ago, my acting coach, Katherine Laughlin, used to call people out, really call them out, loudly and rudely, right smack dab in the middle of rehearsing a scene. And she called them out for not being what she called "organic," or in the moment, just *present in the moment*, when the other actor is just thinking, obsessed about the lines that he's going to say next, instead of engaging with the other actor that's right there in front of them, in the moment, and actually listening, and then organically, naturally responding to them.

She also had a solution to the self-absorbed actor. She would cry out in a loud voice, "*Get out of here, and don't come back, until you've given yourself away!*"

In fact, she'd say, "You stink. Get out of here and go give yourself away. Go find a place to serve. Go to a nursing home. Volunteer to feed folks at a homeless shelter. Work with kids in your church nursery. Just do something, for somebody else, so that you quit thinking of yourself all the time." So that'll preach. I mean, that's a good word!

Michelle Schroeder:

That's a good word.

Punky Tolson:

And I don't think I have to elaborate on the fact that it is the Gospel coming through, in Kathy Laughlin's paraphrase, "Go give yourself away." There's a quote that I love, that is attributed to Malcolm Forbes, that says, "The character of a person is most easily revealed in how he treats those who can do nothing for him or for her."

You know, that verse that we started out with, in Hebrews 10, "Consider then, consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near," that **consider** really means just to *think it through*.

Be creative, be innovative, in ways that you can reach out and encourage someone! Do something for them, share something with them, or just be there for them. Or for crying out loud, just notice them. Sometimes people are just waiting to be noticed. Sometimes, I'll say hi to somebody that's just in this random position, in a store, or in a public place. And I'll speak to them, and they'll look at me like, "You're talking to me? Why are you talking to me?"

It's in giving ourselves away, stepping out of our comfort zones, to notice people, to embrace people, to engage with people. Stepping out of our little "Holy huddles," and our "zip code bubbles," reaching out to others. It's in doing that, that *we do what Jesus would do*. And in the process, we become full, we become aware, we become free of our egos. And after all, as Paul writes, we have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer ourselves and our egos who live, but it is Christ's life that lives in us.



SPIRITUAL LIFE HACK

So, for your spiritual life hack this week, I want you to think about your own self-absorption, and where you need to be free, where you need the freedom of self-forgetfulness, and how you might apply the instruction, my acting coach Katherine Laughlin gave me a million years ago, which is, to go give yourself away. Go serve somewhere, go volunteer somewhere. Do something that just totally sets you apart, and outside of your comfort zone.



Michelle Schroeder:

I would add to that, that as you go out and you do something for someone else, you don't document it on social media.

Punky Tolson:

Oh, absolutely.

Michelle Schroeder:

Just keep it between you and who you served.

Punky Tolson:

Absolutely. And the word of God actually says, "Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing." *Y'all, there are some things that just need to be between us and Jesus!* We don't need to post all the details of our life, and certainly with regard to this, if this is for the purpose of being set free from self, and this freedom of self-forgetfulness, then just keep it between you and Jesus.

Write down how you feel. Write down how you, what you've experienced, *but by all means, let it just be the thing that you and Jesus do together, so that he can show you how much freedom there is to be gained in letting go of yourself.*

Okay, well that's that for that. So let's pray.

Lord God, we want to be women who so strongly resemble Jesus in every way. Women who really do womanhood well, and so, I ask you, Father, for myself, I ask you for Michelle, and for our sisters out there that are listening, that you would show us in our heart, just take the light of your word, Lord, and examine us, and show us where we've got ourselves wrapped around ourselves in an unhealthy way.

Show us, Father, where we need to put the blinders onto us, and take off the glasses that are mirrored on the inside, that always see as us, put those aside long enough to reach out, and to see the people all around us, people who you want us to come in contact with, and to engage with, and to notice and to love.

Lord, help us to become more like Jesus. Help us to become women who so strongly resemble him, and give all the glory and honor and praise to you. And we ask all of this in Jesus's name.

Okay, guys, we'll see you next week and, in the meantime,, don't you forget that you are greatly and dearly loved by the King.

xo -P