**Being Centered in Self**

Over the past two months this column has been exploring the things that we do—indeed that our culture has trained us to do—when we experience conflict and are looking to be powerful. Much of what we are taught not only doesn’t work…it actually makes things worse.

These include

* doing nothing: ignoring it doesn’t make it go away;
* fighting: making others lose only encourages them to try to make us lose; and
* controlling: while we know we can’t control other’s choices, this knowledge doesn’t stop us from trying.

But the most difficult failed tactic, especially for people of faith, happens when we try to take the moral high ground by not being selfish and making others the sole center of our attention. This is also called being codependent.

The logic goes something like this: Because I want the esteem of others I will be careful to not consider myself and attend only to the needs of others. Of course this means that I am not acting on my own behalf and thus will do without, but by attending to others I will look caring and will be safe from the criticism of others. But since I don’t have what I need I may project my needs onto others and imagine that I know what they need. Since I am not attending to myself, I am not conscious of my needs, don’t care for myself, and thus am performing below my abilities. I am getting my needs met only as I am able to coerce or cajole others into caring for me and thus will be seen by them as selfish and self-centered, thus becoming the very person I am trying to avoid.

The Golden Rule is not, “Love your neighbor instead of yourself,” but “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We have to start by caring for ourselves. When we attend to ourselves, knowing what we need and acting on our own behalf, not making others lose or trying to control them, we actually create what they need as well. The quality that is missing in my relationship with someone else that I am creating for myself is also a quality that is missing for them. When we create it, they get it too.

Just a couple of days ago I met with a woman who is separated from her husband and is anxious to restore the marriage. But when she talks to him she asks him a bunch of questions about what he is doing and thinking, many of which she knows he can’t answer. So she comes across to him as controlling when what she is really feeling is scared.

If instead she tells him how she feels (which she is afraid to do for fear that he will use her fears against her) then she is respecting herself and her own needs in a way that can build her self-respect and thus offer him a way to respect both her and himself.

When we become centered in others in order to not be self-centered we are off balance. When instead we center in ourselves we can create what we need such that others also get what they need.