



Lord,  
Make Me a  
**Servant**

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LORD,  
MAKE ME A SERVANT

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## **Lord, Make Me A Servant**

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## Lesson 1

# I Love Serving Is Not About Me

by Clarence DeLoach

### Introduction

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Servanthood is a major topic in the Scriptures. Psalm 84 is a song that exalts the greatness of God and the longing of the human soul to know him. David affirms that the man is blessed who dwells in his presence (v. 4), whose strength is in God (v. 7), and who trusts in him (v. 12). In all this, David found his motivation for serving the Lord.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly (Ps. 84:10-12).<sup>1</sup>

David is telling us that one day serving the Lord is better than anything else we could possibly do. If you had one day to live how would you want to live it? Just think of the possibilities! But, like David, the faithful child of God would want to spend it honoring and glorifying his God. What a contrast to our self-centered culture. The New Age movement is toward self-ism. Humanism glorifies self. Increasingly our society has no place for God. Devotion to self-interest has virtually become the universal religion.

David Truman writes, “Look around. Can there be any doubt that selfishness has conquered this world and most of its people? Individualism has undermined cooperation, devastated intimacy, and corrupted spirituality. Any honest person can see the problems, even in their own life.

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

Yet selfishness is going strong.”<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, the teachings of Jesus emphasize that “serving is not about me.” This lesson will seek to develop the true heart of servanthood with a true perspective on self. Our text is Mark 10:32-44.

## Foundation

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How would you define a Christian? A very simple one is “a follower of Christ.” When Jesus called his first disciples, he simply said, “Follow me!” (Matt. 4:19-22). Later, Jesus would say to all, “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24).

But what does following Jesus entail? Listen to Jesus, “If anyone serves me, let him follow Me: and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26). Following Jesus is serving Him! Following Jesus is denying self!

Serving is not about me!

- **The Crucifixion of Self**
- **Put on the Lord Jesus Christ**
- **Develop a Servant Mentality**
- **The Christ-Centered Life**

*The crucifixion of self.* For Christ to be enthroned, self must be dethroned (Gal. 2:20, Eph. 4:20-32, Col. 3:1-15). The Christian life is a disciplined life. Walking in the Spirit means that we no longer live by “selfish ambitions,” but the Spirit leads us to a life of “self-control” (Gal. 5:16-23).

*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* When we were baptized, we “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26, 27). We became a “new creation” in him, within the old things put away and “all things become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). We were given a new mind, a new standard, a new direction, and a new destiny. Christ is the Lord of our lives. He is our Master and the center of our lives. Like the Galatians, we “have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

*Develop a servant mentality.* This requires a growing maturity. It does not come easily or quickly. We must learn that Christ is in control of our lives. We need to mature so that our thinking is “my purpose on this earth is to serve God.” We must change our way of thinking from “me” centered thinking to “Him” centered thinking. This is a real challenge because our culture is saturated with me-ism. Selfism is not new, but it is doubtful that

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<sup>2</sup> David Truman, “The Rise and Folly of Selfism, The Living Love Fellowship,” [www.soulprogress.com](http://www.soulprogress.com)

any society is more on the pursuit of self-expression and self-assertion and self-gratification than ours. The basic thrust of numerous motivational philosophies is personal improvement and with it, personal power. The philosophy is “have the life you want,” or “become the person you want to be.”

*The Christ-Centered life.* Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matt. 10:24). In a sense, we all struggle with our selfishness, but Jesus wants to help us grow to become more like Him. To serve as He served, to love as He loved, to think as He thought, to pray as He prayed and to forgive as He forgave. That’s our goal.

## Application

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How can we learn to serve others and get self out of the center?

*We must rid ourselves of wrong attitudes.* “And Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, Yet it shall not be so among you...’” (Mark 10:42-43a). The Lord wants us to see that the world has it all wrong. Many of Mark’s first readers were slaves in the city of Rome. They had seen the great rulers of Rome parade through streets with conquered kings and people as their trophies. The whole city would erupt in cheers, as the people would shout, “Great is the Emperor.” But Mark wanted the Christians to understand that the measure of greatness is wrong. It comes at the expense of others. This kind of greatness demands that you put others down in order to climb up. It calls for control, subjugation, and domination. This was the problem with James and John. They wanted position and power!

*We must rid ourselves of wrong ideas about greatness and importance and only Jesus can help us do that!* How can we demonstrate what Jesus taught and lived in our daily life? If you have a position of authority in the workplace, be extremely careful about your treatment of those under your charge. You have no right to walk over people because you are the boss. Remember, you have the Lord over you and you will give an account. To follow Jesus, you must remember that service is not about you! Watch your attitudes!

*We must recognize the value of service.* Jesus turned their idea of greatness upside down, “But whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). The real heroes were not Roman generals, political leaders, or powerful and wealthy bosses but humble disciples who would reach down to serve. What is at the heart of servanthood? It is putting others before you. Paul expressed it this way, “Let nothing be

done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3). Our Christian faith calls for a new way of relating to others to put them first and take their needs more seriously than our own. This is the practical side of the Golden Rule, and the paradox of Christianity.

Just think about the possibilities of putting others first, and how you can serve. Look around, there are opportunities everywhere. That young man, who has been laid off, needs a word of encouragement. That elderly lady down the street needs a visit. That young mother could use a helping hand. That young Christian needs a personal mentor. That struggling family could use some financial help. That elderly Christian man needs someone to drive him to the doctor. Service is not rocket science; it is as simple as seeing a need and responding to it.

*Jesus is our perfect example of service.* “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Christ is our model and motivation for service. He gave Himself, and His death for us on the cross is the ultimate cure for our selfishness.

## Conclusion

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Whatever happened to James and John? Did they get the lesson Jesus taught them? Did they get rid of their wrong attitudes? Did they learn the importance of serving others? Did they come to see the importance of Jesus’ death? Oh, yes! They were redeemed by the blood of Christ. They were forgiven. Their lives were changed! James was the first to suffer the martyr’s death; he gave his life in faithfulness to Christ. John was the last of the apostles to suffer exile and persecution. Read his letters and you will know that he got the message. And let us get it, serving is not about me!

## Discussion

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1. Discuss the glorification of self in our present culture.
2. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?
3. How can we develop a servant mentality?
4. From our text (Mark 10:32-44) give three vital lessons we must get in order to get self out of the center.
5. Discuss many practical ways that you can serve.



## Lesson 2

# Serving Is About God

by Keith Parker

## Introduction

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Serving is not a new topic. It is as old as the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 6:13 Moses said, “Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus quoted this passage when he resisted the temptation to bow down and worship Satan. Remember the story? The devil took Jesus up to a high mountain and showed him the splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. Satan then said, “These things can be yours if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus replied, “For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matt. 4:10).

Last year I preached in 49 different congregations of the Lord’s church. Some of our churches are having difficulty, especially in the area of worship. Some of our people are struggling with the question: What kind of worship service will we have? Are we going to have a traditional service or a contemporary service? Are we going to have a worship service that appeals to the young or that pleases the senior members? Are we going to be conservative or liberal, old-fashioned or progressive? My answer to the question is simple: Worship is about God, not us. God, and only God, is worthy of our worship. God, and only God, is worthy of our service. Serving is not about me; serving is about God. This lesson discusses ways we can serve God and keep him as our focus.

## Foundation

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- **Serve God by Following His Plan (Matthew 4:1-10; 7:21-23)**
- **Serve God by Fellowshiping His People (Matthew 20:20-28; 25:31-46)**
- **Serve God by Finding His Passion (Matthew 20:28; 22:34-40)**

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

*Serve God by following his plan.* Jesus referred to the plan of God each time he was tempted by Satan. Three times our Lord replied, “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus knew the value of God’s written plan. Jesus knew that true life comes not from physical food, but the spiritual food from God’s mouth (Matt. 4:4). The psalmist said, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). The Bible (B-I-B-L-E) is indeed Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Those who are obedient to the plan of God not only honor God in this life, but will be saved in the next life (Matt. 7:21-23).

*Serve God by fellowshiping his people.* It is impossible to serve God without serving his people. Jesus taught that when we feed hungry people, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, we are doing that for him (Matt. 25:40). Likewise, when we fail to serve Christ’s people, we are failing to serve God (Matt. 25:45). True greatness is measured in service to others. People who are truly great are servants of others (Matt. 20:26).

Paul put it like this in Philippians 2:4: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” The last word in Philippians 2:5 is “Jesus.” The last word in Philippians 2:4 is “others.” And the last word in Philippians 2:3 is “yourselves.” How do you spell “joy”? Put Jesus first, others second, yourself third.

*Serve God by finding his passion.* There was only one thing that mattered to Jesus: Giving God his best. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). There are too many Christians who are just going through the motions. They are showing up for church and putting in their time. They are doing only what is expected, nothing more and nothing less. But God wants our best. He wants our “all.” Didn’t Jesus say that we must love God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds (Matt. 22:37)? Don’t be like the church of Laodicea—lukewarm (Rev. 3:15-16). Be alive, on fire, “never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11).

## Application

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Do you want to be great? Great people are servants. And servants...

*Ask the right question.* The question that I’m referring to was asked by the greatest servant, Jesus Christ: “What do you want me to do for you?” (Matt. 20:21, 32). The great people of the church are not the ones who are going around saying, “Let me tell you what I want.” They’re not the ones who are saying, “Let me tell you what I think the preacher needs to preach on.” Or, the ones who are saying, “If I were an elder, I would make this decision.” Or, the ones who are saying, “If I were the song leader, I

would sing this particular song.” The great people are getting their eyes off of themselves and they’re putting their eyes on others and God. They’re saying, “Father, what do you want me to do for you?”

*Do the uncomfortable.* Servants do the uncomfortable to make others feel comfortable. It may be mowing a widow’s grass. It may be cooking a meal for a shut-in. It may be washing windows or washing feet. Remember the story of John 13? Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. Then he made this application: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). Washing feet is not something that we’re comfortable doing. But true servants surrender their “rights” for the “rights” of others.

Have you surrendered your rights lately? Have you scrubbed anybody’s commode? Have you raked anybody’s leaves? Have you prepared Sunday dinner for a poor family? Have you done the uncomfortable so that others could feel comfortable?

*Treat everybody as somebody.* Jesus treated everybody with respect. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, he had compassion on a couple of begging blind men (Matt. 20:34). In Jericho he had compassion on a wealthy tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus brought glory to God by treating everybody as a person of value.

What a difference it would make in our world if we practiced the golden rule. Treat people like you want to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

## Conclusion

Have you read the sign in front of your church building lately? It likely says, “The Church of Christ.” The church is about Christ. The church is about God. It is Christ’s church (Rom. 16:16) and God’s church (1 Cor. 1:2). The church is not mine; I didn’t die for anybody. But Jesus did. He receives the praise. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

What’s true with the church is true with serving. Serving is not about me, but serving is about God. Serve God by following his plan, fellowshiping his people and finding his passion.

## Discussion

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1. What are some specific instructions that the Lord has given that are difficult and challenging to follow? Why are they hard?
2. Name some people who are considered “great” by the world’s standards. Now think of some people who are great by the Lord’s standards. How do these two lists compare?
3. How can we restore the passion and zeal that God wants us to have in serving him?
4. What is one “uncomfortable” thing that you can do this week for another Christian? Will you make a commitment to do it?
5. Study the signs of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Why do you think the list begins with “lovers of themselves”? Why is it difficult to put God and others before ourselves?

## Lesson 3

# Serving to Win Others

by Sam Jones

## Introduction

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The theme conveys an attitude or mind-set that needs to be typical of every Christian. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:19, gives his mission statement for life; he states, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win the more.”<sup>1</sup> The objective of this presentation is threefold: first, to explain Paul’s mission in life; second, to discuss why this was his mission in life; and finally, to describe how he was able to achieve his mission in life.

## Foundation

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- **Paul Had a Mission in Life**
- **Paul Had Reasons for His Mission**
- **Paul Was Able to Achieve His Mission**

*Paul had a mission in life.* Every successful and productive organization has a well-defined mission statement. A mission statement is simply a statement of purpose or aim of a group or organization. The mission statement is a description of the group’s reason for existing. Paul, in the text above, proclaims his reason for living or his goal as a Christian. Paul’s mission was not to “make a name for himself.” He was not driven by a passion to make money. He was not concerned with his peers of the day perceiving him as a “know it all.” Paul was driven by a remarkable plain and simple mission. What was his mission?

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, several times Paul gives his mission statement as a Christian. In verse 19, he states his mission in life was to “win the

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

more” to Christ (i.e., to bring the lost to a knowledge of the plan of salvation). According to verse 20, his mission was to “win the Jews...win those who are under the law,” or to reach his Jewish brethren. Third, his mission was to win “those who are without law”— to explain the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 21). Finally, his mission included efforts to “win the weak” (v. 22). Paul’s mission statement set forth his course of action in life.

Paul’s mission statement did not begin with him; he adopted Jesus’ mission statement described in Luke 19:10. Luke writes, “... the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Jesus was not concerned with the material goods of this world (Matt. 8:18ff). Paul was following Christ’s example (1 Cor. 11:1); he was walking in the steps of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21).

*Paul had reasons for his mission in life.* Now, we know Paul’s mission in life. Why was this his mission? Why did he want so desperately to save others? One reason for this mission was because Paul never forgot his former condition. Paul did not forget that he was once a sinner lost. Paul saw himself not just as a sinner but as the chief, the worst of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, he became aware that Jesus left the glory of heaven to save him, i.e., to deliver or rescue him from his sins. He also realized that Jesus came not only to rescue him but all people (1 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 2:9).

Paul understood well the consequences of sin (Rom. 6:23). It was on the Damascus Road when his eyes were opened to his sad condition (Acts 9:1ff). For years, he thought his soul was “right” with God. After discovering what Jesus had sacrificed for him (Rom. 5:8), Paul adopted Jesus’ mission and never looked back.

Winning souls or bringing the lost to Christ became Paul’s mission because he desired others to experience the joy and excitement of being “redeemed” (Rom. 6:17-18). Those who obey the gospel of Christ or the scheme of God’s redemption become “righteous” in the eyes of God (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:9). Those who are righteous have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life and are eligible to enter into heaven (Rev. 20:15).

Winning others became a mission for Paul because he wanted others to live each day in hope or expectation of something better than this world. He writes in 2 Corinthians about the assurance of an eternal home in heaven awaiting those whose citizenship is in heaven (5:1; Phil. 3:20). He challenged the saints of Thessalonica in the middle of their trials and afflictions to keep looking, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). In Titus 2:13,

he pleaded with Titus to teach Christians to be “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Paul’s mission in life was to win others to Christ because He loved people. The scale of Paul’s love for those who are lost is seen in Romans 9:3. Observe what he was willing to do to save his lost Jewish brethren. He says, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.” He was willing, if possible, to be separated from Christ if it meant his Jewish brethren could be saved. Oh, what love! Do you love the lost? Paul wanted people to be



prepared for the great day of God’s wrath that is coming (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

*Paul was able to achieve his mission in life.* Paul’s mission in life was to win others for Christ; this was his mission because he never forgot his former condition. He saw himself alienated and separated from Christ and the hope of an eternity in heaven. To achieve his mission, Paul did something. He tells us that although he was “free from all men” (1 Cor. 9:19), he made the decision to make himself a servant, a slave. Paul became a servant to achieve his mission in life.

Paul enslaved himself, i.e., he made himself a slave to “all men.” Paul was born a free man, a citizen of Rome, yet he enslaved himself to save others. Paul became a servant to serve others, promoting their welfare or their good. As a servant or slave, he did it without pay. The motive for his decision was to win others, and the reward for him was pleasing His master—Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14).

Paul said he became a servant or slave “that I might win the more” to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). In 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, he specified a few particulars or examples wherein he made himself a servant. First, he

became a servant to the Jews to win the Jews (v. 20). He complied with the customs and prejudices of his Jewish brethren without violating the gospel of Christ to enable him to teach the gospel to them. Second, he became a servant “to those who are without law,” i.e., the Gentiles, to win them (v. 21). For example, when he was in Athens, he sat and reasoned with the Greek philosophers to gain their trust so that he could teach them about the unknown God (Acts 17:16ff). He treated them with respect when he was around them and he rebuked Peter for his inappropriate behavior toward them (Gal. 2:11-14). Thirdly, he became a slave to “win the weak” (v. 22). It is possible that Paul is referring to those who are “weak in the faith” (see Rom. 15:1). When in the company of weak Jewish Christians, he abstained from certain foods which they considered unclean, and he engaged in certain ceremonies that did not violate the law of Christ. One example of this is the keeping of the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24); he was careful not to be a stumbling-block to those he taught.

In becoming a servant or a slave to others, Paul had learned to be ready to adapt to different people, cultures, ethnic groups or races to reach them. Paul’s mission was not limited to the Jews; he made himself a servant to all. Paul states, “I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise.” (Rom. 1:14). He saw the need to win or save all people—the gospel is for all. Jesus in his discourse with the woman at the well in Samaria used the occasion to teach his disciples that the gospel is for all (John 4:34-39).

## Application

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*Christians today should be governed by a mission.* What is your mission in life? Whose steps are you following? Paul was concerned with winning the lost. Solomon writes that the wise person is one who seeks or strives to win souls (Prov. 11:30). Are you a wise Christian? James says do not seek to become a teacher or preacher unless you are willing and ready to accept the obligation or necessity that goes with the responsibility (Jas. 3:1). Christians have an obligation to win souls for Christ.

Winning souls or saving the lost was not something Paul did with his spare time; preaching or teaching the gospel to the lost was not something Paul did once or twice a year during the gospel meeting—it was his passion, his way of life. It was his mission. What is your mission?

God help us to be passionate like Paul about saving the lost. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “...for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” What conviction! He felt this compelling need to tell the “lost” the glorious news of the gospel. God give us a passion to want to save the lost.



*Christians have reasons for their mission today.* First, like Paul, Christians must never forget their former condition. Too many Christians experience a “burn-out” in saving others or lose their zeal to save others because they forget their former condition. Second, Christians today understand that the consequences of sin is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). Third, Christians want others, like themselves, to experience the joy and excitement of being redeemed. Fourth, Christians want others to live each day in hope or expectation of something better than this world. Fifth, Christians have a reason for their mission because they love people.

*Christians can achieve their mission today.* First, Christians can achieve their mission by becoming a servant. Second, Christians can achieve their mission by becoming a servant in order to win people to Christ. Third, Christians can achieve their mission by learning, without compromise, to adapt to different people, cultures, and ethnic groups or races.

## Conclusion

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Paul was truly driven by a mission in life. What is your mission? He did not want to see a person lost. Daily he remembered his former hopeless condition when he was without Christ. His desire was for all men to have the blessed hope of an eternal life in heaven. So, to achieve his mission, he consciously made the decision to become a servant or slave. My plea for you is that you will desire like Paul to become a servant.

## Discussion

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1. What is a mission statement? Explain its purpose?
2. Describe Paul’s mission.
3. Why was Paul set on achieving his mission?
4. What does it mean to become a servant?
5. What conscious decision did Paul make to achieve his mission?

## Lesson 4

# Serving One Another

by Dan Winkler

## Introduction

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Lord, make me a servant, Lord, make me like You;

For You are a servant, make me one too.

Lord, make me a servant, do what You must do

To make me a servant; make me like You.<sup>1</sup>

The most concise summation of Jesus' ministry came from his own words: "[T]he Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve [diakoneo]" (Matt. 20:28).<sup>2</sup> The word he used for "serve" referred to one serving another as a "waiter," a "taster" or a "caregiver."<sup>3</sup> In other words, it referred to someone who served the interests of another.<sup>4</sup> Jesus applying this word to himself makes for an incredible thought.

Before he came to earth, our Lord was in "the form of God;" but, after he came to earth, he took "the form of a bondservant" [doulos, "a slave"<sup>5</sup>] (Phil. 2:5-7). Why? Respectfully, Jesus put on the cloak of humanity (Rom. 1:3; 1 Tim. 3:16) and lived an impoverished life (2 Cor. 8:9) because he

<sup>1</sup> Alton H Howard, ed., *Songs of Faith and Praise* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., Inc., 1998).

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> H. Beyer, "diakoneo," TDNT 2:82.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek--English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1874), 137.

<sup>5</sup> K. Rengstorf, "doulos," TDNT 2:261.

saw himself as a “caregiver,” tending to the special needs of man (Heb. 2:9, 14, 17-18).

Our assignment directs us to Galatians 5:13 where we are challenged to be servants as well: “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” “Serve” in this passage translates the same root term Jesus used to capsule his own ministry, *diakoneo*. Hence, we are to serve as Jesus served. We are to be the “caregivers” of one other. To help us more deeply appreciate this charge, this lesson will revisit our passage and give attention to: (a) the love “from” which we are to serve and (b) the love “by” which we are to serve one another.

## Foundation

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- **Love for God is That “From” Which We Serve (Galatians 5:1-6)**
- **Love for Others is That “By” Which We Serve (Galatians 5:19-23)**

*Love for God is that “from” which we serve.* According to our passage, we are to serve one another because we “have been called to liberty.” Notice that small preposition, “to.” It translates *epi*, “over.”<sup>6</sup> We have been “called over” to liberty.

When I was a boy, we played a game in which we would shout, “Red Rover, Red Rover, let so and so come over.” If you heard your name, you ran to those who called, broke a chain made by their clasped hands and became a member of their team. That is the idea of our passage. We have been “called over” to the side of Christian “liberty” (Gal. 5:1). And, note, it is from this sphere of liberty that we serve.

We do not serve because we are afraid of God [i.e. afraid of being condemned for failing to obey him perfectly]. That is a “law-system” like the Old Testament, and we are cursed if we try to live under something like it because we cannot be perfect in our obedience (Gal. 3:10). Those of us who try to live with that kind of mind-set are “estranged from Christ...[and] fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). We have been called to something better (cf. Heb. 8:6). We are to do what God says because we believe in him and love him (Gal. 5:6). We have been called to a religion that is driven by our relationship with God. For that reason, we do not serve because we are afraid of God; we serve because we appreciate God.

*Love for others is that “by” which we serve.* According to our text, we are not to be a people of self-indulgence but a people of benevolence:

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<sup>6</sup> Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1950), 31.

“[Do] not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Negatively speaking, Paul wrote, “[D]o not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.” Matters of “the flesh” would include: (a) purity problems [e.g. “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness... drunkenness, revelries and such like”], (b) priority problems [e.g. “idolatry, sorcery”] and (c) people problems [e.g. “hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders”] (Gal. 5:19-21). These matters of “the flesh” are barriers to service. Positively speaking, Paul continued to write, “but through love serve one another.” The preposition “through” translates *dia* which can refer to “the means or instrument by which anything is affected.”<sup>7</sup> As used in our text, love is the means or instrument by which we carry out our role as caregivers.

We are moved to help others because of the love we have for them. Love for God is the arena “from” which our service originates. We have the heart of a servant because we love God and want him to be honored. At the same time, love for others is the agent “by” which our service operates. Our love for God gives us the mind-set of a servant and our love for others puts that mind-set into motion.

## Application

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*The heart of a servant makes us a blessing “for” God.* There are rules that direct us and regulations that restrict us. They are found in that part of Scripture called “the law of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1-2), “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) or “the perfect law of liberty” [imagine that, a law that liberates] (Jas. 1:25). If we wish to go to heaven, we must obey this law (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9; cf. Eph. 5:17). But of equal importance, we must obey out of love (1 John 5:3). Accordingly, we do not serve others to be right with God by complying to a list of legal demands. We serve others to do right by God and lovingly give him glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

Remember the words of Jesus: “Let your light so shine before me, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). That is why “faith without works” is (a) non-demonstrable (Jas. 2:14-17), (b) demonic (Jas. 2:18-20) and (c) dead (Jas. 2:21-26). A faith that fails to help others is a faith that does not love God enough to serve and give him glory. Therefore, our love for God is the “Location” from which our service flows.

*The heart of a servant makes us a blessing “to” others.* We obey God because we love him (1 John 5:3). We obey Jesus because we love him

<sup>7</sup> Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 133.

(John 14:15; 15:14). A wife submits to her husband because she loves him (Eph. 5:23; Tit. 2:4). A husband cherishes his wife because he loves her (Eph. 5:25-29). Even so, we serve others “through [i.e. by] love.” We serve others because we love them.

Such adds dimension to the multiple times we are commanded to “love one another” (e.g. Rom. 12:9; 13:8; 1 Cor. 12:31-13:13; Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:1-2; Col. 3:14; 1 Thess. 3:12; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 4:7-11). Whereas our love for God is the “Location” from which we serve, our love for others is the “Motivation” moving us to serve.

## Conclusion

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In summation, we might say that our feelings for God encourage us to have feelings for others and that combination makes for the heart of a servant.

On another occasion, Jesus read from the Old Testament book of Isaiah and applied the prophet’s words to his ministry.

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus came to heal the hurting, mend the broken and free those imprisoned by their past. He came as a caregiver to “serve,” and we are to be like him (Phil. 2:2-5).

## Discussion

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1. In Acts 4:27, 30, what word—it starts with an “S”—describes Jesus’ relationship with God? Explain why this is an appropriate description.
2. In Hebrews 8:1, what word—it starts with a “M”—describes Jesus’ relationship with us? Explain why this is also an appropriate description.
3. Relate both of the preceding to the role we are to play as “caregivers.”

## Lesson 5

# Serving by Involving Others

by Tom Holland

## Introduction

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The people translated into the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:12-13) are in a spiritual realm that offers every citizen a place to labor. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven "is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers" (Matt. 20:1).<sup>1</sup>

The church revealed in the New Testament is the "Body of Christ" and every member of that body is important (1 Cor. 12:12-26), and the functioning of each member is vital to the success and growth of the body (Eph. 4:16).

This lesson will focus on the challenge of involvement in the kingdom, or as a member of the Lord's body. Second, emphasis will be given to the necessity of helping people find their place to serve. Third, the importance of motivation will be explained.

## Foundation

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- **The Challenge of Involvement in the Kingdom**
- **The Emphasis on Helping People Find Their Place to Serve**
- **The Importance of Motivation**

*In order for the body of Christ to function, people must be involved.* Periodically the number of unemployed people is stated by the media. Presently the unemployment rate is about 8.5%.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

What is the unemployment rate in the kingdom of heaven? How many people in the body of Christ are not functioning, or are basically inactive? I know what the unemployment rate should be, zero. For the body of Christ to function according to its potential, there must be “the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

*In order for people to serve, they must know what they can do.* How many people are basically inactive in the Lord’s work because they don’t know what to do? They may imagine that the areas of service are basically



two, namely, preaching and teaching congregational Bible classes. But this view would certainly limit the number of people who could serve.

However, when we turn to the Bible we see that the inspired, or God-breathed Scripture, provides the information so “the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

I am potentially serving the Lord’s servants when I take them to Scriptures that identify good works and areas of potential service. In Paul’s practical application of God’s truth to life, he said we have many members in the body of Christ, “but all the members do not have the same function” (Rom. 12:4). He declared that we have gifts or abilities “according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom. 12:6). The apostle listed seven different areas of service.

If the inspired Scriptures equip us for “every good work,” the Scriptures surely identify those good works. The word identifying the works is *agathon*, from *agathos*, and this word “describes that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect.”<sup>2</sup>

*For people to serve and find satisfaction in doing so, they must be motivated.* Helping the Lord’s people find their place of service is important to the Lord’s work and to the happiness and satisfaction that comes from faithful service. However, once they find a place to serve motivating them so they want to serve and find joy in serving is also very important.

How does the Apostle Paul try to motivate people to fulfill their mission of service? He reminded them that the possibility of serving in different areas of service was a gift of the grace of God (Rom. 12:6). God gives us the ability to service and as we serve we improve that God-given ability. The doctor improves by practice. The lawyer improves by practice. Teachers improve by practice.

Paul urged the church in Corinth to “always abound in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). The church abounding in the Lord’s work would be a contrast to the church in Laodecia that was lukewarm, self-satisfied, and could not see their sad spiritual condition. There is no way to harmonize “abounding in the Lord’s work” with a spirit of indifference, apathy, involvement with the “riches, cares, and pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14).

## Application

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*There is a reservoir of potential laborers in those who have retired from their jobs or professions.* Many have free time who could be used in enlarging the kingdom, continually to the effective functioning of the body of Christ.

But how many of these retirees spend most of their time playing golf, cards, dominoes, fishing, bowling, or watching too much television, to the extent that they don’t have time to “labor in the kingdom”?

*We can be servants of the Lord by helping potential servants find a place to serve.* Is teaching some lost person how to be saved a good work? (Matt. 28:18-20). Can this teaching be done person to person, in a home, office or classroom at a school? Can this teaching be done in a Bible class?

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<sup>2</sup> Vine, Vol. 11, p. 163.



Is an effort to restore a brother “overtaken in a trespass” a good work? (Gal. 6:1) Is an effort to convert an erring brother a good work? (Jas. 5:19-20). Can this work be done in a private way? In other words, going to this person and exhorting him/her to come home to the Lord’s church, is that doing a good work?

Is an effort to encourage some “fainthearted” brother or sister a good work? (1 Thess. 5:14). Is it doing the work of the Lord if you go to a person who is discouraged by family problems, an illness, a difficult work situation, the loss of a job, or some other disappointment, and you try to bring them comfort and hope, is that a good work?

Is it a good work to comfort someone in sorrow? Do the Scriptures instruct us to comfort people who have lost loved ones to death? (1 Thess. 4:18).

Is it a good work to speak words of encouragement and give financial support to those who teach God’s word? (Gal. 6:6).

Is helping someone bear a burden of sorrow, emotional pain, or physical handicap a good work? (Gal. 6:2).

This information does not cover every possibility of service to the Lord. But it does let us know that there is a place for every citizen to labor in the kingdom of heaven.

An old song said, “There is room in the kingdom of God my brother for the small things that you can do. Just a small kindly deed that may cheer another is the work God has planned for you.”

*Motivation comes from understanding that one is involved in the Lord’s work.* What will motivate the Lord’s people to be involved in His work? A recognition that it is the Lord’s work should urge people to be involved. The realization that it is the Lord’s work implies the seriousness of that work. A President of the United States once declared, “God’s work on earth must be our very own.”

Furthermore, the work will not be in vain. There is life after death. The theme of 1 Corinthians 15 is the reality of the resurrection of the dead.

## Conclusion

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The work of the Lord has an eternal dimension. If our labor is for this world exclusively, then we will die and leave it all behind. But the work of the Lord has an eternal connection. This realization has power to cause us to give the Lord’s work the best of our service. Indeed by working for the

Lord we will one day hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23).

## Discussion

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1. How important is the work of every member in the growth of the Lord's work?
2. What are some reasons why every member is not doing his/her part?
3. What are some important areas in which every member can serve?
4. What can you do to get more people involved?
5. What are some things that should motivate us to be involved in the Lord's work?

## Lesson 6

# Serving With Compassion

by David Shannon

## Introduction

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There is something within a man or woman that makes the difference in what they do. Behavior is not isolated as its own organism. Behavior originates in the inner person. Proverbs 4:23 teaches that all the issues (behaviors, etc.) come from the heart of man. When one sees a person go every week to pick up an elderly person or a poor child for worship and class while another person never even sees the numerous people in their lives that would love to have someone do the same for them, one could ask, what is the difference? It goes back to the heart. One heart has compassion and one doesn't and that makes *all* the difference. Most people in the world today know what it means to be a Good Samaritan. Even those who don't own a copy of a Bible know what is meant when a news anchor or police report declares a bystander who becomes involved in saving a life as a "Good Samaritan." Did you know the law that protects individuals from liability who offer emergency medical assistance is called the "Good Samaritan Law?" In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus told about generous acts of humility. It has become the way religious and non-religious people describe sacrificial kindness. But too often the very heart of the story is missed. When anyone tries to reduce this story to simple acts of kindness, as if it is simply something we write on our "to do list," we miss the point. Jesus was aiming at the heart.

## Foundation

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- **It is a Teaching About Eternal Life**
- **It is a Teaching About the Law**
- **It is a Teaching About Identifying "Neighbors"**
- **It is a Teaching About "Compassion"**
- **It is a Teaching About the Result of Compassion**

Many think Luke 10:25-37 is a simple story about kindness, but that is far too shallow. Let's let the text teach us.

*It is a teaching about eternal life.* The most important question anyone could ask was asked by the lawyer to Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 10:25)?<sup>1</sup> He was trying to "test" Jesus, but instead he was the one who learned a valuable lesson. The answer to eternal life dealt not only with the law that had been revealed, but also about one's heart.

*It is a teaching about the law.* Jesus answered by asking the lawyer "what is written in the law?" He promptly responded by quoting the law to love God and love your neighbor, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 or Leviticus 19:18. Some experts in Jewish history say that he most likely would have quoted these two laws twice a day. Interestingly, Jesus gave this very same answer when he was asked, "Which is the greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:35-40)? Jesus and other Jews recognized these two commandments as prominent above all other laws. Even further explaining that under these two laws "hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:40). Jesus knew that no person could disobey these two commandments about love and still have eternal life, therefore he said, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

*It is a teaching about identifying "neighbors."* Well this isn't exactly true, at least not directly. What is interesting is that the lawyer seeking to make himself seem aligned with the will of God, asked Jesus "And who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:29)? Have you ever noticed that Jesus never answered this question directly? Instead he told a story with such depth yet simplicity of meaning. He told a story that is powerful, significant and even dramatic. It calls us to "love our neighbors" with more sacrifice than most of us would ever think God would demand. And He does it without answering who our neighbor is, instead he asked "So which one of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves" (Luke 10:36)? The indirect revelation is that anyone around us who is in need would fall under the category of neighbor. The direct teaching is for us to do things that prove ourselves neighborly. What did he do for the man who had been attacked, robbed, beaten, stripped and abandoned? First he came to him to help, unlike the religious priest or pompous Levite who "came and looked and passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:32). Once near he was able to see the man's horrible condition. The difference in the Samaritan and the other two lies in this often overlooked phrase, "he had compassion" (Luke 10:33).

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

*It is a teaching about “compassion.”* What is compassion? The original language of Greek for compassion is *splagchnizomai* meaning “to have the bowels yearn, i.e. (figuratively) feel sympathy, to pity:—have (be moved with) compassion.”<sup>2</sup> Compassion involves feeling sympathy for the other person. It requires us to put ourselves in the other person’s place so we will feel what they feel and then do something to relieve their pain. It is genuine compassion that moves us to do something to help. In this story the Samaritan evaluated

the man’s condition, seeing his wounds, which literally means “trauma.” In this story one man laid helpless with serious physical wounds while another man hovered over him with a wounded heart, feeling his pain. Consider another story of a wounded heart that led to compassionate behavior. Do you remember why Nehemiah asked the King



of Persia to allow him to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall? He lived hundreds of miles away, yet had the opportunity to ask a traveler from Jerusalem the condition of the Jews and Jerusalem (Neh. 1:2). He was told that the people there were “in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and its gates are burned with fire” (Neh. 1:3). Do you remember Nehemiah’s reaction upon hearing this news? If you say, “he immediately went back to lead the effort to rebuild the wall,” you would be wrong. He immediately showed deep wounds in his heart as revealed with these words, “So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:4). Notice, until a person feels the burden in their own heart, they cannot be compassionate. This is the first thing that *must* be obtained if one is to be equipped to make a positive impact.

*It is a teaching about the result of compassion.* Because of compassion, generous, sacrificial works of kindness were done. He went to him instead of passing by. He bound up wounds requiring humble service. He walked while the wounded rode his donkey. Often we won’t even slide down a pew to invite a guest to have a comfortable seat; instead we allow them to crawl over as we act put out. He gave of his time caring for the man even through the night, perhaps losing some sleep. He gave of his money paying for the room. He went the second mile (Matt. 5:41) by asking the innkeeper to

<sup>2</sup> *PowerBible CD.*

continue the care and run up the tab, which was promised to be paid in full upon his next trip through.

## Application

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*Focus on the heart and compassionate behavior will follow.* As stated in the introduction of this lesson, sacrificial acts to offer assistance is how the phrase “Good Samaritan” is most often stated today. But as people who study the Bible we quickly see a much deeper meaning in this story. The Samaritan only does what he does because he had compassion. Without compassion our service has no pure motive or genuine feel. Without compassion we would “pass by on the other side” (Luke 10:31).

*Focus on the heart and the second greatest commandment will be obeyed.* The second application the Bible student sees is that a heart that genuinely has compassion for others is how the second greatest commandment is to be fulfilled. All faithful Christians would say, “I want to love my neighbor as myself.” But have you considered that without cultivating a heart that feels others’ pain, this simply will not happen?

*Focus on the heart is essential to our salvation!* Finally, the Bible student recognizes that whether or not they have a heart of compassion effects their salvation. This study reveals Jesus’ teaching that one’s eternal life is contingent on their love for God and their neighbor as themselves.

## Conclusion

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I can’t have eternal life without fulfilling the commandment to love my neighbor. I can’t have love for my neighbor without having compassion for them. I can’t feel compassion unless I am willing to allow my heart to be vulnerable to feel the pain of others and willing to get involved with their struggles. This will take away some of my free time and time already dedicated for other things. It will also cost money, energy and comfort. The Samaritan showed us that. Realizing these points makes this powerful story of the Good Samaritan even more important as I realize my salvation is tied to it.

## Discussion

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1. What is the most beautiful part of this story to you?
2. Read the verses before and after the story underlining the word “do” (Luke 10:25-29, 37). What do you learn from this exercise?
3. Jesus was a perfect example of a “Good Samaritan.” What did Jesus do in the following passages that proved He had compassion on others? What variety of pains did He feel as He looked into other’s lives? See Matt. 9:36; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 15:32; Matt. 20:34.
4. How are families to show compassion to their aging mothers and grandmothers as taught in 1 Tim. 5:3-4, 8? What is the significance of the children learning to “show piety?” Comment on how we could teach our children to see the needs and feel the pain of others. In other words, how can compassion be taught?
5. Have you noticed the difference in someone who gives themselves sacrificially to serve others and someone else who only does things of little sacrifice as if to satisfy an unwritten status quo? Our eyes observe the difference in the service, but Jesus was showing us there is a deeper and important part that is different. Comment on this in light of Matt. 12:33-35.

# Serving With Wisdom

by James Meadows

## Introduction

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Jesus emphasized the importance of serving. He said "...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26-27).<sup>1</sup> Being a servant is a difficult concept because it requires sacrifice and it does not come naturally. It is a learned behavior or a way of life. Charles Swindoll said, "Serving and giving don't come naturally. Living an unselfish life is an art."<sup>2</sup>

This lesson calls for several questions about serving with wisdom.

## Foundation

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- **What Does Serving Mean?**
- **What Does Wisdom Mean?**
- **What Are Some Characteristics Of Wisdom?**

*What does serving mean?* It is the act or function of one who serves. "A servant. The original word is deacon – a word meaning a servant of any kind; one especially who served at the table, and, in the New Testament, one who serves the church."<sup>3</sup> Serving means that one is a servant. The word servant (*doulos*) appears 125 times in the New Testament (half of these in the gospels). The apostle Paul lists some essential characteristics of a servant. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Swindoll, *The Inspirational Writings of Charles A. Swindoll* (New York, NY: Inspirational Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Barnes, *Matthew and Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1955), 210.



themselves...” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). (All quotes are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.) The servant of the Lord does not please himself (Rom. 15:1-3). He realizes his work is of the Lord.

*What does wisdom mean?* The word “wisdom” is found thirty-seven times in Proverbs. It is a translation of six different Hebrew words. “The common meaning of these terms relates to a skillfulness in knowing how to apply knowledge so that God is pleased.”<sup>4</sup> The word “wisdom” is from *sophia*, suggesting knowledge, intelligence, judicious thinking, and skillful use of reason.”<sup>5</sup>

*What are some characteristics of true wisdom?* First, it is from above. It comes from God the Father (Jas. 1:5). Second, it is pure. This gives emphasis to the man himself. He keeps himself unspotted from the world. Third, it is peaceable. Being a peacemaker follows being pure in heart (cf. Matt. 5:8-9). Fourth, it is gentle. It is fair dealing and designates an attitude of forbearance. Fifth, it is easy to be entreated. “. . . the exhibition of a disposition which does not demand its rights, but is willing, if necessary, to suffer wrong in the cause of right.”<sup>6</sup> He is willing to listen to what others have to say. Sixth, it is full of mercy and good fruits. This gives emphasis to the conduct of a person’s wisdom (cf. Jas. 5:13). Seventh, it is without variances. The marginal reading has “doubtfulness or partiality.” There is no fickleness of purpose. One does not doubt but is stable in his convictions. He is not a double-minded man. Eighth, one is without hypocrisy. A hypocrite is one who practices deception. He says one thing but practices something else (Matt. 23:1-3). Jesus condemned hypocrisy in no uncertain terms (Matt. 23:13-16, 23-25, 27-28).

## Application

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By way of application consider some principles by which to serve.

*First, serving with wisdom involves an act of choice.* One must distinguish between right and wrong. This requires one to decide and follow the best choice. “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that you may approve things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:9-10). Discernment enables one to discover or ascertain that which is acceptable in the sight of the Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> John Kachelman, Jr., “Proverbs: The Wisdom of God” (Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 1999), 209.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Highers, Christ: “The Wisdom of God, I Corinthians 1, 2” (Freed-Hardeman Lectures, 1999), 141.

<sup>6</sup> Guy N. Woods, *The Epistle of James* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1964), 192.

Discernment comes by using one's senses and applying the principles of God's word (Heb. 5:12-14).

*Second, wisdom involves a pattern of thinking.* That pattern means that it has as its top priority the seeking of divine approval. This involves serving with wisdom. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding" (Prov. 3:13).

*Third, serving with wisdom means that one is gentle and easy to be entreated.* Gentle "designates an attitude of forbearance, the exhibition of disposition that does not demand its rights, but is willing if necessary, to suffer wrong in the cause of right."<sup>7</sup> A person that is easy to be entreated is willing to listen what others have to say.

*Fourth, serving with wisdom enables one to look at the issues and make the decision that is best.* There will be different issues in the lives of all. This means one must learn to think through difficult issues and decide upon the best action to take.

*Fifth, serving with wisdom means one must not show partiality, or variance.* The word used here means to hesitate, to doubt "and has the marginal reading; doubtfulness or partiality. He is stable in his vision regarding religion. He is not like the double minded man (Jas. 1:8). He manifests complete confidence in God and his word. He is able to give sound advice and leadership.

Serving with wisdom promises significant rewards.

*First, Christ, the ultimate servant, gave up equality with God, became man, and died on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).* "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9).

*Second, Christ endured the cross "for the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2).* It was not the joy of sitting down or even of winning the race. His joy was in the fact that in so doing he was perfectly obedient to the will of God (John 5:30; cf. John 17:4), and that by his death he would achieve the full salvation of all who should trust in him (John 17:6, 20).<sup>8</sup>

Christ realized his full joy when "he took his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, *Studies in Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 1954), 131.

<sup>9</sup> Neil R. Lightfoot, *Everyone's Guide to Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 161.

*Third, those who serve others have eternal life set before them.* In the judgment Christ will set the sheep (righteous) on his right hand. He will then let them know that in serving others they had served him (Matt. 25:34-40). “And these (wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46).

*Fourth, Paul had spent his lifetime serving others.* At the end he said: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

## Conclusion

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Serving with wisdom is something we will do because of our character. “While men may act in ways that could cause one to withhold his service to them, but if one’s service is actually to the Lord, then how could he say no?” (Steve Higginbotham). “Likewise also the good words of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid” (2 Tim. 5:25). “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb. 6:10).

## Discussion

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1. What are some ways in which you can serve the Lord daily?
2. Why should service not depend on what others say or think about it?
3. How can serving others help us be better people?
4. What are some essential characteristics one needs in order serve with wisdom?
5. What are some ways in which God is glorified and Christ is exalted in our serving others?

## Lesson 8

# Serving With Vision

by Stephen W. Rogers

## Introduction

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“Leaders serving with vision”—so important—yet, so often not understood, not taught, not practiced, and not expected. Unfortunately, many leaders focus upon the present; they just live for the moment with little consideration of, planning for, and praying about the future. They are more reactionaries than visionaries.

“Vision?” What is it? It involves foresight—looking beyond today and into the future. “Vision” involves preparation, planning, consideration of possible glitches, and a drive to press forward into the unseen future with great faith and prayerfulness. This lesson urges leaders to realize that having vision is *vital* to their leadership role, and to take the challenge to be a visionary leader.

## Foundation

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- **The Godhead were visionaries.**
- **Leaders in the Lord’s Body, imitating the Godhead, need to be visionaries.**
- **Biblical principles call upon Christians to serve with vision.**

*The Godhead were visionaries.* Biblical predestination is in reality the Godhead’s vision. They planned beforehand. They planned Their response to man’s fall and his spiritual problem—sin. They planned the scheme of redemption. They chose the Savior. They determined the appropriate time for the Messiah to come into the world. They established the prerequisites—the plan of salvation. They planned the church. And They set forth the kind of life They expected the redeemed to live—a holy life (Eph. 1:4-7; Eph. 3:10-11; Gal. 4:4). The perfect vision of the Godhead

saw the problem, planned a remedy, and was patient until the perfect implementation time came.

*Leaders in the Lord's body, imitating the Godhead, need to be visionaries.* It behooves leaders in the Lord's church to look to the Godhead and quickly learn the lesson of leading with vision. How could we *possibly* claim to imitate the Godhead and focus only upon the present?

*Biblical principles that call upon Christians to serve with vision.* Several Biblical passages urge Christians to realize the necessity of vision. Proverbs 29:18 is often cited to emphasize vision. In the KJV, the verse reads, "Where *there is* no vision, the people perish." The ASV is very similar. The NKJV gives the proper sense of this passage, "Where *there is* no revelation, the people cast off restraint" and the ESV states, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint." So Proverbs 29:18 is *not* the scripture to use to emphasize serving with vision.

A scripture that emphasizes the wisdom of planning and vision and the foolishness of a lack of planning is the "Parable of the Ten Virgins." There were five visionary virgins who exhibited foresight, planning, preparation, preparedness, and consideration of possible glitches. And there were five virgins who focused upon the immediate moments, lacked foresight, had not planned, were not prepared, and gave no thought to possible glitches. Jesus taught the necessity of vision when He emphasized the importance of a man counting the cost before He builds a tower or of a military leader evaluating the possibility of victory before he leads his soldiers into battle (Luke 14:28-32). Nehemiah used great wisdom as the returnees rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 6). And, many warriors used vision. Abram divided his soldiers into two groups and attacked at night (Gen. 14:14-15). Gideon divided his 300 soldiers into three groups, gave each of them a trumpet, empty pitchers, and lamps. When they attacked at night, the surrounded Midianites were terrified and fled (Judg. 7:16-23).

## Application

*Personal and collective faith.* Each leader must examine his own faith in God and trust in and reliance upon His providential provisions. Leaders without vision tend to rely mostly upon their own knowledge and intuition; they tend to live more by sight than by faith.

*Personal evaluation.* Every leader must examine his own heart, his loyalty to God, and his purity. Too, he must give serious consideration to his view of authority. Instead of learning from God and Christ about respectful, loving headship, many leaders have a very ungodly

authoritarian view of headship. This can be terribly detrimental to the present and to the future progress of the congregation.

*Congregational evaluation.* Leaders must candidly consider the love of the members for each other. Congregations will not grow or progress if true love does not abound. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).<sup>1</sup> Too, leaders must ascertain the congregation’s commitment to challenges—financially, emotionally, and participation. And elders must examine the willingness of all present leaders to think with vision and to challenge themselves beyond the status quo.

*Community evaluation.* Communities change drastically through the years—economically, ethnically, religiously, and morally. Wise leaders need to be very aware of those changes and be willing to address them.

*Financial examination and gift planning.* Leaders must carefully evaluate how members accept the challenges set before them. Too, visionary leaders realize that brethren will give more when challenges are set before them. And, visionary leaders must encourage brethren to remember the Lord, his church, and His work in their wills.

*Evangelistic participation and zeal.* Church leaders must understand the very purpose for the existence of the church—the salvation of souls. Before plans for the future can be made, leaders must decide if they are going to obey the Lord’s command to take the gospel to the lost; only then can they truly inspire brethren to have evangelistic zeal.

*Respect for personnel or staff.* God specifically instructs employers (in business or in the church) on how to treat their employees (Col. 4:1; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:18). Dictatorial, authoritarian, confrontational, or aloof leaders who do not respect employees will have *constant* employee turnover and a lack of consistency. These attitudes are terribly detrimental to visionary leadership. I have interviewed numerous preachers. A great percentage of them I would describe as “wounded warriors.” Young men leave the ministry because of how they are treated. Many mature ministers try to hang in there; however, they are miserable. I hear preachers say, “I have *never* prayed with my elders.” “I rarely meet with my elders.” “I am tired of being mistreated and restrained from doing all I can for the Lord’s kingdom.” “I will *never* be a full-time pulpit minister again.” “I have left ministry to become an over-the-road truck driver.” All of these statements are a *shame*. Elders and ministers should be teammates on the Lord’s team; they should be a team for the congregation. Any leaders who do not respect other leaders should repent or resign. Elders and ministers need to

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

work together with vision to lead God's people to greater opportunities for service.

*Leadership succession planning.* A huge problem in our brotherhood is the lack of leadership succession planning. Congregations call training for boys and men to participate in worship "leadership training." This is *so naive* and near-sighted. Elders and preachers need to continually encourage young men to seek to become leaders; they must have classes to train men *how to become leaders*. Leadership is never static; it constantly changes. To ignore leadership succession planning is to lead without vision.

*Focus upon the future.* Visionary leaders must look forward and make plans for the future. Too many leaders, like Lot's wife, look backward to past congregational troubles and can never get beyond them. Focusing upon past problems stifles and kills progress..... Focusing upon past successes can stifle and kill progress as well. Wise lessons *can* be learned from looking at the past. The main focus of leaders, however, must be the present and the future. What must we be doing now to reach the lost? What must we do to strengthen our brethren? How can we allow God to use us beyond our own expectations? Meet with your members; hear their dreams and ideas; let them challenge you as leaders to have greater vision. All of the above traits are critical for leaders who "serve with vision."

## Conclusion

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Serving with vision is critical to the present and the future success of a congregation's growth. Imitate the Godhead by being visionary leaders. Challenge yourself and members to think with vision. Set goals; dream; rely upon God as you dream. Let him use you and your efforts to glorify him, to broaden your efforts, and to expand the borders of his awesome kingdom.

## Discussion

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1. Why do you think it is difficult for leaders to serve with vision?
2. What are ways in which you can enlist the congregation to dream and to set goals with you as leaders for the future?
3. How can you motivate your members to “buy in” personally, financially, and prayerfully to trusting the Lord and launching out in faith?
4. How does your leadership style promote or hinder serving with vision?
5. How can your relationship with other leaders promote teamwork and stability for years to come?



## Lesson 9

# Serving Without Being Quarrelsome

by Sam Jones

## Introduction

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To be great in the kingdom of Christ requires having the right attitude or heart—a servant heart. In Matthew 20, once again Jesus anticipates His death (see 16:21, 17:9-23). In this chapter, He informs His disciples of how He is going to die, that is, by means of a crucifixion. Shortly after Jesus explains His death to His disciples, the mother of James and John approaches Him inquiring if it is possible for them to be given positions of power in the kingdom. Jesus, the Master Teacher, uses the opportunity to teach His disciples that the measure of greatness is not in a position, prestige or power, but service (vv. 26-27). Our Lord came to this earth not to obtain a lofty position; he did not come to be made a king (see John 6:15). He came to serve or to minister to all humanity (v. 28).

For those in the kingdom to be the servants, as required by Christ, necessitates an adjustment in attitude or the way people think. An attitude is powerful! A bad attitude will lead to bad actions or decisions; a good attitude can produce good, wholesome thoughts and actions. Understanding this reality, the wise man Solomon writes, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).<sup>1</sup> Later, he explains the impact of people thinking on their actions. He writes, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” (Prov. 23:7).

## Foundation

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- **Servants should maintain proper disposition.**
- **Servants must defend the faith.**
- **Servant must not quarrel.**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

*Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:24, explains primarily the disposition of a minister or preacher; but what he is saying is also applicable to every Christian in the kingdom.* When servants are approached rudely, harshly, or mean-spiritedly, Paul states the expected and required response. Servants of the Lord must not allow or let other's behavior cause them not to display a servant's attitude (2 Tim. 2:24). Servants are to mimic their master. Servants of Christ must strive or put forth every effort to remain mild-mannered, calm, and gentle in teaching or correcting those who oppose them.

*Servants are to earnestly or aggressively contend or defend the faith, but it has to be done in the proper spirit (Jude 1:3).* To do so any other way is to disregard the wishes of the Master (Matt. 5:43-44) but also to overlook His example (Luke 23:34). Servants of the kingdom are to pursue peace or the desire to "get along with others" in every situation (Rom. 12:18). Paul puts the burden of the responsibility on Christians to strive to maintain peace.

*Paul says the "servant of the Lord must not quarrel" (v. 24).* Christians are not to serve in "a fighting mode." The spirit of gentleness must be the attitude of servants in the kingdom. In Matthew's gospel account of the life of Christ, Matthew quotes an Old Testament passage from the book of Isaiah. The passage describes the suffering servant of God and the nature that He would display.

Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,  
 My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!  
 I will put My Spirit upon Him,  
 And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.  
 He will not quarrel nor cry out,  
 Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.  
 A bruised reed He will not break,  
 And smoking flax He will not quench,  
 Till He sends forth justice to victory;  
 And in His name Gentiles will trust.

What is your perception of Jesus as you read the quote? He was gentle, kind, and patient with people. In our effort to serve others, we too must be gentle, kind, and understanding.

## Application

By being a servant who is gentle and not quarrelsome, we will be equipped to serve five critical groups of people:

*Serve the lost.* Servants of the Lord must not forget the primary mission of those in the kingdom and that is to serve the lost (Luke 19:10). God's desire is to have every person come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). God's desire causes Him to be longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). Christians have an obligation to serve the lost in a spirit of meekness and humility (1 Tim. 2:25). In correcting or teaching the lost, Peter says "be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians are to be gentle like Jesus (Matt. 11:29). The lost must not be treated as adversaries but like lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) or the lost son (Luke 15:11ff). The gentle, kind and understanding way the father interacted with his son enabled him to gain his son. Learn to be gentle in teaching or correcting those who are lost.

*Serve those hurting in the kingdom.* The Lord's kingdom consists of people who are hurting or suffering in various ways. There are those suffering with health problems; there are others hurting with marital concerns which threaten the stability of their marriages. Still, there are many others with financial difficulties looking for places to turn for assistance. Because of death, there are those in the kingdom experiencing the pains of loneliness and confusion. If

we are going to be able to serve these individuals, then it is essential to have the right attitude; Christians must have an attitude of meekness or gentleness. This attitude as servants will invite people to approach us or allow us to approach them. If Christians display an attitude of gentleness then those in the kingdom who are hurting are more likely to allow them to discuss avenues to help them (Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:7). God cares and desires to

provide comfort to those who are hurting and suffering (Ps. 55:22). People in the kingdom who are hurting do not need to experience the feeling that David writes about in Psalm 142:4. He describes a time in his life when he thought no person cared for him. Be a servant with an attitude of gentleness so that you can serve or minister to those who are suffering in the kingdom.



*Serve those who have left the kingdom.* It's possible for those who have obeyed the gospel of Christ and have been added to the kingdom where the saved are (Acts 2:47), to depart (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 2:1, 3:12; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Because it could happen to any Christian, Paul states the correct method to be displayed if those who have left the kingdom are going to be restored. He says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness,

considering yourself..." (Gal. 6:1). To be equipped to serve and restore those who have quit or left the kingdom, it is necessary for us to manifest the right attitude—an attitude of gentleness.

*Serve those who are struggling with sin.* There are none in the kingdom who sin not (1 John 1:8, 10). There are those who are mature in Christ and sin less than others, and there are those in the kingdom who are struggling to remain faithful. Satan "has their number." They are in need of some spiritual service. They need encouragement to keep fighting. They need someone to help them to understand the things going on in their lives. They need someone to pray with them. Paul teaches that strong Christians ought to serve weak Christians (Rom. 15:1). Furthermore, he states in Galatians 6:3, Christians need to bear one another's burdens, i.e., Christians must see the need to serve each other with their life's struggles. Only when we develop the right attitude—one of gentleness—will we be in a condition to help others. Let us strive to be like Barnabas. Barnabas was able to provide Christian service to John Mark during a struggling moment in his life (Acts 13:13, 15:39). Because Barnabas was gentle and kind with John Mark, he was able to strengthen him. Later John Mark became a valuable servant in the Lord's kingdom (2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). Thank God for gentle servants like Barnabas.

*Serve those in the kingdom who are weary.* The kingdom also consists of people who are discouraged. There are those who are contemplating quitting their walk with Jesus and returning to the world. There are those who need edifying – building up or a spiritual lift. In Romans 14:19, Paul encourages us to look for opportunities to strengthen weary and offended Christians. There are those in the kingdom who feel or perceive no one loves or cares for them. Paul exhorts Timothy to give attention to three things: first, reading the scripture; second, abiding in the doctrine, and third, building up one another (1 Tim. 4:13). One's attitude as a servant will be a determining factor whether these weary Christians will allow themselves to be served. Be a gentle servant. Let us strive to get along with others.

## Conclusion

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For servants to be equipped to overcome evil with good, they need to develop a gentle spirit. The Lord's servants must not be quarrelsome or people who like to verbally fight with others, but have an attitude of gentleness. Servants who have a gentle spirit will be able to serve the lost, serve the hurting, serve those who have left the church, serve those who are struggling with sin, and serve the weak who need to be strengthened.

## Discussion

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1. Describe the importance of guarding one's heart.
2. Explain the disposition needing to be displayed at all times by servants when teaching others.
3. There are at least five groups of people in the world and church who need ministering. To be equipped to serve them requires what of servants and why?

# Serving With Humility

by Tony Lawrence

## Introduction

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Sinclair Ferguson wrote, “Humility is not simply feeling small and useless — like an inferiority complex. It is sensing how great and glorious God is, and seeing myself in that light.”<sup>1</sup> Paul stated, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).<sup>2</sup> Having a proper perception of self is essential to being an effective servant. Having too lofty a view of self will result in one thinking himself too important to serve others, while having too low of a view of oneself will leave one thinking that his service has no value.

Humility can affect so many areas of one’s service. For instance, why does one serve others? Is one’s service to seek recognition or appreciation? Does one serve others for his own benefit rather than for the benefit of others? Does one believe that his ideas are better than others, or even than God’s? If one does not carefully evaluate his attitude and motivations, he may ultimately exhibit what Paul calls “false humility” (Col. 2:18, 23).

## Foundation

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- **Measure of Humility**
- **Model of Humility**
- **Mentoring Humility**

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 25.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

*Measure of humility.* How would one recognize true humility? Does the Bible offer any indication of what is involved in genuine humility? It is multifaceted and expressed in many ways. Jesus pronounced as blessed the one who was “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3; Isa. 66:2). Solomon urged one to trust in the Lord rather than one’s own understanding (Prov. 3:5-7; 28:11; Isa. 5:21). Contrasting the “high” mind and the “lowly” reveals the humble mind-set (Rom. 12:3, 16; Prov. 16:19; Matt. 11:29; Jas. 1:9). It is a “lowliness of mind” that esteems “others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3).

*Model of humility.* There are numerous individuals who modeled humility in their lives. Joseph claimed it was God who revealed dreams, not himself (Gen. 41:16), and it was God who was in control of the events (Gen. 50:20). When offered Saul’s daughter, David protested that he was not worthy (1 Sam. 18:18). Later, when David was promised that one of his own descendants would reign over an eternal kingdom, he opined that all glory should be given to God, as God had given David everything that he had (2 Sam. 7:18-29). For all the strength of character possessed by John the Baptist, he still acknowledged that he was unworthy to loosen the sandals of Jesus (Mark 1:7). He objected when Jesus asked him to baptize Him, recognizing that he should be baptized by Jesus (Luke 3:16).

There is one who perfectly modeled humility in His life: Jesus. Even His appearance on earth was the result of His humbling Himself (Phil. 2:5-8). It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive what was involved when Deity took off the glory of the heavenly realm to be so awfully treated by man. Jesus demonstrated humility when He was subject to Joseph and Mary, even though He was the Creator and they the creatures (Luke 2:51). He adorned an apron towel and washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:3-15). He always put the good of others ahead of His own wishes, and he always submitted Himself to the Father’s will (Matt. 26:39).

*Mentoring humility.* A mentor is one who trains or advises a younger colleague. Humility, like other necessary virtues, must be instilled in the next generation of leaders. One learns such by instruction and observing the behavior of his mentor (2 Tim. 2:2; Phil. 4:9; 1 Cor. 11:1). Parents, teachers, elders and preachers should seek not only to teach children humility by what they say, but also by how they act. One of the great lessons from the life of Jesus is how He mentored the Apostles to lead in His kingdom. These men struggled with personal ambition and even argued right up until the Lord’s death about which of them would be the greatest (Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27). The Lord taught them to reject the worldly method of exercising lordship in favor of being a humble servant.

## Application

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*Preaching with humility.* God had blessed Paul with extraordinary revelations, but rather than allow these to cause him to be exalted too much, He also gave the apostle a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul described his time with the Corinthians as one during which he was “with [them] in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). Later, he was fearful that their sinful behavior might bring out in him something for which God would need to humble him (2 Cor. 12:21). Perhaps at one time or another, every preacher has struggled with personal pride in his own ability and accomplishments. Thankfully, there are always those whom God will send to bring us back down to earth!

The humble preacher will clearly stand *behind* the cross of Christ. He will stand *under* the Word of God. Every preacher ought to take time to evaluate his sermons to make sure they reflect the message of God, rather than his own. The power is in the Word, not in the preacher (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:7). Preachers ought to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Paul praised Timothy as a preacher who truly cared for the needs of the members of the body. He proclaimed, “For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:20-21). In Paul’s own life he had forgone personal support for the good of the church. He was willing to put the needs of everyone ahead of his own (1 Cor. 9:19-23). A preacher should never be “too good” to serve at any place at any time.

*Pastoring with humility.* The pastors in the Bible are not the preachers, but rather the spiritual shepherds of the flock. These godly men serve because God designed His church such that there would be overseers (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11). Theirs is not an easy task, and they face a unique set of temptations. Paul warned that from among the overseers would arise some seeking to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:30). As well, Peter warned that they must guard lest they become “lords over those entrusted to you” (1 Pet. 5:3). It also appears that, since they have charge over the treasury, they might be tempted by “dishonest gain” (1 Pet. 5:2). Thus, humility before the Lord is an essential characteristic for those who shepherd the flock of God. They must always remember they serve under the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4).

Elders will be called upon to render judgments in matters of expediency. Such decisions should be approached with prayer and humility. They are not just deciding what they wish, but what the congregation needs and what the Lord desires. Such decisions may even be different from what



they would want to do. Elders must resist those who would attempt to manipulate them in matters of doctrine and stand firmly under the Word.

*Providing with humility.* Deacons, by virtue of their name, are those who serve. The service which they provide may sometimes seem to be mundane and unappreciated. Rarely do they receive much recognition for their service. Many faithful deacons have done their jobs with honor. Paul said, “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). As with any good deed, there is the possibility of temptation for one to take the honor for himself. Jesus addressed this in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1-4). Every time one does a good work for the Lord, he should be sure that it is the Lord who gets the credit (Matt. 5:16).

## Conclusion

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Everyone should see themselves properly, as special creatures of the Almighty created in His own image (Gen. 1:26). However, they need to be reminded that they are “but men” (Ps. 9:20). Man should acknowledge the supremacy of God. As God stated through Isaiah, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). With such an understanding, man will recognize that he should humble himself and serve under the directions God.

## Discussion

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1. What is the difference between being humble and an inferiority complex?
2. How can one determine if humility is genuine or fake?
3. In what areas did Jesus exhibit humility?
4. Explain how preachers should be humble before the Word of God.
5. Why is it necessary for elders to lead with humility?

# Serving as to the Lord

by Steve Higginbotham

## Introduction

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Being a servant requires sacrifice; sacrifice requires self-denial; and self-denial requires a rationale. Therefore, if one is to become a servant, he needs a worthwhile or compelling motive.

Louis Cochran, in his book entitled *The Fool of God*, recounted how Alexander Campbell turned down a young lady in marriage, in order to be, as the young lady called it, “a fool of God.”<sup>1</sup> While Campbell sacrificed “love” to serve the Lord, countless others have sacrificed a myriad of things, even life itself, to serve the Lord. While these sacrifices may differ from person to person, the common thread that connects all these acts of self-denial is the recognition of a compelling cause or a motive that is worthwhile.

This lesson offers a reasonable rationale to develop the discipline of service.

## Foundation

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- **Service Is Christ-like (Matthew 20:28; John 13:1-17)**
- **Service Is Difficult (Matthew 20:20-23; Mark 8:34)**
- **Service Is Needed (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Ephesians 1:22-23)**
- **Service Is Motivated (Ephesians 6:5-7; Luke 17:7-10)**

*Service is Christ-like.* Being a servant is difficult, selfless, humbling, and inconvenient, but it is also Christ-like. Our Lord came into this world, not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28). As a disciple of Jesus, one

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Cochran, *The Fool of God* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1986), 115.

must therefore learn to become a servant as well, for it is the mission of a disciple to conform himself into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29).

*Service is difficult.* Because service requires sacrifice, it does not come naturally. Rather it is a learned behavior or way of life. Charles Swindoll said of service, “Serving and giving don’t come naturally. Living an unselfish life is an art!”<sup>2</sup> It is something in which one must grow and mature. The motivation to undertake this process of maturity is in recognizing that one’s service to his fellow man is service to Jesus himself (Matt. 25:34-40).

*Service is needed.* The Lord desperately needs servants. He needs his disciples to be his point of contact with the world today. The body of Christ must be his lips, his feet, and his hands to say what he would say, go where he would go, and minister as he would minister if he were here today. One chokes on the words, “Jesus needs me,” but this is precisely what Ephesians 1:22-23 says. The church is the “fullness of him who fills all in all.”<sup>3</sup>

*Service is motivated.* In light of the great sacrifice Jesus made, how can one refuse to answer his call to serve him? If one would understand that whatever service he renders to his family, neighbor, co-workers, or church family is service that is actually rendered to Jesus himself, would he not serve more willingly? Would it also not affect the quality and spirit of one’s service? The apostle Paul thought so, for he said, “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your master according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Eph. 6:5-7).

God wants one to look beyond the person being served and see Jesus as the object of the service. Adopting this biblical approach to service is of great value in motivating one to make the sacrifices that serving the Lord demands. If one will serve “as unto the Lord,” he will find the following to be true:

## Application

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*One can serve God with joy.* Luke reminds us that while Jesus was on earth he said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The truthfulness of that statement is confirmed not only by the fact that Jesus

<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Inspirational Writings of Charles R. Swindoll* (New York, NY: Inspirational Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

said it, but also by one's own experiences. When one can get outside of himself, and seek out ways to meet the needs of others, he will find great joy and satisfaction in service.

Usually, when one purchases an appliance, it will come with an owner's manual. This manual will instruct a person how to best use the product. We have all read the phrase, "For best results..." When God created mankind, he also provided an "owner's manual." That manual says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In other words, "For best results," one should serve. If one lives according to the divine owner's manual, he will find the joy and fulfillment everyone wants in life.

*One can serve God with zeal.* Paul informed Titus that the people of God were to be a people who were zealous for good works (Tit. 2:14). The child of God should not have to be dragged into good work, nor should he wait for the opportunity to serve to fall in his lap. Rather, he should pursue opportunities to serve. The apostle Paul told the brethren at Rome that they should "pursue the things whereby they might edify one another" (Rom. 14:19). Disciples of Christ should not wait to serve until the church devises a program, the elders make a specific request, or when one's own family or friends are the beneficiaries. They should, with zeal, pursue avenues to serve God and their fellow man.

Consider how much service could be offered up in the name of Jesus if Christian families would get together in each other's homes, and instead of spending the evening playing games, they spend the evening brainstorming about ways to serve the Master. Consider how much service could be done if Christians would explore ways to use their secular professions, skills, and training to serve the Lord. Consider how much service could be rendered if Christians would not simply be content with the way things have always been done in the past, and try new ways to serve the Lord.

Such intentional service is exciting, contagious, and generates zeal.

*One can serve God in small ways.* Many Christians would be willing to serve God if they were called upon to serve God in a large way. If a service could be performed that would put one in the spotlight or result in one being the "talk of the church," many would be willing to "sign up." However, numbers might significantly decline if the service being rendered was behind closed doors where no one saw and no one knew.

Jesus once said, "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). Apparently, the "little things" matter to God. In fact, all those acts of service that "fly under the radar" and

receive no public acclaim or attention do not escape God's notice. The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

Recognition of the fact that God accepts "small" acts of service puts meaningful service within everyone's reach.

*One can serve God for nothing.* When one realizes that his service is to the Lord, then his service is not contingent upon being shown proper respect or being given sufficient thanks. If one's service is to the Lord, circumstances will not matter. He will serve when he is overlooked, criticized, gossiped about, lied about, and threatened. While men may act in ways that could cause one to withhold his service to them, if one's service is actually to the Lord, then how could he say no? Besides good, what has Jesus ever done? Serving as unto the Lord will empower one to serve in spite of the flaws of his fellow man because Jesus is the true object of his service.

## Conclusion

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"For Christ, service wasn't a 'spiritual ladder' to success, in the sense that, if we're willing to serve a while, we'll get power later! It wasn't a performance so that he could be rewarded. It was his character. When he served he was doing what comes naturally."<sup>4</sup> However, we're a different story. Service doesn't come to us so naturally. However the Lord desperately needs us to be servants. He needs us to be his point of contact with the world today. Remember this final thought: You will never be more like the Lord than when you pick up a pitcher and a towel and serve your fellow man as if that service was unto the Lord himself.

## Discussion

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1. In light of Acts 20:35, why do you think that so many people struggle with being a good servant?
2. What are some "service ideas" that can easily be done every day, but have a lasting impact on others?
3. What is the value of serving anonymously?
4. How can one serve anonymously while fulfilling Matt. 5:16?
5. What are some ideas for teaching our children to love and be involved in service at a young age?

<sup>4</sup> Jim McGuigan, *The God of the Towel* (Lubbock, TX: Montex PC, 1984),

## Lesson 12

# Serving With Absolute Obedience

by Earl D. Edwards

## Introduction

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The author T. Brooks once wrote,

A man sincerely obedient lays such a charge upon his whole man, as Mary, the mother of Christ, did upon all the servants at the feast (John ii, 5), “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” Eyes, ears, hands, heart, lips, legs, body and soul, . . . [must] seriously and affectionately observe whatever Jesus Christ says unto you, and do it.<sup>1</sup>

And from whence did Brooks get his comprehensive concept of obedience? Most likely, at least in part, from our text, Matthew 6:24. The words of this verse are a part of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. They are a part of a section in which he discusses where our “treasures” are stored, whether in “heaven” or on “earth.” Our “treasures” are what we attach a high value to, what we deem really important. In other words, he is talking about focusing on himself, who is, indeed, to be our Master. And in that context he pronounces the words of our text, which reads, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Brooks, “Obedience,” in *Cyclopedia of Illustrations of Moral and Religious Truths* (ed. John Bate; London: Jarrold and Sons, n.d.), 634.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

## Foundation

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- **The meaning of master**
- **The impossibility of serving two masters**

The term for “masters” (*kyrioi*) is the one frequently translated “lords.” It many times, as here in our text, means, “one who is in charge by virtue of possession, owner.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is *not* synonymous with employer as some commentators contend. It is, rather, synonymous with a slave master who has purchased the slave as a property. One can work for two different employers because he is not owned by either; so he can justifiably sell 40 hours of each week to one employer and 20 hours to another. But *all* of a slave’s hours belong, not to himself to dispose of, rather to his owner/master. And Christians are “enslaved (*doulōthentes*) to God” (Rom. 6:22).

As Hagner says, “The point here, however, is that a slave with two masters can do justice to neither. Truly to serve a master demands total and undivided commitment. This is why serving [in a proper way] two masters is impossible.”<sup>4</sup>

Lewis correctly points out that, “Jesus does not say that a man ought not to **serve two masters**. He says that he **cannot** (cf. Jas. 4:4).”<sup>5</sup> That is, since each would expect full devotion such is, in the very nature of the case, *impossible*.

*It is impossible for one to serve two masters.* Now, if one tries the impossible what will happen? Jesus tells us here in our text: “either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” Though these two affirmations are divided by the word “or,” they actually constitute a parallelism as Nolland says, “Though offered as an alternative (‘either . . . or’), the second statement is really only a restatement of the first . . .”<sup>6</sup>

The NASB’s translation of the Greek text here is somewhat misleading when it renders “hate the one and love the other.” Hagner is right in commenting,

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<sup>3</sup> BDAG, 577.

<sup>4</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew: 1–13* (LWC; ed. Everett Ferguson; Austin: Sweet, 1967), 107.

<sup>6</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 304.

This does not refer to hatred as we understand the word but is only an emphatic way of referring to the absolute commitment required in discipleship. “Hate” thus equals “love less than,” as can be clearly seen from the parallel in Matthew 10:37.<sup>7</sup>

The whole thought is: His attempt at serving “two masters” will utterly fail!

Then, as Jesus restates the same concept, he says, “He will be devoted (*anthexetai*) to the one and despise (*kataphronēsei*) the other.” The word for “devoted” means “have a strong attachment to,”<sup>8</sup> whereas the word for “despise” can have a milder meaning like “to consider of little value.”<sup>9</sup> But, however you define the two terms, the attempt to serve “two masters” falls flat, it is a miserable failure!

Jesus then concludes the thought by saying, “You cannot serve God and wealth (*mamōna*).” As Morris says,

The term is μαμωνᾶς, [and it is found] elsewhere in the New Testament only 3 times in Luke. It transliterates an Aramaic term whose derivation is uncertain but which probably comes from a root meaning “that in which one trusts” [. . .], and which comes to signify “wealth, property.”<sup>10</sup>

Please note that the “wealth” is not necessarily ill-gotten wealth; he does not imply that the owner of the wealth has gained property by unethical means. As Newman and Stine say, “Jesus’ words are concerned with property in general, not with possessions obtained by evil means.”<sup>11</sup> And another thing that should be noted is that Jesus does not condemn *having* property; he condemns *servicing* property—that is, having a second “master” (other than God). See 1 Timothy 6:10 and Matthew 22:37 for a similar concept expressed in different words. Wealth becomes wrong when we “love” it, are “devoted” to it to the point that we “serve” it as a “master.” As Jack Lewis wrote, “Many a man is owned by that which he thinks he owns.”<sup>12</sup>

Hill gives a good, short summary of what Jesus is teaching here in Matthew 6:24: “[I]t is impossible to combine devotion to God with

<sup>7</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 159.

<sup>8</sup> BDAG, 87.

<sup>9</sup> BDAG, 529.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 155–56, n. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 184.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Matthew 1–13*, 107.



devotion to wealth.”<sup>13</sup> And Hill is right. The second “master” Jesus has in mind in the verse is wealth, but we should notice that this principle is general. That is, *any other* “master” that threatens to challenge and minimize our devotion to God is sinful. As Hagner says, “Wealth, it happens, is only the most conspicuous example of that which can distract from true discipleship.”<sup>14</sup> No man can serve “two masters” even if the other one is sports, or family, or whatever else challenges the place God should have in our lives. So, in America today, what are the challenges we face in this area?

## Application

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We American Christians are tempted to compromise in several areas of our lives and effectively displace Jesus as our one Lord and “master.” The things of a physical, material nature clamor for our attention and we are tempted to give him only partial and incomplete obedience. In what areas are we tempted to do this?

*In handling our wealth.* The first area of temptation is the one of which Jesus spoke in our text: our wealth. We here in the United States complain about our current recession. And things are not as positive as they were a few years ago. And yet, as compared with others in the world, we are greatly favored. In fact, one source reports that,

The average home in the United States has more than 700 square feet per person, which is 50%–100% more than in other high-income countries. Even in the lowest income percentiles people enjoy more space than middle classes in Europe. Likewise even in the lowest percentiles ownership rates of gadgets and amenities are exceptionally high compared to other countries. The labor market in the United States has attracted immigrants from all over the world and its net migration rate is among the highest in the world.<sup>15</sup>

And since most of us are now comparatively rich, have we now turned our attention to other things and de-emphasized the material aspects of our existence? Indeed, we have not. The most important topic of the last several U.S. elections has been, and still is, the state of the economy. Moral issues like abortion and same-sex marriage may have some importance, but *the* issue is “jobs,” “the economy.” As McKibben says,

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<sup>13</sup> David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black; London: Oliphants, 1972; repr., 1975), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> “Affluence in the United States,” *Wikipedia.org* (3 September 2012). Cited 19 September 2012. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affluence\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affluence_in_the_United_States).

“We have made most important decisions—as individuals and as a nation—in recent decades by answering the question: is it good for the economy?”<sup>16</sup> And since we Americans are comparatively rich, are our contributions to charity higher than the ten percent the faithful Jew gave under Moses’ Law (Lev. 27:30–33)? Indeed, they are not. Wolfgang reported the results of a study which indicated that New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts residents gave less than 3.1% of their 2008 income to all charitable causes.<sup>17</sup> In an earlier study, John and Sylvia Ronsvalle reported that in the year 1987,

... two billion dollars was [*sic*] invested in overseas ministries by all American denominational and Catholic programs. In that same year Americans spent eight billion dollars on pet care, twenty-nine billion on the diet industry, and forty-four billion on soft drinks.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Americans in general serve another “master.”

But, we tend to say, “Wait, members of churches of Christ do much better in their giving!” Are we sure? In the last forty years this preacher has analyzed our giving in about one hundred congregations in at least twenty states, comparing collection figures in those congregations with government figures of average per capita income from state bureaus of statistics. What were the results? The highest percentage he ever found was 5.8% of gross income given to the Lord, with many being around 3.5%! The average has been around 3.8%. Indeed, we too are trying to serve a second “master”!



Jesus says, “You cannot serve God and wealth”! This is *partial obedience*!

But, as already established, the principle of this verse goes far beyond the use of wealth. What are other areas where we are tempted to render *partial obedience*?

<sup>16</sup> Bill McKibben, “Christmas Unplugged,” *Christianity Today* 40.14 (1996): 21.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Wolfgang, “In the Color of Money,” *WashingtonTimes.com* (20 August 2012). Cited 19 September 2012. Online: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/aug/20/religion-politics-affect-americans-philanthropy/>.

<sup>18</sup> John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *The Poor Have Faces: Loving Your Neighbor in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 42.

*In making a career for ourselves.* There are many members of the Lord's body who are talented enough to become esteemed doctors, lawyers, and even CEOs of companies. And such is not bad, in and of itself, unless one's *career* becomes his primary purpose and goal in life, causing him to spend 60 and even 80 hours per week to further his career. When that happens, his family is frequently neglected—his children become unfaithful to their God, and his wife may become discouraged and leave him. But even in cases where the family is not completely destroyed, his overemphasis on his career will keep him from developing himself spiritually and he may not become “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) so that he can be a qualified elder.

This is partial obedience! But what are other areas where we are tempted to render only *partial obedience*?

*In our participation in sports activities.* Would you agree that at least *some* Christians overemphasize sports? What about the father who loves baseball and wants his son to be a star and so he buys him all the most sophisticated equipment, takes him to all grade school and high school practices and games (even at the cost of missing Bible study), and maybe even takes him to major league games across state (at a cost of \$500 or so per trip)? And many times such is done when dad is not contributing very much to the congregation's heavy load of missions nor encouraging his son to be involved in Bible classes or in youth activities. Is there competition between “two masters” here? Aren't both father and son more devoted to sports than to God?

Indeed, this is *partial obedience*. No man can successfully serve “two masters.” But note now a final area where we are tempted to render partial obedience.

*In overemphasizing family relationships.* God created the family (Gen. 2:18–24). Certainly he wants us to “honor” our fathers and mothers (Eph. 6:2), but he does not want us to love our family members more than we love him. In fact, Jesus specifically says,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:34–38).

As Chouinard says, “Jesus insists [in this passage] that *absolute priority* must be given one’s relationship to him, *even over family ties.*”<sup>19</sup> And what does that mean down where the “rubber meets the road”? It means that the Christian who misses worship because Aunt Sally came to visit is trying to serve “two masters”! It means the family which forsakes worship and uses Sundays for trips (even if to visit their unfaithful children) is loving son or daughter “more than” Jesus, in direct violation to Jesus’ teaching. In other words, such persons are attempting to serve “two masters.” This is only *partial obedience*.

## Conclusion

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The teaching of Jesus in our text is crystal clear: he demands *absolute obedience*. “Absolute” means unlimited and unconditional. And since he is our owner and master, we are in no position to discuss or dispute with him. We must rid ourselves of our selfish, defective thinking and learn *absolute obedience*.

## Discussion

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1. Is Jesus’ “one master teaching” in Matthew 6:24 “radical”?
2. Did some of Jesus’ first-century disciples think he (Jesus) was too demanding (cf. Matt. 19:10–12; John 6:60–66)?
3. If we decide Jesus is too demanding, what choices remain for us (John 6:66–69; 14:6)?
4. Do we really know enough to discuss with Christ about what is required for true obedience (Job 42:1–6)?
5. How can preachers and teachers more effectively communicate the need for *absolute obedience*?

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<sup>19</sup> Larry Chouinard, *Matthew* (College Press NIV Commentary; ed. Jack Cottrell and Tony Ash; Joplin: College Press, 1997. Repr., 2005), 196. Emphasis added.

# Serving Without Expectation

by W. Kirk Brothers

## Introduction

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Expectations make a difference. David Fisher, in his book, *The Twenty-First Century Pastor*, notes the crises of preacher depression, discouragement, and dropout that have become an increasing problem in recent years. Fisher stresses that a key factor in burnout and discouragement is that preachers are trying to live up to multiple expectations: God, congregation, community, self, etc.<sup>1</sup> H. Norman Wright observes the role expectations play in successful marriages. “If you plan to marry it is certain that you have a preconceived fantasy of your ideal mate or the perfect marriage. After a while you will begin to realize that your fantasy and the person you have married will diverge sharply. At that point you embark upon a reform program...”<sup>2</sup> Wright emphasizes that many marriage problems occur because of these unrealistic and unfair expectations.

## Foundation

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- **Expectations Affect both Attitude and Actions**
- **Perspective Is As Important As Practice**

*Expectations impact our attitude and our actions.* What do these expectations have to do with the subject of service? Everything. The expectations we have as we serve others will not only impact our attitude but our actions as well. Jesus targets not only the practices of

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<sup>1</sup> David Fisher, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> H. Norman Wright, *Before You Say “I Do,”* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), p. 12.

people's hands but also the perspectives of their hearts. He illustrated this repeatedly in the Sermon on the Mount. "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees were known for their meticulous observance of the rituals of the Law of Moses. How then could one have a righteousness that surpasses them? Jesus follows this statement with examples that may answer the question.

*Perspective is as important as practice.* The Savior reminds his audience that they had been told not to murder or commit adultery. Jesus then states that he did not want them to even hate or lust (cf. Matt. 5:21-30). He reminds them that living in God's kingdom not only involves one's actions but his or her attitudes. This seems to have been the Pharisees' problem. Jesus compares them to cups that have been washed on the outside but are filthy on the inside (Matt. 23:25-26). Paul further emphasizes the importance of motives in 1 Corinthians 13: "And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (13:3).

## Application

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What should our perspective be when we serve? What should our expectations be? The answer can be found in the preaching of Jesus, and specifically in a sermon in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Matthew records what is commonly known as the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt. 5-7). Luke 6 records a sermon often known as the *Sermon on the Plain*. It is not as famous as the sermon in Matthew but it is powerful, none the less. One will notice the similarities between these two sermons. It is this author's belief that they are not the same sermon. Why then the similar discussion? Jesus had a central message that he wanted to get across as he went from town to town. Thus, it should not be surprising to find that various sermons addressed consistent themes.

*Service frequently involves a shift in thinking.* People were coming to Jesus in droves (Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon). The fame of his ability to heal and cast out demons was spreading. Jesus took advantage of this phenomenon to teach them about the kingdom of God. He begins the sermon with shocking statements that would have gained the attention of his audience and illustrated his message that in the coming kingdom of God there was going to be a shift in thinking, a new spiritual paradigm (Luke 6:20-26). The world said the blessed, the happy, and those at peace were the rich, well fed, and pain-free. Instead, Jesus said the blessed are the poor, the hungry, and the persecuted. Why are they blessed? The answer is that the blessed are those who have learned to trust in God, not self or

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture references are from the *NASBU* unless otherwise indicated.

wealth. Poverty, hunger, and persecution can pave the way to learning that lesson. Jesus gives practical application to this shift in thinking by stressing that his followers should love their enemies, pray for those who mistreat them, turn the other cheek when struck, and give to those who take (6:27-30).

*Service means we get according to how we give.* Having announced and applied this SHIFT in world-view, Jesus next moves his attention to the SCOOP section of the sermon (6:31-38). His basic premise in this section is, “Scoop out, scoop in,” in other words; we get according to how we give. He sums this up with two phrases, “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you” (6:31) and “For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (6:38). We receive love, forgiveness, mercy, and blessings based on our willingness to give the same. It is during this discussion that Jesus makes a series of statements that are the basis for our discussion of serving without expectations.

Verses 32-34 give three “what credit is that to you” statements. If we love because we expect love in return, or do good because we expect good in return, or lend because we expect money in return “what credit is that” to us. Even sinners would do this. Remember that a central message of both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain is that it is not merely what we do but why we do it that shows true discipleship. Doing the “right things” for the “wrong reasons” makes the right, wrong.

To serve for personal benefit is not service at all; it is manipulation. Christians are to be counter culture. We are to do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. We are to do good because it is the right thing to do, not because it benefits us. How will the world know that we are true children of the Most High? They will know if we serve “without expectations” (6:35).

*Service requires us to examine ourselves.* The final division of the sermon might be described as the SPECK section (6:39-49). In this section, Jesus calls us to examine ourselves. He wants us to remove the planks from our own eyes before looking at the faults of others (6:39-42). We need to consider the spiritual fruit produced in our own lives (6:43-45).

This is the invitation portion of the sermon in which Jesus calls his audience (and us) to consider whether they (we) will listen to his words and put his principles into practice (6:46-49). Do we have planks in our eyes? Have we been doing the right things for the wrong reasons? Why do we serve? Do we serve because we expect or want praise? Do we serve because we expect to get something from it financially? Do we serve because it will get us a particular job or position or because we think it will help us to keep a job or position? In short, do we serve expecting nothing in return?

## Conclusion

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One place where expectations come into play can be in athletic events. Teams ranked in the top 25 are expected to defeat teams that are not. It was opening day of the 2012-13 college football season. The lowly Louisiana Monroe Warhawks were going up against 8<sup>th</sup> ranked SEC powerhouse, Arkansas Razorbacks. Louisiana Monroe had never defeated a ranked team since joining the FBS in 1994. They were 4 and 34 against the SEC in their history and trailed Arkansas 28-7 midway through the third quarter.<sup>4</sup> They were not expected to win. Yet, they did win in overtime, 34-31. The Warhawks had different expectations than everyone else. We now know that Arkansas was not as good as advertised (they currently have a record of 3-4) and the Louisiana Monroe was better than thought (currently 4-2). Why was everyone surprised at the outcome? In a word, it was because of expectations. Yet, those expectations were wrong. Are our expectations wrong? Do we serve expecting nothing in return? Spiritual victory lies in how we answer.

## Discussion

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1. What do expectations we have of others have to do with service?
2. What should our perspective be when we serve?
3. How can service involve a shift in thinking?
4. In what way is it true that we get according to how we give?
5. How should we examine ourselves before deciding to serve?

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<sup>4</sup><http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/football/ncaa/gameflash/2012/09/08/50045/index.html>



## Lesson 14

# Serving Without Distraction

by Allen Webster

### Introduction

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The Gospel accounts record eight times Jesus accepted an invitation to dinner. One was at Martha's house (Luke 10:38-42), a place where Jesus, "who had no where to lay his head," felt at home (cf. John 11:1-5; 12:1-2; Matt. 8:20; 21:17; Mark 11:1).<sup>1</sup> Other than the Twelve, Jesus had no closer friends than this untraditional family in Bethany. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5).

That particular visit, though, did not turn out as well as it should have because Martha lost her decorum. She got mad at her sister, dragged Jesus into it, and received an embarrassing rebuke from the Master in her own living room. This lesson offers practical lessons on how to avoid common distractions.

### Foundation

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- **Distracted by Responsibility (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-2)**
- **Distracted by Resentment (Romans. 12:14-21)**
- **Distracted by Shortsightedness (2 Peter 1:8-11)**

*Martha was distracted by responsibility.* To appreciate the context, put yourself in Bethany that day. Jesus showed up, probably unannounced. With no cell phones, email, texting, or postal system—how could He have informed her He was coming? Even a preplanned visit would have been difficult to arrange since Jesus was on foot and often stopped along the way to minister to others.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

As the older sister and house owner, Martha was the hostess. Showing hospitality was very important in Jewish culture (dating back to Abraham hosting angels, Genesis 18). In that time, a woman was valued most for fertility, but it seems that Martha had no husband or children. So her success as a hostess was her chance for honor and would have meant a lot to her.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, Martha would have wanted nothing but the best for Jesus.

Martha was hosting a baker's dozen of Jesus and twelve apostles. Traditional hospitality dictated two nights' stay, including meals and lodging. It was the rainy season in Palestine, leaving only indoor space available for accommodations and entertaining—not easy with such a large group who likely entered with wet garments and muddy feet. The average



Jewish home had only six hundred square feet. Even if Martha's house was twice that size, fifteen or more people would have been a tight squeeze.

Had you asked in Bethany that day for the best woman in the village, you would have found yourself a few moments later knocking on Martha's door.<sup>3</sup> Martha was not distracted by wine, men, and song. A night of debauchery on the town held no allure for her. She was a good woman doing good things.

What then was Martha's "vice"? She was enslaved to the second best. She was so busy doing good things that she missed doing the better thing. Preparing dinner for the preacher was good, but on that day, Jesus did not

<sup>2</sup> Debi Stack, *Martha to the Max* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 36-41.

<sup>3</sup> Clovis Chappell, *Feminine Faces: Vivid Word Pictures of Sixteen Bible Characters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1942).

want food; He wanted fellowship. He wanted to teach, not eat. When the bread of life is on the menu, who wants a four-course meal (Matt. 4:4)? Martha was doing her job of managing the household (1 Tim. 5:14) so it wasn't her service Jesus rebuked, but her failure to take advantage of her spiritual opportunity.

*Martha was distracted by resentment.* When Jesus arrived, He set off a whirl of activity. Food had to be fixed; drinks poured; the table set. Picture Martha in that hot kitchen with no modern conveniences. Everything is from scratch; everything takes time; everything requires muscle. The more Martha works, the more she resents Mary just sitting with the guests. Kenneth Gire helps us picture the scene:

Her hands work the dough vigorously as a broken necklace of sweat forms under her chin and separate beads glisten on her forehead. She wipes them away with the back of her hand and blows away a drip bulging from her nose.

"I can't believe Mary isn't in here helping," she thinks. Martha pushes a fist into the dough. "She should be in here." Another fist into the dough. "We could get this done in half the time. You know, I'd like to hear what He has to say, too, but somebody's got to fix dinner." Then her thoughts turn to Jesus. "I can't believe He just lets her sit there. Here I am in the kitchen, sweating, working my fingers to the bone . . . doesn't He care?"

Finally, Martha throws down the dough and stomps into the living room. Martha doesn't address Mary directly. She unsheathes her tongue and we see that it is double-edged. The one side cuts Jesus, accusing Him of lacking concern. The other side cuts Mary, accusing her of laziness.<sup>4</sup>

*Martha was distracted by short-sightedness.* Think of Martha looking back on the memory of this day as a grey-haired woman sitting in that same kitchen a quarter century later. Jesus has been back in heaven for many years, but she can still see His quiet smile when she closes her eyes. She thinks back to that autumn of A.D. 32. Little did she know it then, but Jesus was approaching the end. Six months later, He would be dead. Seven months later he would be back in heaven.

Oh, to hear His voice again! To sit and listen to just one more sermon . . . ask His advice . . . express her gratitude for His death. But those opportunities are lost. How deeply she regrets that day long ago when He came to visit, but she stayed in another room—when she rebuked

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Gire, *Moments with the Savior: A Devotional Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 207-208.

Him for not commanding Mary to make the same mistake she was making. Oh, to relive that day!<sup>5</sup>

It was a rare treat for Jesus to visit—only a few people ever had that privilege. Martha had welcomed Jesus into her home and then neglected Him. She had been ten feet away on the other side of a wall, but not “with Him.” Mary was present. She sat at His feet—in the moment, paying attention. She chose fellowship with friends, family, and the Father over kitchen work.

## Application

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*Christians can be tripped up by shades of white.* Many are like Martha. It is not the difference between good and evil that trips them. Their eyes see clearly between black and white; they can even discern grays. It is shades of white that give them fits. The difficulty is choosing among good, better, and best (Col. 3:12).

*Stressed Christians should not give in to self-pity and criticism.* Martha should have commended Mary, but instead criticized her. When we feel overworked, we too may yield to self-pity and criticism. When a sister does well, do I compliment or complain (Rom. 12:10)? Do I resent my own brother (John 13:34) or spouse (Eph. 5:25, 33)? I should rejoice with them (Rom. 12:15). Martha’s resentment spilled over to Jesus. She implied, “Master, you treat me unfairly because you allow her special privileges.” Since God gives us different personalities, abilities, and opportunities (1 Cor. 12:4-5, 20; Col. 1:29), we should be careful about complaining about our lot. Martha learned her lesson, for later she prepared a feast for the same fifteen people without complaint (John 12:1-2). Martha served; Mary anointed; a marvelous day!

*Christians can allow meeting responsibilities to interfere with spiritual growth.* “Cares of this world” and “lust for other things” can choke faith (Mark 4:19). One family asked to be restored, saying, “While the church has gone on, we have been outside the kingdom, busy with things that don’t matter much.” Twenty-first century Americans are Martha’s first-cousins. We live by our to-do lists and digital reminders. Husbands work hard to provide for their families. They leave early and return late—until one day they come home to wives they don’t know and to find their children grown and gone.

*Christians can be so busy working for Jesus that they forget to spend time with him.* Like Martha, we can be in the house with Jesus but not worship due to the distraction of worries and worldliness. We show our

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

love both by serving Jesus and by letting Jesus serve us (Matt. 20:28). What we do with Christ is more important than what we do for Christ for “without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Our most important activity is to sit at the Master’s feet (Deut. 33:3).

## Conclusion

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We need Martha’s hands and Mary’s heart. What is the “needful” thing that Jesus mentioned? “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Ps. 27:4).

Have you chosen that good part? Let’s pray, “Dear God, bring us out of the kitchen and to thy feet.”

## Discussion

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1. How can Christians judge if their responsibilities are interfering with their spiritual service and growth? What is the balance?
2. If one feels resentment building up, what steps should he/she take?
3. How can we live in the moment in our relationships and avoid regrets in old age?
4. How does one spend time “with” Jesus?

## Lesson 15

# Serving With What Is in Your Hand

by Teresa Hampton

## Introduction

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Mary asks Jane, “Will you teach ladies class next week?” Jane answers, “That’s not my talent. Please ask someone else.” Mary tries again, “On Monday night, would you help me take a welcome basket to the couple who just placed membership?” Jane responds, “Oh, Monday night is my bowling night. Will you ask another time?”

Jane’s excuses for not serving come easily. Perhaps she feels incapable, or maybe she is just focused on self. But God wants us to set aside feelings of inadequacy or self-centeredness. He asks his children to serve Him (and others) with gladness and humility. Christians who rely on God—and use what is in their hands to serve others—please the Lord.

Let’s challenge ourselves to grow spiritually by looking closely at what God has given us, and examining our hearts to see if we are pleasing Him by using these blessings.

## Foundation

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- **Moses Relied on God’s Strength and Care to Serve**
- **Moses Served God with What Was in His Hand**
- **Moses Stepped out of His Comfort Zone to Serve God**

*Moses relied on God’s strength and care to serve.* God came to Moses in a burning bush to announce He had chosen him to lead His people out of Egyptian bondage. Moses protested, “Who *am* I that I should go to

Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (3:11-12).<sup>1</sup>

God responded, "I will be with you. And this is the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." How would this promise strengthen Moses' faith? "The promise that God would have the people serve Him in that place was an assurance, if fully believed, that all intervening obstacles would be removed by His power."<sup>2</sup> In providing this sign of confirmation, God also set Himself apart from false, unreliable gods. "This precluded any comparison between the God of the Israelites and the deities of the



Egyptians and other nations, and furnished Moses and his people with strong consolation in their affliction, and a powerful support to their confidence in the realization of His purpose of salvation."<sup>3</sup>

When Moses asked God's name, God said, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (3:13-14). By distinguishing Himself as a self-existent being, the Lord offered the ultimate reason to trust and obey Him: because He is God. "No human being can comprehend the nature of a being who had no begetter; not explainable is it how a being could exist who had no

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> F. C. Cook, ed., *The Bible Commentary Exodus--Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 13.

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes Vol. I* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 442.

beginning, who is his own cause for being.”<sup>4</sup> Moses could fully rely on God’s strength and care as he fulfilled his mission.

*Moses served God with what was in his hand.* Moses continued to offer excuses to dissuade the Lord from sending him to deliver Israel from Pharaoh: “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you’” (Exod. 4:1).

The Almighty asked, “What is that in your hand?” (4:2a). Moses answered, “A rod.” God told him to throw it to the ground. He obeyed and the rod became a serpent. He told Moses to pick it up, and it returned to its former state (4:3-5). “The rod was the symbol of authority in Egypt, and Pharaoh was represented by the serpent figure...featured prominently on his crown. The first sign then suggests that Pharaoh and his authority are completely in the power of God.”<sup>5</sup>

The Lord told Moses to place his hand in his bosom. It was leprous when he pulled it out. The Lord told him to put his hand in his bosom again and the leprosy disappeared (4:6-8). God’s use of leprosy may have shown his intent to punish Pharaoh (Num. 12:1-12; 2 Kings 5:22-27; 2 Chron. 26:16-21).

In case the first two miracles did not persuade, God provided yet another sign to be performed by Moses’ own hand. Moses would be able to “take water from the river and pour *it* on the dry *land*”—and the water would become blood (4:9). This “shows God’s control of the prosperity of Egypt, which was entirely dependent on the waters of the Nile.”<sup>6</sup> When Moses used his resources as God directed, he was an effective servant able to accomplish great things.

*Moses stepped out of his comfort zone to serve.* Moses had shepherded his father-in-law’s sheep for forty years. Following his failed attempt at age forty, He no longer sought to lead God’s people. He stopped looking for a way to be excused and said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send” (4:13). God, angered, told him that his brother Aaron was already on the way to meet him and would serve as a Moses’ mouthpiece (4:14-17). Moses obeyed. It required him to go beyond his level of comfort, but he led God’s people with humility and gladness (Num. 12:3, Exod. 15).

<sup>4</sup> Hugo McCord, *Getting Acquainted With God* (Henderson, TN: Hester Publications, 2002), 16.

<sup>5</sup> John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



## Application

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*We rely on God's strength and care to serve.* The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision when he was in Corinth, saying, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-11). The apostle stayed for three and a half years proclaiming the word of God. Perhaps he partly alluded to this when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). To the Romans he wrote, “If God be for us who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Young or old, we may be ridiculed for our belief in God, but we must rely on the Lord for strength and boldly affirm our faith. Be ready to explain your hope with a gentle spirit and respect for the Almighty—“having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed” (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

*We obey God by serving with what is in our hand.* Choosing Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites (Judg. 6), God promised, “I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man” (6:16). Despite seeing an angel, Gideon requested further proof that he was indeed the chosen leader. God provided the proof with the wet (and then dry) fleece. Gideon assembled 32,000 men, but God drastically reduced the number. He used Gideon and only three hundred men with pitchers and torches to defeat the massive Midianite army. God taught Gideon to serve with what was in his hand.

Those to whom God has given a special ability to give monetarily should do so with liberality. Others have a talent for leadership; they should diligently put it to use. A cheerful demeanor ought to be exemplified by all who have opportunity to show mercy. Paul said, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:8-13).

Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Our houses, cars, food, and time are all blessings from God. We need to readily prepare meals, open our homes with warm hospitality, and take brethren to the doctor. If God has blessed you with children or grandchildren, take them to visit a widow. Wash her windows, rake leaves, or clean her house. The possibilities of service are endless.

*We display trust in God by stepping out of our comfort zone to serve.*

Ananias was very uncomfortable going to Saul of Tarsus. He knew Saul had done great harm to the saints in Jerusalem and had come to Damascus with “authority from the chief priests to bind all” who called on the Lord’s name (Acts 9:10-14). The Lord told Ananias he was going to use Saul to preach “before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” and suffer many things for the sake of his name, so Ananias went (9:15-18).

Those who are called upon to teach a class, talk to their neighbors about the gospel, or serve in an unfamiliar way may have to step outside their comfort zone. However, those who accept the assignment may discover that they grow until such actions become second nature.

## Conclusion

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God has called us, as his children, to serve. We cannot do this if our focus is self. God expects us to use what is in our hand to carry out the mission. There are many tangible and intangible things in our possession that we should use to serve the Lord. We should not trust in our own abilities, but rely on God to give us strength. It may require that we step out to accept a new role, or walk in unfamiliar territory. We are assured, however, that if we serve with gladness and humility, God will be pleased.

## Discussion

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1. Describe how the world pressures us to focus on self.
2. Discuss the similarities between Moses’ excuses and ours today.
3. What talents do we have that may be used to serve the Lord?
4. What possessions do we have that may be used to serve God and others?
5. Describe the difference between serving and serving with gladness and humility.

## Lesson 16

# Serving Without Being Appreciated

by Roberta Edwards

## Introduction

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Several years ago, I sat in a meeting with a couple of dozen missionaries in Port au Prince, Haiti. I sat quietly and listened to their complaints. I was a newcomer to the mission field compared to the others in attendance. Many had four or more years my tenure in missions. I had hoped to hear some secrets for success from their time in the trenches.

The general discussion was fueled by a sense of disillusionment and bitterness. Each missionary tried to top a fellow missionary with a story of some poor person they had served in the past who turned around after being helped and hurt them. They were represented as liars, cheaters, thieves, cads, ungrateful and downright mean to their benefactors. Some of the missionaries vowed to never put themselves in such a disadvantaged position again. No one would ever use them, make fools of them or hurt them to the extent that these people had.

So many times in our Christian walk, we serve willingly, fervently and with a whole heart only to be ridiculed, taken for granted and hurt when those we are helping don't appreciate what we do. After all we deserve to be appreciated, right? It would seem that if we are going out of our way, denying self, taking our precious time and giving our all to help some downtrodden, helpless person, the least they could say would be thank you. They could take their responsibility and do the right thing after we help them. They could treat us with respect and honor after what we went through to help them!

## Foundation

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- **Jesus served those around him**

*In the Gospel accounts, we have many examples of our Lord serving those around him on a regular basis. Let's look at one of these examples to see what we can glean from His attitude that will help us as we serve.*

In Luke 17:11-17, we see the story of the Ten Lepers. These ten men were shunned by the community around them and thought of as “unclean.” They lived outside of the city walls and were required to yell “unclean” when anyone came near. I can only imagine this was a grief-filled existence. Let's read the text:

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up *their* voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw *them*, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:11-19)<sup>1</sup>

In the text we see the Lord exhibiting trust, compassion, mercy and unconditional love.

## Application

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*Trusting.* These men yelled “ Jesus, Master, Have mercy on us.” These men, though shunned by society, had heard of Jesus and his great works. They knew who he was and were not afraid to speak to him. They had a need and knew from his reputation that he would at least listen so they called to him. How many times has our reputation for helping or not helping influenced whether or not we are approachable? It will determine whether or not people feel comfortable and accepted enough to come to us in a time of need. Our Lord had an attitude that bade those in need to come to him time and time again.

*Compassion.* Our Lord was able to look at a person's situation and feel their pain and try to alleviate it. A young woman of sixteen was riding in the car with me. As we drove by, a group of women alongside the road

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

yelled “Look at Roberta, I cannot believe she would put someone like her in the car.” She appeared to not react to the comments on the outside, but I know her heart must have bled a little more. At sixteen years of age, she had already gained a horrible reputation. At seven her mother began to sell her and her sister for favors to men. At fourteen, after spending years hearing about a new life in our Bible studies for kids, this young girl asked to be baptized. Even after baptism she struggled with sin and her reaction to men. You have all heard stories about sexually abused children and how they struggle to escape this captivity. Her self esteem was tied up in her abuse. If someone said something to hurt her feelings, she would search for a male response to help her feel loved and needed. Thankfully our Lord sees our ugliness, sin and shortcomings, and he still has compassion for our hurting hearts.

*Mercy.* I remember another discussion at the meeting that we mentioned earlier about a young mom with three children. The missionary said that they had taken this woman off of the streets, given her a job, given clothes



to her kids, shoes and food to only to see this “shameful” woman pregnant again with no husband. This missionary put her outside and refused to help again because she was a waste of time. I am so thankful that our Lord looks at what I can become and not what I have been. He gives me what I don’t deserve and that is another chance. He can wipe away my past if I agree to obey his will. I can have mercy.

*Unconditional love.* As the fury of the missionary meeting reached its peak, a quiet preacher raised his hand. He began to speak words that silenced the room. He asked questions like these: What was your response to Jesus the last time he got you out of a difficult situation? Did you thank him? Did you treat him with honor and respect? Everyday? Do you only love when it feels good to you? Do you give your love with one hand and

hold the other hand out to receive your payment for what you have given? When you sin, are you careful to never repeat that sin again to show God you are worthy of forgiveness? Or do you fall time and time again in agony and pain and know that your Jesus understands and forgives. Do you believe we have a God that looks down his nose at our weaknesses? Do you have a savior that loves you in spite of your weakness? He went on to explain that Jesus' love is not like our love but that he does it not to receive honor and glory, respect or love but that his love is there for all of us. We don't deserve it but he gives it freely.

In Luke 17:15, the one leper came back to praise and thank our Lord. I wonder what some of those missionaries would have done to the nine lepers that didn't come back and say thank you to Jesus. I am pretty sure there were those there that would have struck them with leprosy once again for their ungrateful attitudes. There are those that would never talk to them again if they saw them in the streets. I am sure there are even a few who would give them a larger dose of leprosy for their bad attitude. Yeah, that would show them!

## Conclusion

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Our example in Jesus is that he continues to do good, all the time, any opportunity he has, regardless of people's responses. He finds comfort in knowing he is about His father's business and showing His father's heart to others. In Luke 6:33, 38, we can find that same comfort and assurance when we follow His example of trust, compassion, mercy and unconditional love.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

We can be assured by our Lord's example that if we fervently serve with love, mercy, and compassion, that as we do, it will be given back to us.

## Discussion Questions

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1. Have you ever thought someone was too far gone or too bad to receive compassion, forgiveness, or unconditional love?
2. Do people look at us and feel we can be trusted to share their weaknesses, pain, faults and failures? Or do we exhibit a attitude of being better than others?
3. Do we offer our love to others and expect a response in return? Gratefulness? Honor? Respect?
4. How do we give to others and not expect to receive an immediate reward?

## Lesson 17

# Serving Beyond Communion Trays

by Patsy Loden

## Introduction

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Serving beyond communion trays! Do you wonder what that means? Let's try to figure out the depth of this statement. Our Christian life revolves around the Lord's supper. Each time we partake of it, we renew our covenant to Christ, our commitment to him, and our communion with him. We remember his beautiful life, his horrible death, and his glorious resurrection from the dead; thus, sealing our being with him forever and ever when He comes to claim his bride and takes her to that heavenly bridal supper prepared by his Father. Isn't that a beautiful thought? In the meantime, after the communion trays each first day of the week, what then? Let's read 1 Peter 2:9 and see if this helps us understand, "what then?" "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."<sup>1</sup> This verse explains our attitude as we go out into the dark world and live as the children of light of whom we shine as the stars in the sky (Phil. 2:15).

## Foundation

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- **Chosen Generation - Jesus gave his life, his death, his eternity for us.**
- **Royal Priesthood - We reign as queens in the home and priests in the church.**
- **A Holy Nation - Devoted to Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, a spiritual nation in an evil world.**
- **Special People - God's own possession and surrounding.**
- **Priesthood Under High Priest and Servant Attitude of the King of Kings - Christians are priests serving under Jesus.**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.



*Chosen generation.* We are the end blessing of God's covenant to Abraham. We are the children of Abraham through the blood of Christ (Gal. 3:7). Christ came to give us eternal life (Rom. 5:10).

*Royal priesthood.* We reign on earth as kings (Rom. 5:17; Rev. 5:9-10). Women are the queens of the home (Prov. 12:4). We are priests of God (Rev. 1:5-6; 8:3; Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:15-18).

*A holy nation.* The church is now the spiritual Israel of the Old Testament (Heb. 8:7-13). The church will be the spiritual Israel that will have its Jerusalem in heaven (Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 12:22-34). Israel serves God and brings others to him. As spiritual Israel, we must be holy (Eph. 1:4). Being holy, we must also be loving (1 John 4:8; 1 Cor. 13:4-13). Being holy and loving, we are naturally people who serve as Father God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are there to help and serve their children at all times (Heb. 4:13; 1 Pet. 5:7; Phil. 4:3).

*Special people.* In Greek this word means an "ownership," "a surrounding." The Godhead surrounds Their children and Satan must go through Them before reaching one child.

Job is an example of the surrounding of God. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is a promise. We need fear nothing on earth in serving the Godhead as They will protect our souls while we do Their will in serving mankind with the gospel and good works (Matt. 10:28).

*Priesthood under high priest and servant attitude of the King of Kings.* Christians are priests serving under the High Priest Jesus (Heb. 10:19-24; Rev. 20:6). Jesus came to minister to mankind physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually and not to be ministered to by others (Matt. 20:25-28.) Jesus left his followers an example to follow and how to be servants to others (Eph. 2:8-10). This is the crux of our discussion today: servanthood like Christ.

## Application

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*Women have special places of service as priests under our High Priest Jesus.* We were created to be a helpmeet for man (Gen. 2:20). Next to being a suitable mate for her husband, Eve was created to be mother to their children (Gen. 4:1-2). Proverbs 31 gives the attributes of the wife's service to her family. Solomon, in his wisdom, said that a virtuous woman was a crown to her husband (Prov. 12:4). The wife is to be the reigning queen and ruby treasure of the home. She looks after all the needs of her household with great care.

*As priests we offer prayers which rise as incense to the heavenly throne.* These prayers are to be continuously given (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayers are to be with thanksgiving, supplications, and requests for self and others (Phil. 4:6).

*As priests, each Christian offers the sacrifice of self to the Godhead* (Rom. 12:1).

*As priests, Christians are the light of the world and by serving mankind with good works, the world will be brought to glorify the Father* (Matt. 5:16). Good works are the result of being created anew in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10).



*As priests, Christians eat the Bread of Life and live forever* (Matt. 6:58).

*As priests, Christians continue the good work of ministering the gospel and good works to mankind in the stead of Jesus* (Rom. 9:21-23; 2 Cor. 4:5-7; Gal. 6:10).

*Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but he came to serve as we have seen.*

There are special ways that women are called upon to serve. 1 Timothy 5:9-10 is a checklist for widows who were to be helped by the church. These requirements must be the works that a woman spent her life providing for her family and the world. A woman was to have been the wife of one husband, brought up children, be hospitable to strangers,

washed (or cared for) the saint's feet, and she must have diligently followed very good work. Godly women will follow this pattern set down for them.

*Women are to teach children and other women God's way.* Timothy was taught by his mother and his grandmother leaving us an example (2 Tim. 1:5). Older women are to instruct the younger women in love: love for husband and children (Tit. 2:3-5). Women are to labor in the gospel in any way that is helpful to those who preach the word as did the women in Philippi (Phil. 4:3). World Video Bible School is a good example of women teaching. Praying and aiding those who do preach at home and in the various parts of the world is being a useful servant to the Lord.

## Conclusion

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Women are not merely “pew fillers,” but beyond the communion trays they are very much a part of the priesthood and kingship given to Christians by Jesus. Women have been given much influence in the family and in the church. Such a worthy servanthood has been given them by the Godhead. They are the servants who minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the church family and to the world at large. It is through women's loving hands doing many good deeds that the world sees the love of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, being a true and living presence in the form of earthen vessels. Peter was inspired to write in 1 Peter 3:4 that a woman who was of a meek and quiet spirit was in the sight of God a woman of great price. In Proverbs 31:30 the worthy woman is given praise and the declaration, “Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.” Can women of today do any less?

## Discussion

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1. Why is it so important to the servanthood mindset to obey 2 Corinthians 10:5?
2. Why is Philippians 4:8 so vital in developing one's servanthood persona?
3. Why is it important for a congregation to practice the plea of Paul to the Philippians (2:1-11)?
4. What are some other ways women can serve in the church?
5. In describing the servanthood of women in the church, why is the warning in Revelation 2:5 so important to remember?

## Lesson 18

# Serving as Shepherds

by Johnnie LeMaster

## Introduction

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Frequently, the problem is not so much finding men who are qualified for the eldership as it is finding men who will accept the responsibilities of the eldership. In the early church, the eldership involved much work (1 Thess. 5:12-13). There is more to being an elder than just filling an office. The person who will not accept the work that goes with the office should not be serving. Effective elders need the courage to lead Christians of the Lord's church by scripture's inspired teaching.

## Foundation

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- **Elders should take heed to themselves**
- **Elders should take heed to the flock**

Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).<sup>1</sup> This passage makes it clear that in order for elders to serve as shepherds, they must do two things: pay careful attention to themselves and to the flock.

*Elders should take heed to themselves.* (1) They should make sure that they qualify for the work (Tit. 1:6ff; 1 Tim. 3:2ff). (2) They should know the Bible and know it well (1 Pet. 2:1-2; 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:18; Acts 17:11). (3) They must be men of character. It has been said, "You may not be what you think you are, but you are what you think" (cf. Prov. 23:7). It is profoundly

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

important that elders be what the Lord would have them to be. An elder “may be the inspiration that helps someone to endure temptation and to develop his potential for the Lord. Be loving. Be tender. Any Christian virtue should be yours to an advanced degree.”<sup>2</sup> In Ephesians 4:29-5:2, Paul gives valuable instruction that every elder should take seriously:

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.



(4) The elder must take heed that his beliefs, actions, and attitudes make him more and more like Christ as time progresses. If an elder ceases to meet the qualifications or do the work, he must resign the office.

No elder is perfect. All elders have their shortcomings. No man (other than Christ) has ever lived a perfect life, but an elder’s reputation with the flock must be solid. He must be a man of integrity and humbleness. He must love people. A elder should be acutely aware that loyalty, trust, and

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Davis, “The Proper Attitude of Elders Toward The Flock” *The Gospel Journal*, Vol. #. Issue # (2010):83.

respect must be earned, and that they can easily be damaged or destroyed. Elders who rule in prideful ways breed resentment (3 John 1:9). When a good elder makes a mistake, he repents. Souls are depending on him; this is his trust, duty, and passion.

*Elders must take heed to the flock.* (1) Elders must be careful that they feed the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). The word “feed” means to see that the flock has adequate and proper food (1 Pet. 2:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14). Elders must be certain of the soundness of all preaching, all teaching in classes, and all lesson helps in classes. This entails that they themselves are sound. The elder’s job is to look to the future and prepare people to hear, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of the Lord.” The work of an elder is like that of a father over a family (1 Tim. 3:4), a shepherd with his sheep (1 Pet. 5:2, Acts 20:28), and a steward entrusted with the well-being of others (Tit. 1:7, 1 Pet. 5:2).

(2) Elders must take heed that they take the oversight of the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:1). Elders are to rule over the flock (Heb. 13:17). That rule should be informed and with good intention. Every shepherd must remember that the Bible is always the ultimate standard, and the flock is a precious treasure to be guarded and cared for. As good stewards, elders are to be sure that the congregation is safe and properly nurtured. Through love and great passion for the Lord’s church the elder prays for wisdom to lead as God would have him to lead. After all, he will answer to God for his oversight (Heb. 13:24). The church is the body and the bride of the Lord who redeemed her with his own blood. It is not to be treated lightly or taken for granted. If an elder has the fruit of the spirit, if he possesses the Christian graces, if his life emulates the life and teachings of Christ, then he cannot fail to do what is right for the flock.

## Application

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*Elders must serve with Christ in mind.* Christ, the chief shepherd, serves as more than a lead shepherd. He is our head (Eph 5:22ff), our mind (Phil. 2:4ff), our example (1 Pet 2:21) and our life (Gal 2:20). Following his lead as shepherd demands not only that we think of him, but also that we think like him. Bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ demands our all (2 Cor. 10:1-5). Rather than being captive to the law of sin (Rom 7:23), Christians—elders especially—are mentally and spiritually captive to Christ. Elders with this mindset will be well prepared to feed God’s people.

*Elders must serve with self in mind.* Elders as leaders and shepherds of the flock must not be so “others directed” that they forget themselves. Leadership is not about self or selfishness, but about selflessness. The

exhortation in Acts 20:28 demands that all elders pay attention to themselves. When we put others first (esteeming others better than ourselves, as all Christians should do, Phil. 2:1ff), then we are doing what is ultimately best for ourselves. The twin principle of loving God first and loving our neighbor second provides the proper motivation. When they love God first and others second, elders do what is best for God, their neighbors *and* themselves.

*Elders must serve with Christians in mind.* As spiritual overseers of God's flock (Acts 20:28), elders are primarily responsible for God's people. The church was purchased by the blood of Christ, but there is a sense in which elders should also "purchase" something: a good reputation among the congregation's members. In 1 Timothy 3:13 deacons are said to "purchase" (KJV) a good standing. They do not, of course, purchase it with money, but by serving well and demonstrating the excellent character described in the previous verses. The same principle applies to elders. An elder should always ask himself, "How am I serving? What does the congregation think of me? Am I a good example and a good teacher?"

*Elders must serve with non-Christians in mind.* The list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:7 demands that elders have a reputation worthy of respect by those who are outside the body of Christ. This requires more than a one-time qualification met just to become an elder; elders are to remain worthy of this respect. Though tasked primarily with the spiritual oversight of God's flock, elders must have real concern for the lost so that these souls might, through the elders' effort and example, become part of the flock.

## Conclusion

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The Lord's brother, James, describes the character that God seeks in a Christian. An elder should do his very best to conform his own thinking and life to this description. This beauty of character will be what gives him the quality and qualification to be one of God's shepherds. James 3:13-18 reads,

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your heart, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But His wisdom that is from above is first pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits,

without partiality, and without hypocrisy. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

There is no job or work of any sort that is more important than the work of the shepherd.<sup>3</sup>

## Discussion

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1. How does an elder take heed to himself?
2. In what ways can an elder take heed to the flock?
3. Discuss ways in which elders may serve.

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Philip Davis for his August 2010 article on elders in *The Gospel Journal*, from which I have taken many thoughts for this lesson.



## Lesson 19

# Serving as Deacons

by Aubrey Johnson

## Introduction

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The New Testament is filled with inducements for faithful living. The crown of life and the tree of life are promised to those who are faithful unto death. But in 1 Timothy 3:13, there is a unique incentive directed to a special group of people. Deacons who serve well are guaranteed two remarkable things: a good standing and great boldness. The first has to do with the evaluation of others. The second grows out of your assessment of yourself.

## Foundation

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- **Service results in high esteem**
- **Service results in boldness**

*Service results in high esteem by God's people.* Reputations are built, and that process begins long before you are appointed as a deacon. You construct your reputation through a commitment to excellence in the little things you do each day. Every task and human encounter is part of the fabric of your character and credibility. They determine how others see you and how you feel about yourself.

When a deacon serves commendably, he is held in high esteem by God's people. His stock goes up in their eyes. His influence grows in proportion with his honorable service. The word "good" comes from the Greek word *kalos* which means high or noble. The word "standing" comes from the Greek word *bathmos* meaning step or stair and refers to a grade of advancement. Together they speak of one who is held in high regard.

People have a good opinion of him. They respect and appreciate him because his work is characterized by excellence.

The honor and esteem enjoyed by faithful deacons comes from God's house, the church. Some people go to great lengths to be recognized by the government or a leading university. Greater than praise from the President of Harvard or the President of the United States is the commendation of people of faith. To be respected in the church is the highest tribute one can receive on earth. Winning awards in athletics or at work cannot compare with receiving the admiration of people who possess the mind of Christ.

*Outstanding service also results in great boldness.* As you experience a string of successes, momentum builds for doing more. Your confidence increases with every victory along the path of life. After losing five pounds, you know you can drop twenty. After running one mile, you are sure you can finish a five-K. After saving a thousand dollars, you realize ten thousand is not beyond reach. This lesson from daily life applies equally to your spiritual growth and ministry. Confidence is a consequence of doing well. The boldness Paul speaks of is a by-product of faith in



Christ. People of great faith are people of great boldness. Faith is the fuel that enables you to serve with distinction in God's kingdom. It increases your power and peace. Satan wants to destroy your faith and your ministry. As faith declines, a Christian loses his confidence. His fears and sins make him nervous and hesitant. Because he is afraid of failure or exposure, he treads softly lest he be disappointed or discovered.

A dynamic deacon is bold because he is not concealing a double life or a doubtful heart. His faith is genuine and his service is sincere. Faith is a performance enhancer that expands a person's ministry and influence. He sees new possibilities of service that others cannot imagine. The spiritual giants of Hebrews 11 were powered by faith to serve with distinction (11:33-34). They were people of vision, endurance, and resilience. They

were not minimalists, limited by their job descriptions and satisfied with the status quo. Rather, they were ready unto every good work (Tit. 3:1).

The same is true in the local church. The more a deacon is faithful the less he is fearful. No problem can defeat him and no criticism can derail him. Faith makes a deacon bold because it links him to Christ (John 15:5). Faith equals capacity for service. It allows a man to tap into potential that unbelievers cannot access. It makes him frank in speech and courageous in action. Like Paul, every servant of God should pray for increased boldness (Eph. 6:18-20), but prayer alone will not suffice. By serving well, you gain the confidence you need to do even greater things for God's glory.

## Application

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*Dynamic deacons strive for excellence*, moreover, the truth is that everyone struggles from time to time. When you are not hitting your stride, giving up is not the answer. There may be occasions when stepping down makes sense. For instance, if your marriage is on the rocks or your children are at risk, you may need more time to focus on their needs. But in most cases, your work as a deacon should complement your role as a spouse or parent. One should make you better at the other.

Frankly, the problems that tempt a deacon to hang up his spurs prematurely are the ordinary stresses and strains that accompany church work. The answer to life's demands is not quitting. Rather, it is refining your position, reframing your perspective, and reconnecting with your purpose. Fatigue is a sign that you are trying to operate on your own strength without drawing on God's strength. It is a result of cutting yourself off from His resources for renewal. Before jumping ship, make sure you've considered all your options.

*Dynamic deacons do not sulk and complain when things are not perfect.* Paul told Christians to "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).<sup>1</sup> They endure and abound in the work of the Lord. They continually increase their capacity to handle responsibility and adversity.

Will there be tough times and difficult relationships. You bet. That is why every church needs an extraordinary team of servants to pull together when things get rough. As Paul exhorted, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). It takes Christian manhood to meet the challenges Satan throws at the church.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

Discouragement indicates that you have a problem that needs to be addressed. There is a reason you feel this way. Something needs to change. It may be your attitude, assignment, schedule, habits, or companions. General feelings of depression can usually be traced to an area where you are struggling. Pay attention and figure out where the pain is coming from. Are you prone to pessimism? Are you mismatched with your position? Are you plagued by perfectionism? Are you staying up past your bedtime? Are you hanging around the wrong pals? Find the trouble and then face it, fix it, and move forward.

The problem with bailing is that it doesn't require you to grow. You may find a temporary sense of relief, but you will not find long-term satisfaction. When you think of the things you are proud of in your life, they have one thing in common: they challenged you and you stuck it out. So make up your mind to hang in there. Constantly examine yourself in order to carefully pinpoint problems and find practical solutions for addressing them.

## Conclusion

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Every day, Satan will tempt you to turn in your badge of faith and call it quits, but do not draw back (Heb. 10:39). Shrinking from responsibility is not the path to the life you want. So next time the devil comes knocking, just tell him, "Not today." Get a good night's sleep, meet with a friend and pray, and do one small thing to advance your ministry. Things will look brighter tomorrow.

## Discussion

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1. Imagine that one of your fellow deacons told you he was planning to resign next Sunday. What would you say and do to help him reconsider?
2. What can deacons do to battle fatigue and discouragement?
3. Why is serving as a deacon a high privilege?

## Lesson 20

# Serving as Preachers

by Steve Baggett

## Introduction

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Because of the gracious words and acts of love regularly shared with the preacher by his fellow church members, the temptation is great for a preacher to “think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3) rather than seeing himself as a servant.<sup>1</sup> Without a doubt, preaching is one of the truly great opportunities and responsibilities in the world; God had only one Son, and He was a preacher. However, before He was a preacher, Jesus the Christ was a servant (Phil. 2:5-9).

This lesson will explore the responsibilities of preaching and emphasize that all of these are best fulfilled when the preacher recognizes that he is first and foremost a servant.

## Foundation

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- **Preaching the Word Is Best Accomplished by One Who Is a Servant (2 Timothy 4:2; Ephesians 3:8)**
- **Reproving God’s People Is Best Accomplished by One Who Is a Servant (2 Timothy 4:2; Jeremiah 6:10)**
- **Rebuking God’s People Is Best Accomplished by One Who Is a Servant (2 Timothy 4:2; Proverbs 15:32)**
- **Exhorting God’s People Is Best Accomplished by One Who Is a Servant (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:11)**
- **Preachers Serve Through Patience and Teaching (2 Timothy 4:2; 2 Peter 3:9)**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

*Preaching the word is best accomplished by one who is a servant.* When the preacher stands before God’s people and preaches the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8), he is accomplishing one of the most important tasks in the world. He is serving as a herald for Christ the King. As such he is delivering a message that is not his own. It did not originate with him, nor can it be changed by him. As the King’s herald, he is a servant. As Christ’s servant, he receives instruction from the King; his sustenance is given by the King; and his life function is to please the King. Only when he functions as a servant (Matt. 20:28) and has the attitude of a servant (Phil. 2:5-9) can he effectively preach his Master’s message.

*Reproving God’s people is best accomplished by one who is a servant.* The word “reprove” conveys the idea of correcting one whose behavior is not consistent with the will of Christ. One of the specific purposes of Scripture is the function of reproof (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Reproof or correction is best given by one who has earned the right to extend it, and it is best received when it is given by one whose attitude of service is clearly demonstrated through love. The prophet Jeremiah learned that even when God’s reproof is offered with love, it is often rejected (Jer. 6:10). How much more will that rejection come when reproof is delivered by one without a servant heart!



*Rebuking God’s people is best accomplished by one who is a servant.* The word “rebuke” may be thought of as a synonym to the word “reprove,” perhaps best defined as “censure”<sup>2</sup> or “warn.”<sup>3</sup> Paul instructed Titus to “rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13) and to “rebuke with all authority” (Tit. 2:15). It is a “sharper and more severe word than ‘reprove,’ generally with the

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<sup>2</sup> C. Michael Moss, *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (The College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 237.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 285.

idea of bringing the fault home to the offender.<sup>74</sup> No one can better rebuke, reprove, censure, warn, and bring fault home to the offender than one who is loved because he has always functioned as a loving servant.

*Exhorting God's people is best accomplished by one who is a servant.* To exhort someone is to encourage and urge him to do better. Paul exhorted (urged, encouraged) Timothy to pray regularly (1 Tim. 2:1). Barnabas was so named because he was known as an encourager (Acts 4:36). Encouragement to greater service in the kingdom will best be received from one who is readily recognized as a servant himself and who exhorts and comforts others “as a father does his own children” (1 Thess. 2:11).

*Preachers serve through longsuffering and teaching.* One of the amazing and loving attributes of God is His patience. Peter explained that the reason God is allowing the world to stand today without destroying it completely (2 Pet. 3:7) is His patience. He is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). The preacher who wishes to be served instead of desiring to serve others will distract folks away from the message he is delivering. In contrast, the preacher who lovingly teaches and instructs his listeners and suffers long with their shortcomings and failures is serving his brethren as Christ served His brethren (John 13:1-17) and will thereby draw people to the Lord through his message.

## Application

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*As a servant, the preacher appreciates the congregation's heritage.* Just like physical families, congregations have commonly accepted and often unspoken rules for how things are operated. These rules have served the congregation well for years. They are not inherently right or wrong; they are simply part of the congregation's heritage. The preachers who have served the congregation in the past, the former elders and deacons, and all who have been part of the congregation's past have made valuable contributions in determining who the congregation is today. To help the congregation grow, a preacher must embrace, appreciate, and build upon that heritage.

*As a servant, the preacher must love the congregation.* In Matthew 16:18 Jesus used the personal pronoun “my” in referring to the church. Thus the church—and more specifically, local congregations of the church—belongs to Jesus. The effective preacher will make the commitment to hold a deep love for every member of the congregation. His love for the church will be

<sup>74</sup> David Lipscomb and J. W. Shepherd, *I, II Thessalonians I, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (vol. 5 in *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*; Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1979), 239.

evident in his preaching, his service, and his personal relationships; it will be the motivating force behind every part of his work.

*As a servant, the preacher must be submissive to the congregation's leadership.* It was God's plan that elders be appointed in every place (Tit. 1:5). While the preacher will be a leader in the congregation, he is not the leader, and he should not strive to function as such. He should constantly exhibit by his words and actions his deep appreciation, respect, and love for the elders. He should support, encourage, and facilitate them in every way possible.

*As a servant, the preacher should nurture the family relationship of the church.* The fact that Christians are referred to as "brethren" indicates that the church is God's family. Thus, when the church comes together for worship, in addition to reverential awe of the Almighty, there should be a friendly, inviting, and loving atmosphere. This type of atmosphere will attract people to the assemblies and create in them a desire to return.

*As a servant, the preacher should strive to involve new members in the work of the congregation.* Successful businesses understand that their employees will be more effective if they are given ownership of their individual responsibilities. This is also true regarding the Lord's work. When new members are plugged into ministries in which their interests and talents lie, the opportunities for spiritual growth increase significantly.

*As a servant, the preacher should work with the elders to "keep the saved saved."* Church growth is not just limited to the addition of souls through conversion; it also requires helping individual members remain involved. While elders ordained by God bear the responsibility of shepherding the flock, the local preacher can be of great assistance in this area because of relationships he has with the congregation.

*As a servant, the preacher should promote an "outreach" mindset in the congregation.* Every activity of the congregation should be planned and facilitated with the goal of reaching out to the community with the love of Jesus. Whether an activity is a worship assembly, a Bible class, a fellowship meal, a weekend retreat, a youth devotional, or a family gathering, it should be designed with the purposeful intent of including others from the community. Thus, there is a clear pursuit of the inseparable goals of harvesting souls and, at the same time, sustaining and enhancing the growth of an already vital, living congregation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Application Section is adapted from an article originally submitted by the author to Hope and Expectation, Dec. 2011, edited by Jeff and Dale Jenkins.



## Conclusion

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Like the Christ they serve, preachers do their work “not to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). In so doing, they effectively spread the good news of Jesus to a lost and dying world and edify the church, the body of Christ.

### Discussion

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1. How did Christ “humble Himself” (Phil. 2:8)?
2. Identify reasons why it might be difficult for preachers to see themselves as servants.
3. How might a preacher develop a servant heart?
4. What are some ways preachers can teach the young to become servants?
5. What are some of the blessings which come from being a servant?

## Lesson 21

# Serving Like Bezalel

by David Wright

## Introduction

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Considered in the light of Old Testament usage, a reference to the filling of the Spirit may bring to mind the mighty feats of Samson. The Bible says that “a young lion roared against him; and the Spirit came mightily upon him.” As easily as another man might tear the tender body of a baby goat, Samson ripped apart the lion with bare hands (Judg. 14:5-6).<sup>1</sup>

Or the filling of the Spirit may evoke memories of prophets delivering messages directly from God. Joash, a young king of Judah, turned his back on the Lord. But “the Spirit of God took possession of Zechariah.” At an assembly of the people, this son of Jehoiada issued a ringing denunciation of the king’s folly (2 Chron. 24:20).

Isolated from their biblical context, do the words “filled [...] with the Spirit of God” lead the average reader to think of casting precious metals, creating artistic designs, setting stones, or weaving? Does a reference to the filling of the Spirit make anyone think of Bezalel? Does a typical church-goer even recognize Bezalel’s name? Probably not.

## Foundation

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- **Bezalel Was the Grandson of Hur (Exodus 31:2).**
- **It Was Hur’s Grandson Who Constructed the Tabernacle (Exodus 38:22).**
- **Bezalel’s Partner Was Oholiab Son of Ahisamach (Exodus 38:23).**
- **The Lord Himself Equipped Bezalel for the Great Task of Tabernacle Construction (Exodus 31:3-4).**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

*Bezalel was the grandson of Hur (Exod. 31:2).* When Israel fought Amalek in the desert, Moses held the rod of God in his hands. As long as he extended it, Israel prevailed. But whenever he lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur helped secure victory for God's people by seating Moses on a stone and holding up his hands (17:12).

*It was Hur's grandson who constructed the tabernacle.* The author of Hebrews affirms that "when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain'" (8:5). But Moses had no hand in the actual work of hammering, weaving, cutting stones, or embroidering. Moses himself recorded that "Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded" (Exod. 38:22).

*Bezalel's partner was Oholiab, son of Ahisamach.* Belonging to the tribe of Dan, Oholiab was a "designer and embroiderer" (Exod. 38:23). These two master craftsmen were assisted by "every able man" to whom the Lord gave "ability and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary" (36:1).

*The Lord himself equipped Bezalel for the great task of tabernacle construction.* "I have filled him with the Spirit of God," the Lord said, "with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs" (Exod. 31:3-4). Indisputably, God was speaking of a supernatural gifting.

## Application

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*Gifted people add beauty to the worship experience.* Bezalel was to "work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood" (Exod. 31:4-5). God had filled him and Oholiab with "ability to do every sort of work done [...] by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen" (35:35). These vibrant colors, precious metals, and various textures suggest beauty (28:2).

Faithful congregations readily embrace both the demand for what is essential and an appreciation for what is beautiful. God's people understand that the melody of the heart counts far more than harmony or pitch, but they revel in the joy of a special event that draws together a great number of truly talented singers. And the Lord's people understand that the truth of the message is far more important than the eloquence with which it may be presented, but their hearts thrill to the power of a message delivered by a man of God gifted with remarkable speaking ability.

*Gifted people thrive only if supported by the congregation.* The Lord filled Bezalel “with the Spirit of God [...] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze” (Exod. 31:3-4). Who was to supply these precious metals? Was Bezalel to fund the tabernacle out of his own pocket? No. The people of Israel “came, every one whose heart stirred him, and every one whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord’s offering to be used for the tent of meeting” (35:21).

Lack of congregational support renders a creative person ineffective. How does a woman with artistic talent make the church building more appealing to visitors if no funds are made available? How encouraging is singing led skillfully but joined halfheartedly? How effective is a gifted teacher whom no one comes to hear?

*God is the source of every natural gift.* The Lord said that he had “given skill to all the craftsmen” (Exod. 31:6, NIV). Did God give artistic skill to Israel’s priests or shepherds? No. The Lord enhanced gifts already naturally present.

But natural gifts must never be understood as genetic accidents. When Moses argued at the burning bush that he lacked the eloquence required of a good leader, the Lord replied: “Who



has made man’s mouth? Who makes him deaf, or dumb, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exod. 4:11). If God gives the gifts of speech, hearing, and vision, then surely he bestows creative talents too.

Mother Nature is not the giver of “natural” gifts. Father God deserves all the credit for every good thing. The Bible says that “every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas. 1:17).

God’s gifts call for a humble spirit. Moses records nothing about Bezalel’s attitude. But perhaps the character of the Exodus account itself is a fair reflection of Bezalel’s spirit. The main thing in Exodus 25-40 is the construction of the sanctuary, God’s portable house of worship. Bezalel’s own role is secondary.

## Conclusion

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The Hebrew name Bezalel means “in the shadow of God.” Bezalel served not only in God’s shadow but also in the shadow of men. Bezalel constructed the tabernacle, but Moses got the credit. For a few hours of one day, Hur held up the hands of Moses. The church remembers him every time a preacher encourages the congregation to “hold up the hands” of good men. But Hur’s grandson did tedious artistic work for months on end—only to be forgotten by all but the most studious Bible readers.

Probably, though, Bezalel was content to work in God’s shadow. He was serving the One who never forgets good. As the Spirit promises, “God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints (Heb. 6:10).

## Discussion

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1. Excluding Bezalel and Oholiab, name some Bible characters who played a vital but overshadowed role in God’s redemption drama.
2. If a little servant girl had not cared about his disease, how would Naaman have known of Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 5:1-4)?
3. Without the encouragement of Huldah the prophetess, how would the distressed Josiah have continued his spiritual revival (2 Chron. 34:18-28)?
4. What attitudes make it difficult to serve in the shadow (Mark 9:33-37; Phil. 2:3-8; 3 John 1:9-10)?
5. What is the relationship between dedicated service and encouragement or honor (Phil. 2:29-30; 1 Thess. 5:11)? How often do preachers and elders publicly commend the talented brothers and sisters who serve in the shadow?

## Lesson 22

# Serving Like Sons of Korah

by Charles Cochran

### Introduction

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People lost in the credits is a wonderful and encouraging concept! Some, because of great ability, “stand out.” They are well known. Moses, David, Peter, Paul are names so well remembered and respected. However, most of us are not very well known. We fall into the category of those “lost in the credits!” Yet, some of God’s greatest servants were those willing to stand in the shadows while others shone in the spotlight! They are those of one talent (Matt. 25:15). Ordinary people must be special to God for he made so many of them. The challenge of this lesson is to study the example of some men identified as the sons of Korah. To most Bible students, these men are not well known. By a close examination of these servants of the Lord, we are challenged by the lessons they teach us.

### Foundation

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- **The Identification of the Sons of Korah (Numbers 16; 26:10-11; 1 Chronicles 9:31; 12:6; 26:1, 2, 9, 14; 6:31-33; Psalm 42-50, 62, 72-85)**
- **The Significance of the Sons of Korah**

*The identification of the sons of Korah.* A careful study of these men reveals some truly encouraging and challenging lessons. These sons of Korah were from the family of a rebellious leader named Korah. A study of Korah reveals his rebellion towards Moses and Aaron. Korah was the “son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi” (Num. 16:1).<sup>1</sup> Along with Dathan and Abiram, Korah “rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

in the congregation, men of renown, they gathered together against Moses and against Aaron” (Num. 16:2-3a). Thus, Korah was a “ring leader” of rebellion to God’s chosen authorities, Moses and Aaron. It is revealed that “the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not” (Num. 26:10-11). This last verse is significant to our study.

*The significance of the sons of Korah.* One of the most important things we can learn from these sons of Korah is that the sins of the father do not necessarily cause those sons to share in those sins. It is sometimes true that children suffer the *consequences* of the wrong choices of fathers. But, sin is not passed from fathers to sons. The prophet Ezekiel stated: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezek. 18:20). Each person is responsible for their own sins! The sons of Korah did not die with the sin of their father upon them. Another significant truth we see in the sons of Korah is that God uses unknown, ordinary people for his glory! How many of us know much about these sons? These men are “lost in the credits” when it comes to being well known servants of the Lord! Yet, there are several indications throughout Scripture that they are great men of God. These men were placed in positions of service in the temple (1 Chron. 9:31-32). They were among the mighty warriors of David (1 Chron. 12:6). These sons were doorkeepers of the temple (1 Chron. 26:1; Ps. 84:10). The sons of Korah were identified as being “set over the service of song in the house of the LORD” (1 Chron. 6:31). One of the marvelous truths about these men is their writing of a number of the Psalms (Ps. 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88).

## Application

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*One can overcome a discouraging past.* It must have been difficult growing up knowing your father had died as a result of God’s judgment. For their father to die as a rebel against authority would have been a bitter memory for the sons of Korah. Yet, these men did not allow their father’s sin and subsequent punishment to pull them down. There are many today who struggle with similar situations. Their fathers do not set the proper example for them. Some pay an awful price of discouragement from such fathers. Yet, it is beautiful to see these sons of Korah rise *above* the poor example of their father!

*Sins are not shared.* Just because Korah rebelled did not mean the sons became rebellious. These men were different. Each person can change the course set by an unfaithful father. Within the freedom of will lies the

possibility of going a different direction! This is seen both positively and negatively in the lives of all. These sons became obedient servants of the Lord! They would not let the sins of their father become an *excuse* for godless living!



*The negative influence of a family can be changed.* The name of Korah was used by Jude as a warning to the false teachers of his day. Jude spoke about the “gainsaying of Core” (Jude 11). Even this New Testament writer remembered the negative influence of Korah. Though Korah left a bad influence from his life, his sons left a positive example through their lives! How encouraging it is to know that the influence of families can be reversed! One can rise out of a negative situation and make a positive difference in this world!

*Use what you have for the glory of God.* The sons of Korah do not stand out like Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, James or John. They indeed have been “lost in the credits” in the minds of Bible students. Yet, a careful consideration of their lives manifests a marvelous spirit. They were willing to do even small tasks for the glory of God! They used whatever opportunities to serve and become to us a lesson of great men who see no task as “too small” when it is done for the Lord! Oh, what a message! One of the beautiful Psalms attributed to the sons of Korah expresses it this way: “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10). Indeed, some of these men were “doorkeepers” in the house of God! They counted such an honor for it was done in service to the Lord!



## Conclusion

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The sons of Korah will continue to be a beautiful example of men who determine that they will not let their past become an albatross around their necks, but will focus on the possibilities of service and devotion to God. These men, while “lost in the credits,” become a credit to their God as they did whatever tasks given to them for the glory of the Lord! The greatness of their examples will forever serve as powerful lessons to the commitment of time and talent the Lord uses and blesses!

### Discussion

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1. What possible directions can sons of an unfaithful father go?
2. Are all sins of fathers passed on to succeeding generations?
3. How can children arise out of the negative influence of fathers?
4. What is to be the attitude of our serving God, even in the small tasks?
5. Why it is important that we see the freedom of will involved in the decisions of fathers and their children?

## Lesson 23

# Serving Like Micaiah

by Winford Claiborne

### Introduction

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If every preacher of every religious group in the United States had the faith and courage of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and other great prophets of God, would it make a difference in the moral and spiritual atmosphere of our nation? Would it make a difference in the purity and strength of the Lord's church? Isaiah called the leaders in Israel "rulers of Sodom." He compared the Israelites to the people of Gomorrah (Isa. 1:10). Jeremiah accused the prophets in Judah of committing adultery and walking in lies. "They are all of them unto me as Sodom and inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. 23:14).<sup>1</sup> God commanded Ezekiel to examine what was occurring in the nation of Israel. He told him to go into the temple of the Lord where there were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple and their faces toward the east; "and they worshiped the sun toward the east" (Ezek. 8:16). Amos, a prophet from the southern kingdom delivered a withering attack against the people in the northern kingdom and in the southern kingdom. He revealed God's message to the people of Judah: "I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked" (Amos 2:4).

### Foundation

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There were two groups of prophets among the Israelite people – the writing prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the non-writing prophets like Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and Micaiah. Ahab was serving as the king of Israel, the northern kingdom. Jehoshaphat was the king of Israel, the southern kingdom. Jehoshaphat paid a visit to the king of Judah. Ahab asked his servants, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-Gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king” (1 Kings 22:1-6).

Jehoshaphat must not have trusted the court prophets. He must have thought they would give a good report regardless of the truth. So he asked Ahab: “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so” (1 Kings 22:7-8).

Ahab called an officer and told him to bring Micaiah to him. “And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them” (1 Kings 22:9-10). The court prophets

predicted that the army of Israel would prevail against the Syrians. “And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth; let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak” (1 Kings 22:13-14).

Ahab called for the prophet Micaiah. The king asked the prophet: “Shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?” Micaiah answered: “Go, and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I make you swear that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?” Micaiah then told Ahab what God had revealed to him. “I saw all



Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" Micaiah then said: "Hear thou the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner, And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and will put a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets, And he said, Thou shall persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord has spoken evil concerning thee" (1 Kings 22:15-23).

## Application

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*False prophets exist in every generation.* We know that the Apostle Peter wrote: "But there were false prophets also among the people (that is, among the Jewish people, w.c.), even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." The false prophets "have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:1-2, 15). That is the reason the Apostle John wrote: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world: (1 John 4:1).

*Every preacher and teacher must base his lessons on the Word of God.* There will be times in the life of every preacher when he may be tempted to soften his message to keep from disturbing some leaders in the church or other members in the church. We must have the faith and courage of Micaiah. Even if we are speaking to prominent political or religious leaders, we must teach what God has revealed in his word. We must realize that God will judge us for what we say and how we say it. We must follow Paul's injunction to a young preacher: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

*Every preacher must preach the whole counsel of God.* One of the greatest needs in the church of our Lord is preachers who will say: “As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak” (1 Kings 22:14). We have too many preachers like Joel Osteen and Robert Schuler who are preaching pop psychology. They completely neglect to preach God’s Word in its entirety (Acts 20:26-27). How many evangelists on Trinity Broadcasting Network ever mention the book of Acts? They act as if the book of Acts does not even exist. I have never heard one of those evangelists discuss a single conversion from the book of Acts? Yet if you were to ask one of these evangelists if he believed the entire Bible is inspired, I have no doubt he would confess his faith in the inspiration of the scriptures. If they believe the book of Acts is inspired, they must not believe it is of any practical use.

## Conclusion

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I urge all preachers of the gospel to be faithful to the word, even if it means we are hated because of our preaching. The world needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must not compromise the truth if we want to see the church fulfill its mission in the world. May God help all of us who preach to have the faith and the courage of Micaiah!

## Discussion

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1. What does it mean to serve one’s own interests?
2. Why do some people serve their own interests?
3. What are some things that happen to the Lord’s Word when one’s own interest is served?
4. What is essential to be able to teach the truth of God?
5. What are the rewards of serving like Micaiah?

# Serving Like Andrew

by Bill Bryant

## Introduction

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We live in a world that worships the grand, the great, and the outstanding. But the wise among us soon realize that true greatness comes when people take care of the routine, the ordinary, and the little things. Even in the church, Christians can be easily deceived into thinking that because they are not delivering great lessons to packed auditoriums or going on mission trips to faraway places, their lives are not important to the Lord or to His precious church. This mindset could not be further from the truth!

The disciple Andrew proves that the Lord often calls and assigns His servants to work in the inconspicuous places in His kingdom. Even though Andrew labored in the shadow of his brother Peter and the other apostles, he was a mighty instrument in the hands of the Lord to help establish the church. Andrew shows us the kind of qualities that a servant must have to be effective in the Lord's work.

## Foundation

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- **Andrew Was a Man of Conviction (John 1:35-39).**
- **Andrew Was Always Bringing People to Jesus (John 1:40-42; 20:20-22).**
- **Andrew Was a Man Who Would Give His Best Effort (John 6:1-14).**

*Andrew was a man of conviction.* When Jesus met him for the first time, Andrew was one of John's disciples. One could not follow John the Baptist without being a man of conviction. Living and preaching a strong message of repentance in the wilderness away from the comforts,

conveniences, and complacency of the towns and villages would pose too great a hardship on the faint of heart.

Andrew's heart of conviction could also be seen in his immediate acceptance of Jesus after John the Baptist had acknowledged Him as the Lamb of God. He fully believed John's message that he was only the forerunner and had prepared his heart to accept and follow the Messiah when the time had come. He would soon tell his brother, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41).<sup>1</sup> Andrew was convinced and was, therefore, convincing to others in his life for the Messiah and his message. When one truly embraces the Lord, he will be ready to do whatever is necessary to spread the gospel that he believes so firmly (Rom. 1:16).

*Andrew was always bringing people to Jesus.* As soon as Andrew learned of the Messiah, he first found his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. His sense of urgency showed not only in his passion for the Lord, but also his true love and concern for his brother. What true believer would not want to immediately share the news that the long awaited Messiah had arrived?

Another example of Andrew's great passion for the Messiah and for people is seen on the occasion of the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Certain Greeks were present in Jerusalem for the worship and feast and requested to see Jesus. They approached Philip who seemed unaware of how to best handle the request from Gentiles. He brought the situation to Andrew who immediately knew what to do. These men needed to be brought to Jesus. Though these men were not of the house of Israel, Andrew knew that they needed the Lord. No one would ever be a nuisance to Jesus if they were seeking the truth. Can you imagine what this kind of spirit would do if embraced by the church today? It would inspire us to follow the example of the early church and develop 20/20 vision again (Acts 20:20 – teaching publicly and from house to house).

*Andrew was a man who would give his best effort.* The incident of the feeding of the 5,000 was a test for the disciple Philip to see what he would do. Philip's vision was overwhelmed by the size of the need compared to the available funds. But Andrew soon speaks up. He had found a boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish. It wasn't much, but he had at least found something to contribute. Even though Andrew expresses his doubt, it is still noteworthy that Andrew had made the effort to do what he could. The Lord then provided the rest. Andrew's initiative in doing what he could, even in the face of overwhelming odds, reflects an attitude that, if embraced, would result in tremendous growth in the Lord's church (Eph. 2:10; 4:15-16).

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

## Application

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*Like Andrew, we can serve the Lord today in humility.* Spiritual conviction that manifests itself in initiative and evangelism are notable and significant, but only if the attitude behind it is one of true humility. Andrew is mentioned less than a dozen times in all of the gospel narratives. Six of those times he is identified as the brother of Peter. He would forever live and work in Peter's shadow, but there is no evidence of any envy or resentment on the part of Andrew

Andrew does not play a conspicuous part in the gospel drama. He occasionally stepped up into the forefront of human attention, played his part and then slipped to the background. He is a great model for those in the church who labor today in relative obscurity. Andrew was more concerned with serving than building his personal reputation. He is an excellent example of the unselfish and humble attitude that Paul exhorts us to embrace as we strive to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:3-5).

*Like Andrew, we can do our best today to bring people to the Lord.* The church is made up of people of various talents that have been given to them by the Lord. Members have been placed in churches just as He pleased (1 Cor. 12:18). Though some are apt to teach, many are not. But what all can do is to strive to bring people to Jesus. Our personal life should be so lived that when we approach someone who has become good soil, an invitation to attend worship services and Bible studies with us should mean something (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Those apt to teach can then sit down and share with them the Gospel. Friendship evangelism is something that all can do and will do once properly motivated after the example of Andrew.

*Like Andrew, we can understand the importance of the ordinary.* Andrew was not the most beloved or the most popular disciple. His name is not even mentioned in the book of Acts. But he was a common man who fell in love with an extraordinary Lord and the Lord used him in a great way behind the scenes.

What is Christian service today? It goes far beyond what is seen "up front" in our worship services on Sunday. It includes those who bend their knees in prayer throughout the day and study their Bibles fervently so as to provide the wisdom, encouragement, and support for themselves and for the other members of the body in their cards and calls. It includes those who build their families on the foundation of God's Word and raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). It includes those who make the hospital visits and share their tears along side of those who have lost their loved ones. It includes taking food to the hungry and clothing the needy (Matt. 25:31-46). It includes the hundreds of little



things that never make the bulletin each week that are done in the shadows for the pure joy of service to others and on behalf of their precious Lord.

## Conclusion

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We need more Andrews in the church! After the shooting stars in our brotherhood have come and gone, the Andrews are the members that hold congregations together. They labor quietly and faithfully in the shadows, but every act is seen clearly by the Lord. They do not have to have their actions applauded from the pulpit or be the object of long write-ups in the church bulletin. They only want to hear the Lord tell them one day, “Well done.”

Andrew has left us a great legacy. He is living proof of the validity of God’s wisdom for building the church as expressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Andrew shows us that it is not our ability that matters most with God; it is our availability. Let us pray for workers in our churches as we are admonished to do (Matt. 9:38) and may they be like Andrew.

## Discussion

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1. Discuss what the church can do to produce more members like Andrew.
2. Discuss what improvements can be made in most congregations to better equip members “for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).
3. Discuss what we can do to enlarge our members’ thinking of what qualifies as Christian service.
4. Share ideas how we can help instill the spirit of Andrew within our young people.

## Lesson 25

# Serving in a Better Way

by Tracie Shannon

### Introduction

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It is hard to sacrifice time to serve others, especially those not in our immediate family. Not because we are cold and uncaring but because we honestly don't know how we will fit another person's needs in. And we can't. But God can. Jesus, the constant shepherd, can. Many times we look at the lesson of the vine and the branches mostly from the angle of the 'cut off and burning' part. But the huge lesson for the faithful Christian is the 'apart from me you can do nothing' lesson. In our busyness, we are in danger of losing our connection to the vine and in so doing, losing our ability to serve with joy and selfless love. Jesus reminded the apostles that God desired for them to do great works for him, but only through connection to the vine. No matter our personality or our level of spirituality, only the love of Jesus flowing through us as the branch will give us the compassion and energy we need to truly serve all the people God puts in our path.

### Foundation

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- **Serve to Glorify the Father by Bearing Fruit (John 15:8)**
- **Bearing Fruit Is Only Possible by Being Connected to Jesus, the Vine (John 15:4-5)**
- **Prayers Should be Offered for Those We Are Trying to Serve (John 15:7-8)**

*Serve to glorify the Father by bearing fruit.* The overall purpose of serving is to glorify the Father by bearing fruit (John 15:8). It is easy to become selfish or arrogant in service when the things done for others are intended to bring glory to self. But if one's motive is to reach out and serve another

in order to show the love and compassion of Jesus, actions truly become more loving, helpful and effective (Phil. 2:3-8).

*Bearing fruit is possible only through connection to Jesus, the vine.*

Because all spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3), an individual who is not connected to him has nothing of eternal value to offer those in need. An individual cannot give something away that he does not have just as a branch that has been cut from the grapevine will not produce grapes (John 15:4-5). If a life is not filled with the love and will of Christ because he is not connected to the vine, that life cannot give the love and will of Christ away.

*Prayers should be offered for those we are trying to serve.* Many times the person in need of service is going through difficulties that we may not fully understand or know how to deal with. James counsels us to pray for wisdom and then later in the book gives us a picture of what wisdom from God looks like (Jas. 1:5-6, 3:17). He also assures that the effective prayers of a righteous person will bring about change (Jas. 5:16). When Christ’s love and devotion to His word are flowing through a person, he will make godly requests on behalf of those he is trying to love through his service. Jesus makes it clear that God will answer those requests (John 15:7, 16).

## Application

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*Identity should be found in Christ and not in the act of serving.* It is so easy to let acts of service become our identity. This is a stumbling block because it will only lead to wrong motives. Remember in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul points out that incredible acts of service can be done and be worth nothing if not done with the right motives. The right motive for service or help to others should always be to bring them closer to God and thus glorify him. If our service glorifies us personally, then we forfeit the greater reward which is given by God. Also, clear motives will help guide us in truly helping others and not just making grand gestures to be seen by others as a great person. Sometimes bringing someone closer to God will not be the most pleasant thing for that person, but it will be the most loving thing. Our counselor, Bud Lambert, frequently counsels people to learn to differentiate between doing what will make others feel good for the moment and doing what will truly help them to move in the right direction. When our motive is to glorify God it is much easier to see the difference and act in the most loving way even when that is not the most popular way. The right motive for service keeps us focused on the person’s soul and not our own ego or their happiness.

*One’s own connection to Jesus is the greatest gift that can be given to those we are trying to serve.* Jesus states it plainly – “apart from me,

you can do nothing.” My knowledge of Jesus’ word and commitment to following it helps me have the wisdom to come to the aid of others in the most meaningful ways. Meditating on His love for me and abiding in it are the only ways I can show that true love to others for any length of time. Being “in Christ” lets the fruit of the Spirit be grown in my life. I cannot manufacture these fruits on my own. They come from the Spirit and my life lived in subjection to Christ. So as much as I truly want to serve others with genuine agape love, it is not in my power to do so if I am not connected to and abiding in Christ. So often we get so busy doing the work of helping and serving that we neglect our time of study and prayer and meditation. Our connection to the vine becomes



weak and we learn quickly that it’s hard to love others when we are disconnected. It’s easy to become frustrated with the weaknesses of those we are trying to serve when our connection is weak because we have begun to try to help others through our own power and not the power of Jesus in us. When this happens we generally get burned out, discouraged and have a martyr mindset. The power is never in us and how good and loving we are but always in the perfect power and love of Jesus flowing through our imperfect attempts to bring others closer to him.

*We should make it a habit to pray for God’s will in the lives of those we are trying to serve and his will in how we go about helping them.* Jesus promises that we will receive whatever we ask if we are abiding in Christ and His word is abiding in us. We know that Jesus isn’t promising us something to feed our own selfishness. He can only do things for our own good and the good of others. So this promise is extraordinary in its scope as we pray for those we serve. When we are abiding in Christ and His love, we will see more clearly what to pray for others. And it is easy for God to make the connections that we would never be able to make on our own. I believe he must love to surprise us with gracious gifts for those we are trying to love and serve.

## Conclusion

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Because Satan is the prince of this world, the world hurts. And therein lays our opportunity to lovingly serve. In our country alone, the hurt seems at a crescendo: The numbers of the poor, the homeless, the jobless, the fatherless, the widowed, the homosexual, the illegal alien, the single

mother or father, the orphaned and imprisoned are staggering to the human mind. There is no government agency with the ability to fix these things and there never will be. Christ is the only answer for these problems and we as his hands and feet are to be about binding up the wounds of the brokenhearted and doing every good that we can to those who are of our own household of faith. Jesus' example of building relationships in order to grow disciples is our answer to greater service. But it will cost a lot. "There are none righteous, not even one." But God is perfectly righteous and will take our feeble desire to be like him and enable us to show the world how amazingly loving and beautiful he is.

## Discussion

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1. What are some of the costs of serving others? Consider Matthew 5:40-41, 1 John 3:16-19 and 1 Timothy 5:3-4 as you examine the cost.
2. Who provides Christians with the resources to give in the first place? Read 2 Corinthians 9:8 and discuss whether or not we are like reservoirs or conduit with the resources God gives us.
3. Give examples of instances where God has answered prayers on behalf of someone you have tried to minister to.
4. How can we serve others while still fulfilling our role in the family?
5. Give examples of how your service to others as a family has strengthened your family.

## Lesson 26

# Serving Every Minute for the Master

by Cynthia Guy

## Introduction

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We've all heard the adage, "Man may work from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done." This perspective is concerned with the physical labor in homemaking and child rearing; but it brings up an important spiritual concept. Can we work for the Lord "from sun to sun" and is this service ever "done"?

"Serving Every Minute for the Master," implies an attitude of the heart—like praying "without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), which translates into action whenever needs arise.<sup>1</sup> These attitudes and actions should begin in childhood, flourish in our active adult years, and continue, if possible, in our golden years. A woman's life can be spent serving every minute for the Master.

## Foundation

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- **We Can Serve Every Minute In Our Childhood (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Luke 2:49, 52)**
- **We Can Serve Every Minute In Our Active Adult Years (Proverbs 31; 1 Timothy 5:10)**
- **We Can Serve Every Minute In Our Golden Years (Titus 2:3-5; Luke 2:36-37)**

*We can serve every minute in our childhood.* Children can learn to serve the Lord when they are taught and have models to emulate. God gave this prescription in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Adults are commanded to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength and teach diligently when

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

children lie down and rise up (every minute!). Modeling influences children (2 Tim. 1:5). They can learn to serve like Jesus, being about their Father’s business and growing in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:49, 52).

*We can serve every minute in our active adult years.* Proverbs 31 offers an excellent model for the virtuous women. She serves every waking minute, rising early and staying up late. She encourages her husband, cares for her household, and gives to those in need. Her life of service deserves honor if she has brought up children, lodged strangers, washed the saints’ feet, relieved the afflicted, and diligently followed every good work (1 Tim. 5:10).

*We can serve every minute in our golden years.* Many elderly women in Scripture spent time serving. Dorcas made clothing for widows (Acts 9). Anna and others served by praying night and day (Luke 2:36-37; 1 Tim. 5:5). Paul admonishes the mature women to teach novices about marriage, child rearing, and life skills (Tit. 2:3-5). We must never retire from the Lord’s service.

No matter what period of life—from childhood to golden years—we can develop the attitudes and abilities necessary to serve every minute for the Master. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “[A]nybody can serve.... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”<sup>2</sup>

## Application

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*It takes every minute possible for children to learn service for the Master.*

*Children need to learn about service.* Deuteronomy 6 stresses the importance of teaching God’s word—all the time! My mother put Bible hero posters, not teen idols, on our bedroom walls. My husband and I read the Bible to our babies at night and taught Bible books in the morning. Some children only learn Bible in class. Are we serving every minute possible in preparing for and teaching Bible classes? A recent Christian Woman magazine article reported, “Too often our Bible classes have become places where we fill the hour instead of filling our student’s hearts with the knowledge of God’s Word.”<sup>3</sup> One cannot spend too much time leading children in God’s service.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, “MLK on Service.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th733HfJwdo>, accessed 27 January 2010.

<sup>3</sup> April Meacham and Teah McWhorter, “Here, We Learn Something!” *Christian Woman Magazine* (July/August 2012), 49.

*Children need to practice service.* They will imitate adults. Like Lois and Eunice, a mother in our congregation modeled her faith by involving her daughter in ministry to the sick and teaching a Bible class. A grandmother took her grandchildren with her on mission trips. It takes quantity time to mold children into ready and willing servants. Bible teachers can plan service opportunities such as visiting and doing work for the elderly. If children are about their Father's business early, they will continue these



good habits into adulthood.

*We must use and manage minutes wisely in serving the Master in our active adult years.*

*How is our time spent?* Too much time is wasted watching TV and surfing the internet. The wise woman of Proverbs 31 shows the value of industry and time management: keeping her pantry stocked and her family's clothing clean. Homemaking is part of her service to God and loved ones. Career women often struggle to manage work and family. Many find efficiency in making a daily "to do" list, prioritizing each item, and marking them off as completed—remembering we do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

*Are we doing good works?* Our time is not our own. We are a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). Our life should be full of good works, such as being a supportive wife and training up children, helping the sick, poor, and discouraged—especially of the household of faith. My mother always invited the visiting preacher for a fried chicken dinner. Any wonder my sister and I married preachers? A woman in our congregation picks up expired bread at the grocery and distributes to the shut-ins. We can "serve



without ceasing” by being ready and willing to substitute teach Bible classes or call and offer help to a new mother, a cancer patient, a lonely widow(er), etc.

*We must never retire, but serve the Master in our “golden” years.*

*Let’s wear out, not rust out.* Some die years before they are buried. As long as we have breath, there are acts of service we can perform. Imagine the wisdom of aged Christians being passed to the younger! One congregation offered a class for young women in which older women taught good things through biblical principles and practical experience. Lynn Gannett wrote, “How a mature woman relates to her husband, speaks to her children, creates atmosphere and order in her home, and reacts to the trials of life are all circumstances of life that younger women can observe if given the opportunity. The challenge is for older women to allow younger women close enough to see.”<sup>4</sup> Older women, volunteer to help in Bible classes. Invite young women into your home and show them how to knit or make homemade bread, and teach them about godly living. Let your past experiences serve others now.

*We can serve in mind, if not in body.* A discouraged friend asked 10 older women to pray fervently for her loved one. God answered. Imagine the mighty force for good that praying widows can be for a congregation! An older shut-in I know makes homemade cards to encourage others. Another, bedridden with crippling arthritis, used her time to teach correspondence courses and called to cheer the discouraged. The spirit can serve, even if the flesh is weak.

## Conclusion

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So, can we work for the Lord “from sun to sun” and is this service ever “done”? We have learned that this implies an attitude of the heart which translates into action whenever needs arise. These attitudes and actions should begin in childhood, flourish in our “middle” years, and continue as much as possible in our golden years.

Children’s hearts can be molded into service through adult example and involvement. It takes quantity time in the home and church. Every minute is precious, for children grow up quickly. In our active adult years, we must manage our time wisely. We are to be a living sacrifice, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Our good works will follow us into eternity (Rev. 14:13). Good works were a requirement

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<sup>4</sup> M. Lynn Gannett, “Older Women/Younger Women: The Implementation of Titus 2,” in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Family Life Education* (ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit; Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 90.

for widows supported by the church (1 Tim. 5:10). Even in the golden years, women can teach from wisdom and experience. The frail can pray and encourage. The hymn says, “We’ll work ‘till Jesus comes,” not “We’ll work ‘till we feel like quitting.” Our rest will come later. From the cradle to the grave, we can—we must—be “serving every minute for the Master.”

## Discussion


1. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” Discuss some of the influences you had as a child that still foster actions and an attitude of service in your life.
2. What is the value of having a “to do” list and/or a personal time planner?
3. Discuss activities in the church in which older women can serve.
4. Consider the concept of our being a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service (Rom. 12:1-2). In light of this, discuss the question: “Can we work for the Lord ‘from sun to sun’ and is this service ever ‘done’?”



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## Lord, Make Me a Servant

We often sing, “Make me a servant; Lord, make me like you.” Jesus came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). He illustrated humble service by washing the feet of His disciples. How can we be His followers without doing the same?

Following the example of Jesus, we need to develop the heart of a servant and get down to the business of “washing feet.”

*Lord, Make Me a Servant* provides two quarters of Bible study material in powerful lessons we all need to hear. Suitable as a course of study for junior high through adult classes, this book is also valuable for personal and family Bible studies. Lessons include:

- Serving Is Not About Me
- Serving Is About God
- Serving One Another
- Serving With Humility
- Serving Without Distraction
- Serving Without Being Appreciated
- Serving as Shepherds
- Servings as Deacons
- Serving Every Minute for the Master

Studying these topics—and taking the lessons to heart—will help us follow Christ’s example as willing, loving, joyful servants of God.

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