

Bible Study for February 27th and March 1st

Serving God is not a job for the casually interested. It's costly service. He asks for your life. He asks for service to Him to become a priority, not a pastime.

The ministry of serving may be as public as preaching or teaching, but more often it will be as sequestered as nursery duty. Serving may be as appreciated as a good testimony in a worship service, but typically it's as thankless as washing dishes after a church social. Most service, even that which seems the most glamorous, is like an iceberg. Only the eye of God ever sees the larger, hidden part of it.

Serving is as commonplace as the practical needs it seeks to meet. That's why serving must become a spiritual discipline.

The flesh connives against its hiddenness and sameness. Two of the deadliest of our sins – sloth and pride – loathe serving. So if we don't discipline ourselves to serve for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom (and for the purpose of Godliness), we'll "serve" only occasionally or when it's convenient or self-serving. The result will be a quantity and quality of service we'll regret when the Day of Accountability for our service comes.

Every Christian Is Expected to Serve

When we are born again and our sins are forgiven, the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience, according to Hebrews 9:14, in order for us to "serve the living God!" "Serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:2) is every Christian's commission. There is no such thing as spiritual unemployment or spiritual retirement in the Kingdom of God. Of course, motives matter in the service we are to offer to God. The Bible mentions at least six motives for serving.

Motivated by obedience. In Deuteronomy 13:4, Moses wrote, "Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him." Everything in that verse relates to obedience to God. We should serve the Lord because we want to obey Him.

How can any professing Christian think it is okay to sit on the spiritual sidelines and watch others do the work of the Kingdom? Any true Christian would say that he or she wants to obey God. But we disobey God when we are not serving Him. Not to serve God is sinful.

Motivated by gratitude. The prophet Samuel exhorted the people of God in service with these words: "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24). It is no burden to serve God when we consider what great things He has done for us. He has never done anything greater for anyone, nor could He do anything greater for you, than bring you to Himself. If we cannot be grateful servants of Him who is everything and in whom we have everything, what will make us grateful?

Motivated by gladness. The inspired command of Psalm 100:2 is, "Serve the Lord with gladness." We are not to serve God grudgingly or grimly, but gladly.

For the believer, serving God is not a burden, it's a privilege. I can understand why the person who serves God in an attempt to earn his way to Heaven doesn't serve with gladness. But the Christian who gratefully acknowledges what God has done for him for eternity should be able to serve God cheerfully and with joy.

Motivated by forgiveness, not guilt. In Isaiah's famous vision of God, he became eager to serve the Lord once his sins were forgiven (Isaiah 6:6-8). Like a dog on a leash, Isaiah was straining to serve God in some way, any way. Because he felt guilty? No! Because God had taken his guilt away!

Legislators' Weekly Bible study meets each Tuesday (except following a Monday holiday) and Thursday in Capitol Annex Room 436 from 12:00-12:30 pm. It is the same study both days to allow flexibility for everyone's committee schedules.

The people of God do not serve Him in order to be forgiven but because we are forgiven. When believers serve only because they feel guilty if they don't, it's as though they serve with a ball and chain dragging from their ankles. There's no love in that kind of service, only labor. There's no joy, only obligation and drudgery. But Christians aren't prisoners who should serve in God's Kingdom grudgingly because of the guilt. We can serve willingly because Christ's death freed us from guilt.

Motivated by humility. Jesus was the perfect Servant. With astonishing humility, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as an example of how all His followers should serve with humility.

In this life a part of us (the Bible calls it the flesh) will always say, "If I have to serve, I want to get something for it." But this isn't Christlike service. This is hypocrisy. By the power of the Holy Spirit we must reject self-righteous service as sinful motivation, and serve "in humility," considering "others better" than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Motivated by love. At the heart of service, according to Galatians 5:13, should be love: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." There is no better fuel that burns longer and provides more energy than love.

Jesus said in Mark 12:28-31 that the greatest command is to love God with all you are, and the next most important one is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. In light of these words, surely the more we love God the more we will live for Him and serve Him, and the more we love others the more we serve them.

Every Christian Is Gifted to Serve

At the moment of salvation when the Holy Spirit comes to live within you, He brings a gift with Him. We're told in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 11 that there are many different varieties of gifts, and the Holy Spirit determines by His sovereign will which gift goes to which believer. Even more specific is 1 Peter 4:10, which certifies that each Christian is specially gifted and that the purpose for that gift is service.

If this is among the first times you have heard about spiritual gifts, then you probably have no idea what your gift is. Relax. Many Christians serve God faithfully and fruitfully for a lifetime without ascertaining their specific gift. I'm not suggesting you shouldn't try to identify your gift; I'm saying that you aren't relegated to bench-warmer status in the Kingdom of God until you can name your gift.

By all means, don't be discouraged from serving. I encourage you to discipline yourself to serve in a regular, ongoing ministry in your local church. It doesn't necessarily have to be in a recognized or elected position. But find a way to defeat the temptation to serve only when it's convenient or exciting. That's not disciplined service.

Serving Is Often Hard Work

Some teach that once you discover and employ your spiritual gift, then serving becomes nothing but effortless joy. But that's not New Testament Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:12 of "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry." Sometimes serving God and others is nothing less than hard work. Paul describes his service to God with these words in Colossians 1:29 – "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." The word labour means to work to the point of exhaustion, while from the Greek word translated "striving" comes our word agonize.

God supplies us with the power to serve Him. We struggle in service "according to his working, which worketh . . . mightily" in us. True ministry is never forced out by the flesh. But the result of his power working mightily in us is "labour." That means when you serve the Lord in a local church or in any type of ministry, it will often be hard. If you are like Paul, sometimes you will be agonizing and exhausting. It will take time. There will always be more entertaining things you could be doing. And if for no other reason, serving God is hard work because it means serving people. But remember that service costing nothing accomplishes nothing.

Serving God is work, but there's no work so rewarding or enduring.

Are you willing to serve? The Israelites knew without a doubt that God expected them to serve Him, but Joshua once looked then in the eye and challenged them on their willingness to serve: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve....but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

The Lord Jesus was always the servant, the servant of all, the servant of servants, the Servant. He said, "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). If we are to be like Christ, we must discipline ourselves to serve as Jesus served.

This study adapted from chapter seven of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney.