

“*Serving...from the Heart*”

February 19, 2012

Seek God for the City

Servanthood → New Name (FaithWorks; Trinity Treat Day; Volunteer Program for schools, etc)

Clarify intentions:

Why should we serve?

A Biblical Framework for a Life of Servanthood:

1. **Jesus is our model as the ultimate servant-leader** (John 13:3-17; cf. Luke 22:27; Phil 2: 3-9).

John 13:1-5, 12-17

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ² During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

If you are going to be a follower of Christ, you need to know that it will require servanthood. You can't possibly imitate Jesus without being a servant of God to people. Jesus' whole life was characterized by a pervasive attitude of servanthood.

Whether washing the disciple's feet or going to the cross, Jesus could freely serve because He had a clear understanding of His identity and mission.

Verses 1-4 detail how Jesus was conscientiously aware of His imminent death (vs.1), His betrayer (vs. 2), His own authority (vs. 3), and His return to the Father (vs. 1, 3). It was in light of these things-- knowing who He was, what He had come to do, and what it would cost Him--that allowed Jesus to serve so freely.

Like Jesus we, too, must have a clear sense of our identity and mission. If you know who you are in Christ and understand God's purpose and mission for your life, it will empower you to love and serve others. When your identity is secure in Christ, there is no loss of “dignity” in humbly serving someone else. It is the Father's will; it's honorable.

Are you just living your life? Or do you have a clear vision of serving people as an opportunity to build the kingdom of God by living out and sharing the gospel?

2. **Servanthood leads to God's blessing** (John 13: 14-17; Heb 6:10; Rev 7:15; 22:3).

In John 13, just after Jesus washed His disciple's feet, He commanded them to follow His example by serving one another and said: “*a slave is not greater than His master...if you know these things, you are blessed if you do them*” (13:16-17).

You are blessed if you do what things? If you imitate Christ taking on His identity of servanthood—serving people as an expression of the Father's will. God is the ultimate rewarder of servanthood regardless of what it costs us to serve other people. It may be costly and sacrificial now, but God will make the blessing follow at the appropriate time.

Hebrews 6:10 is a wonderful promise of blessing to those who serve: “*God is not unjust so as to forget your work and **the love which you have shown toward His name** in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*”

3. **Servanthood is at the heart of the gospel** (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27).

Mark 10:45 ~ “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*”

The epitome of servanthood is the cross. We are saved from the hell our sin deserves, by the servanthood of Jesus. And every person that has been saved from the looming day of judgment has been called to join Christ in His mission of the gospel. Yet how can we ever dream of effectively taking the hope of the gospel to the people we live with and work with if it is not with the very spirit of servanthood in which the Savior Himself came?

Servanthood is at the heart of the gospel.

4. **We are commanded to serve** (Gal 5:13; Col 3:23-24; cf. Rom 12:10-11).

Gal 5:13 ~ “*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another.***”

One of the results that the gospel should have in your life is to love others by serving them. We are *free to serve* others because the Gospel has released us from the bondage of our self-centeredness.

It’s important that as we serve people with our actions, we serve God with our attitudes. In other words, one of the ways we serve each other through love is giving people the benefit of the doubt; withholding judgment and criticism when we don’t really know the whole story; extending mercy and grace; speaking the truth in love.

What I want you to see here is that our relationship with God is directly affected by how we relate to each other.

Illus: There are many ways that my children can and do serve me, but the very best way is by how they treat each other with love, honor, and servanthood. For example if our kids go to stay at their grandparent’s house, I tell them to honor Grandpa and Grandma. And the best way to honor their hosts is to honor each other. The same is true for the family of God.

Col 3:23-24 ~ “*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.*”

The key to genuine servanthood is not just signing up to volunteer at church or anywhere else. Genuine servanthood requires a servant’s heart—a heart attitude that is anchored on serving the Savior by means of serving other people.

5. **Servanthood is necessary for the church’s maturity** (Eph 4:11-13).

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* ¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* ¹⁴ *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;* ¹⁵ *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

The role of church leaders is equipping the saints through the ministry of the Word (vs. 11, 14). The role of the saints is to serve, to do the work of ministry (diakonia—vs. 12).

So the church matures in love (vs. 16) as leaders teach right doctrine, so that the saints can serve with right practice. And all of this happens in a context of servanthood as each member utilizes his spiritual gifts under the headship of Christ (vs. 16).

What I want you to see here is that a mature church is one in which the fullness of Christ is evident as each one serves according to God's design. Leaders are serving through the ministry of the work so that the saints can serve through the work of ministry. The ethos of the church is servanthood.

6. **We have been gifted for service** (I Peter 4:9-11).

I Peter 4:10—“*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”

We have been gifted to serve one another. So the question is, how is each one of us going to serve according to our God-given design?

By the way, this is how we function as a grace-filled church. As stewards of God's grace, we use our spiritual gifts to serve God's grace to each other. We overflow with grace as each member appropriates God's grace through serving others.

7. **Servanthood is critical to a believer's identity** (James 1:1; Phil 1:1; Rev 22:3; Acts 4:27-30).

This is really important and it's found in the verses that we pay least attention to in the Bible like:

James 1:1—“*James, a **bond-servant** of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*” (bond: yoked to master for life)

Phil 1:1—“*Paul and Timothy, **bond-servants** of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...*”

Rev 22:3 identifies the saints in heaven as servants: “*And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His **bond-servants** shall serve Him*”

Our eternal identity is that of servants. It is a holy and honorable title because it is also used of Jesus Himself. In Acts 4, the church referred to Christ as “Your Holy Servant Jesus” (4:27, 30).

Every believer who identifies with Christ should have the identity of a servant.

Do people identify you as a servant, not just by what you do, but the heart with which you do it? I'm talking about a disposition or attitude of servanthood that is the overflow of God's grace growing in your life.

Many of you serve diligently and generously at Trinity. *Thank you* so much for serving Christ and serving us even when you are tired and when it's inconvenient simply because the grace of God is rich in your life. I am free to say, may God lavish His blessing and joy upon you, good and faithful servant.”

Yet, I want to be very clear: Serving is so much more than filling up the schedules for another ministry year at TEFC. There is a much deeper issue at hand. **There is an incredible joylessness that can be found in serving without a servant's heart. But when we serve out of a heart immersed in God's grace, serving becomes a means to joy.** Let's not miss the juggler vain. The goal is not merely for everyone to serve more—that's a surface issue. ***God wants to shape in you the heart of Christ.*** A heart that serves others is a heart that has been transformed by God's grace and rescued from self-absorption.

I want you to live in the joy of serving that comes out of a heart that is being constantly renewed by God's grace as you abide in Christ.

We don't want to keep a checklist of the ways we serve. We want everything we touch in life to be permeated with a Christ-like spirit of servanthood.

The most important question is not how much am I serving, but is God sculpting in me a heart of servanthood?

Q: How do I sculpt a heart of servanthood?

That's a hard question for me to answer because God is the sculptor, and He'll have to sculpt uniquely in each of our lives. But if God is going to make us like His servant Jesus, there are certain aspects of character that we can expect Him to be molding in us.

Let me point out some of these qualities in Phil. 2, so that as God chisels at your heart, you have a vision of what He is shaping in you.

Philippians 2:3-9

³ *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;* ⁴ *do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.* ⁵ *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* ⁹ *For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,*

- ➔ **Humility:** “*humility of mind*” (vs. 3) indicates that we can make choices toward humility in how we speak, what we think, how we act, and how we drive. And certainly we can choose to pray for humility. Humility is essential to servanthood.
- ➔ **Selflessness:** “*do nothing from selfishness*” (vs. 3). Servanthood requires dying to self.
- ➔ **Other-centeredness** (passion for Christ; compassion for people): “do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interest of others” (vs. 4). Servanthood is putting others ahead of ourselves.

➔ **Surrender:** Relinquishing your “rights” to God for the good of others. “...*Who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant*” (vs. 6-7).

➔ **Loyalty to God:** “*bond-servant*” (vs. 7). This is a slave that has willingly bonded himself to his master for the rest of his life.

➔ **Willingness to be identified as a servant:** “*taking the form of a bondservant*” (vs. 7).

Donald Whitney: “The reason some are unwilling to serve or unwilling to serve very long is that they don't have servants' hearts. They do the work of a servant on the outside but they don't have servants' hearts. Then when they are treated like servants—which inevitably happens to those who serve—they quit. Until you realize that every follower of the Servant is also called to be a servant, you'll have difficulty serving, no matter where you try to serve in the church. Every ministry becomes mundane at times. Every ministry is underappreciated. Every ministry feels the sharp sting of criticism sooner or later. Every ministry sometimes seems barren of God's blessing. And unless in these times you can fall back upon the call of God to be a servant, you will become disillusioned and eventually walk away from every place of service you ever fill.”¹

➔ **Obedience over convenience:** “*He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (vs. 8). “Too many people have decided that they will serve in the church only occasionally, and when it's convenient.”² Yet God calls us to be faithful, dependable servants who out of obedience to Christ will imitate Jesus in true servanthood, even when it requires sacrifice.

¹ Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating fully in the body of Christ*. Pg. 112.

² *Ibid.*, pg. 113.

Note: Not only are these characteristics essential to a servant's heart, they are best developed when you are positioned in a place to serve. In other words, the best way to develop humility, selflessness, other-centeredness, surrender, and so on is by serving.

Finally, if you really want to follow Christ in taking on a heart of servanthood, begin by adopting a servant's attitude in your home. Be intentional about serving your spouse and your family. If you will let God shape a true heart of servanthood in the rub of family life, it will overflow into the church and everywhere else you go.

Summary:

1. Jesus did not just serve. His whole life was one of serving God and serving people. (the pervasiveness of servanthood in the life of Jesus)
2. Our identity as Christians cannot be separated from a heart of servanthood.
3. Ultimately God must do this work in our hearts, our homes, and our church. So we must pray for God to shape in us the heart of Christ.