

Chapter 4

A LIFE OF SERVICE

In the truest sense, life has value and purpose when we have an intimate relationship with Christ. Blessings come from accepting the love and instructions that the Lord has for each of us. “*‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’*” (Jeremiah 29:11). God, Who has saved us through the blood of His Son, Jesus, and Whose Spirit nurtures us through Word and Sacrament, has a purpose for our lives. “*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God*” (Hebrews 9:14)!

Many people ask the question: “Why am I here?” The writer to the Hebrews gives a clear answer: “*that we may serve the living God!*” The life Jesus lived for thirty-three years gives us a model of service to emulate. As Jesus lived to serve and extend His Kingdom, we are called to do the same. Jesus lived a perfect life of complete service to those He came to save, and His death and resurrection were His supreme acts of service.

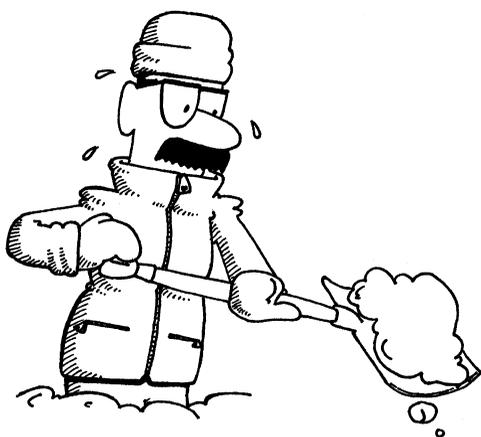
Of all the commandments, Jesus said the most important is “*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Mark 12:30-31). Service is made possible through love. If love is not the motivating force behind the service, then the service is done for the wrong reasons of approval or acceptance. “*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16)



Our desire to love and serve our neighbors is our response to the Lord’s love for us. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). To love is to serve; service is the natural outcome of love. Love is what gives us the energy and desire to serve. When we love someone with our whole heart, we want to continue to serve that person. We don’t withhold our kindness. Because we love our

spouses, children, parents, and best friends, we willingly serve them. The *agape* love of Christ enables us to love the unlovely as well. Our life of service is not offered as a way of receiving “more” of God’s love. While God is pleased with our acts of loving service, they do not earn or bring His love. He already loves and accepts us unconditionally. Motivated by God’s love for us, we offer our service as a deliberate gift to Him. Others will see God’s love through us. “*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves*” (Romans 12:10).

Our lives are God’s gift to us. How we use them is our gift to God. When we commit to a life of service because of Jesus’ love for us, we are fulfilling one of the purposes Christ has for our lives. Service is what we can do with the brains, bodies, and talents God has given us. When we spend time in Christian service, we



are fulfilling the request by Christ to “*feed My sheep*” (John 21:17). Jesus reminded us in John 15:5 that “. . . *apart from Me you can do nothing.*” We are by nature selfish and thoughtless. We can’t stir up enough love in our own hearts so that we serve with truly pure motives. On our own, we may serve out of duty or to gain recognition from others, but if we abide in Christ, we will bear fruit of service for His glory. All things flow from and reflect our relationship with Christ.

NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE

The words of Matthew 20:28, “*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,*” remind us that the life of Jesus was one of total sacrifice. It is clear that Jesus wanted to develop that same servant heart in His disciples and us. He said in Matthew 20:26, “. . . *whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.*” He lived for His heavenly Father and for others. In the same way Jesus served His Father, we exist to serve Him. Being conformed to the image of Christ, we will take on the role of servants.

The concept of serving rather than being served is not a natural one. We have an inborn desire to be served ourselves and to have our own needs met rather than to see to others. We prefer to be “number one.” In addition, apathy will often reduce our interest in sharing. God loves changing our mindset from serving ourselves to serving others.¹ Seeing others as our brothers and sisters in Christ helps us live “life at its best.”

A life of service and servanthood is contrary to what our society promotes. We are told by the world that we should aspire to fame, power, and wealth, but for servants, there is no glory, spotlight, or status. We cannot follow Christ's command to feed His sheep if we put ourselves first and only seek the goals that are important to the world in which we live. Living a life of service, we give of ourselves without striving for financial rewards or personal recognition. Along with the Apostle Paul we say, *"We are not trying to please men but God, Who tests our hearts"* (1 Thessalonians 2:4b). As a servant, Jesus was not looking for praise from the masses; He was only interested in glorifying His Father.

When we desire to serve Jesus, we begin to see people as He saw them. Instead of seeing only the sores covering the leper's body, He saw a man in need of healing (Luke 5:12-15). He raised the widow's son out of compassion for a heartbroken mother (Luke 7:11-15). When He allowed the *"woman who had lived a sinful life"* to minister to Him, He was offering forgiveness to a repentant heart (Luke 7:36-38). When we comprehend that *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8), performing the ultimate act of service, our response of love and gratitude will be to serve others in need.

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13). Our freedom expresses itself in the form of service. God brings us into a proper relationship with Himself and then helps us understand that service honors Him. We are called to be imitators of Christ and *"to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us"*(Ephesians 5:1-2). Christ showed His love by coming to serve. We serve out of love for Christ and the desire to *"live a life worthy of the Lord and [to] please Him in every way"* (Colossians 1:10).



D.W. Kerr, in his article entitled "Living the Christ-Life," discusses how some acts of serving are divine in nature. When we serve our superiors, it is expected, as is serving our equals, but to serve our inferiors is divine. If a wealthy person should give up his wealth to a poor person and become poor for the sake of the pauper, this is the mind of Christ. *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). To serve or extend kindness to someone we consider more honorable than ourselves is praiseworthy. However, when we extend service and kindness to all people regardless of their apparent worthiness or worthlessness—this is Godlike. As Christ humbled and emptied Himself for us, we

are called to deny ourselves and serve others.² *“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”* (Matthew 16:24).

The entire life of Jesus was one of service, but the one act of servanthood that is most often referred to is His washing of His disciples’ feet during the evening of the Passover Feast before His crucifixion.

When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” He asked them. “ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:12-17).

Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and told them to do as He had done. As Christ came to serve, so must all disciples accept a life of service to others. In our service, we put our faith into action. We are called to serve, and as we serve, we find support and strength. As we grow and find God’s strength, we desire all the more to put our faith into practice—and so it goes. God’s people reach out to receive and serve in the name of Jesus. Christianity is not a way to do certain things. It a certain way to do everything. Christianity is a relationship with Christ based on faith. James reminds us that faith and actions work together and that faith is made complete by what we do (James 2:22).



Some of us may believe it is beneath us to serve others. We have received so much from God and so much kindness from other Christians, but we are indignant at the suggestion that we have an obligation to minister to the needs of others. Are we letting others visit old people in rest homes, help the elderly with home repairs, befriend prisoners, take little kids on outings, work with the handicapped, or transport someone not able to drive to church? James admonishes us as believers *“to look after orphans and widows in their distress. . .”* (James 1:27b).

The example set by Jesus shows us the fallacy of believing that we are too important to be servants to others. Because Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, we can no longer say, “I have a degree from a very prestigious university, so I’m above

helping others,” or “I am the CEO of a corporation, so don’t expect me to give of my time and myself to someone else.” Our success, education, or status in life is immaterial, because we are all called to serve. Joan Rawlusk said, “There is a great paradox in reaching out to touch someone—and that is, the more you reach out to others, the more you will be touched yourself. Joy and happiness in great measure are waiting for us if we will reach just a little further. In the reaching we become God’s own hand. . .”³ The Apostle Paul probably found that concept to be true in his life. He wrote, “*So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well*” (2 Corinthians 12:15a). While serving others, we are equally blessed. Jesus, speaking about acts of service, said, “. . . *you will be blessed if you do them*” (John 13:17b).

Whatever God calls us to do, we must do. It matters not who gets the credit for what we do, as long as God gets the glory. We are called to be His hands, reaching out to people in need. With God’s help, we can accomplish more than what we thought possible. To do what we can is the responsibility we have as Christians.

A CHANNEL OR A TERMINAL



Throughout life we receive and give. We must receive in order to give and live at all. God gives us all the resources and talents to make living and giving possible. Keeping what we have brings no blessing to us or others. We must give in order to live abundantly and to help others live. If we consume all of our time, possessions, and energy on ourselves, we become empty, spiritually dead, unhappy, friendless people.

The need to give and the benefits of giving can be illustrated by contrasting the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, both of which are located in the Holy Land. The Sea of Galilee receives water from the northern mountain streams, which flow into the Jordan River. Because the sea allows water to flow through it, it lives. On its banks, flowers bloom and bushes grow. Birds and animals drink from its waters. People swim in it and enjoy water activities. Nearby communities enjoy the waterfront.

The Jordan River flows south into the Dead Sea, which keeps all the water it receives. The Dead Sea simply takes without giving. The water has become stagnant with no birds or animals willing to drink from it. No fish live in it. No plants spring up around it. There is no life; in fact, the water destroys life. The

Life at its Best

very fact that the sea takes without giving has created death in and around it. It is a reservoir rather than a channel.

Just as there are these two different seas, there are two kinds of people. People who share nothing and serve no one act as terminals. They will end life unhappy, empty, and stagnant. Our purpose is to be channels so that God's love and goodness may flow through us. By His grace, God transforms us into generous givers willing to love, share, and serve others and live "life at its best."



Individuals who act as channels of God's love and gifts put self aside. Jesus said, "*Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him*" (John 7:38). God refills serving people with more love, time, gifts, and abilities to share with others. "*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

When we focus on "I, me, mine, and myself," we take care of "number one" to the exclusion of others. Since others are not important, we don't look for opportunities to help or serve. The following words and slogans describe the contrast between desiring to serve and love the Lord and others and looking out for "self":

I, Me, Mine,
Myself

Love the Lord
and others

- Looks out for number one
- Feels he "deserves a break today"
- Thinks "the one with the most toys wins"
- Indulges himself
- Says, "You owe it to yourself"
- Stores up for himself
- Wants to "Have it [his own] way"
- Believes in himself
- Is seldom content
- Is possessive
- Loves money, success, and notoriety

- Is humble and caring
- Is empowered by God's grace
- Acknowledges God's ownership
- Resists materialism
- Has a servant attitude
- Gives generously
- Is content in his circumstances
- Is rich in Christ
- Seeks the true life
- Surrenders life to Christ
- Loves God and others

The slogan of our society today appears to be "Do your own thing your own way." We live in a ME generation. For many of us, the goal in life is to take care of ourselves. An attitude of selfishness prevents a caring and serving lifestyle and

blinds us to opportunities to serve. When we start to look consistently and lovingly upon Jesus, Who is revealed to us through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit will quietly change the focus from ourselves to Christ. It will no longer be we, but Christ Who lives in us (Galatians 2:20) and molds and transforms us into servants who desire to serve.

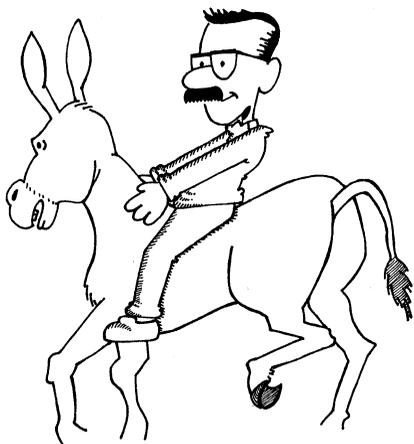
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What is the Apostle Paul's admonition in Romans 12:10? How is this evident in your life?
2. How does God enable you to serve?
3. What does Jesus ask of you in John 13:12-17?
4. What are the differences between people who live as terminals versus those who live as channels?
5. In which service activities are you currently involved?

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is one of the most popular parables in Scripture. It has become part of our culture and vocabulary with many hospitals and institutions bearing its name.

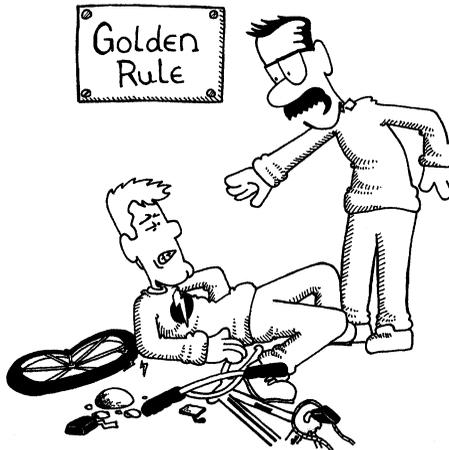
We read in the tenth chapter of Luke that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when He was asked some difficult questions by an expert theologian, or expert in the law. The theologian asked Jesus this question: *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* (verse 25). He replied to his own question in verse 27: *"He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and, 'love your neighbor as yourself.' "* The theologian had no problem with *"Love the Lord your God,"* but he debated the second half of the command by asking the question, *"Who is my neighbor?"*



Jesus responded with telling this parable. A man was going down the road to Jericho. The man was robbed, beaten, and left half-dead alongside the road. At different times, a priest and a Levite passed by the injured man, but neither chose to give him any help or hope.

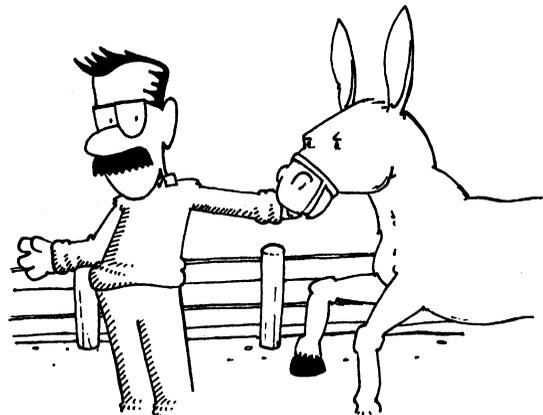
Along came a merchant who was identified as a Samaritan. Samaritans were non-Jews living in Israel and were hated by Jews. When the Samaritan came upon the injured person, he had pity on him. Dismounting from his donkey, he bandaged the beaten man's wounds and showed additional compassion by putting the man on his donkey and taking him to an inn. Before leaving the inn, he paid the innkeeper two silver coins for continued care of the injured man. The Samaritan also promised he would return and give the innkeeper additional money should more care be needed.

The Samaritan did not do this work of love and charity on a reciprocal basis. There was no way of knowing if the injured person would even express any gratitude for his actions. The Samaritan willingly sacrificed his time, money, and possessions and risked his health and safety. He was able and willing to meet the injured person at his point of need. He fulfilled the Golden Rule, which is *"Do to others as you would have them do to you"* (Luke 6:31).



Whatever our position or status in life, we are called to share God's love in acts of service to all people. *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* is a command to everyone. Paul exhorts the Galatians, *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers"* (Galatians 6:10). Jesus proclaims, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me"* (Matthew 25:40). The Samaritan did not choose the beneficiary of his kindness. He simply helped his "brother" who was in need.

The Good Samaritan put his good intentions into action. He gave more than money; more importantly, he invested himself freely into the well-being of the injured person. As a servant, he was able to subjugate his needs to the one he was serving. When the time comes, we, too, will need to "get off our donkeys" and do something. Helping may mean more than calling 911. We may need to get involved, get our hands dirty, and go the extra mile. God may want us to move out of the limelight into the shadows and suffer some inconvenience in order to be somebody's servant. He may request that we help others in work that



seems menial, tiresome, dirty, and ill-timed. Willingly, many husbands and wives have interrupted their careers to care for an injured or sick spouse. Willingness to serve God means that we are prepared to do the small things or the large things; it makes no difference. Whenever an opportunity to serve presents itself, we need to be ready to act.

Luke recorded the actions of some busy people. Religious leaders neglected the half-dead man because they were too busy. Martha was too busy even to listen to Jesus. Jesus encouraged His hearers never to be too busy to love God or serve others. Even as busy people, we are called to find the time to demonstrate our love for God by showing love to all people, especially those who are difficult to love. Can you think of someone who is neglected or undesirable in some way so that you can reach out to that person with God's love?

A sick single mother had been bed-ridden in her apartment for several days. The dishes were piled in the kitchen, the house was a disaster, and the small children hadn't been bathed or changed in days. Members of the church, noticing her absence, sent Jane over to check up on the sick woman. Arriving at the mother's house, Jane stuck her head in the door and expressed her willingness to pray that the woman would get well soon. Prayer is powerful and effective, but often more than praying is necessary. In this case, what was necessary was some assistance with the housework. We need to be willing to make sacrifices for those who are in need. James 2:14-17 teaches:

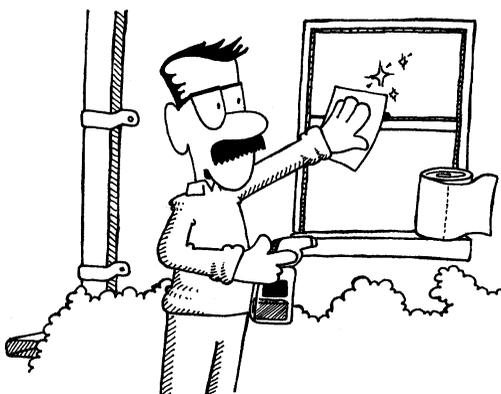
What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?



Jesus' last words to the theologian in the parable were, "Go and do likewise." The command is for all of us. James 1:22 exhorts, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." We are created to be "Good Samaritans" who continually share the love of Christ. God strengthens and nurtures us to share our faith, energy, and time with others. "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1John 3:17).

We are to live our lives as “Good Samaritans” and share the message of the Savior with those around us through word and deed. We have nothing to offer God in exchange for what He has given us. It’s not that we don’t have any value. We have value and worth because Christ gave His precious blood for us. He bought us back from the slavery of sin, not with gold or silver, but with His blood. We don’t have any right, in ourselves, to request the forgiveness we so desperately need and which God is so willing to give. In spite of our failure to serve, these blessings are ours because God in Christ chooses to be our servant. Christ’s cross gives us that “right.” His blessings amaze us!

To make the act of serving intentional, we may want to take up one of



Benjamin Franklin’s habits. Each day he would ask himself two questions. In the morning his question was: “What good shall I do today?” At the end of the day he asked himself: “What good have I done today?” Mr. Franklin wanted to use his life to be of service. If we were more deliberate in our efforts to serve others, we would surely find more opportunities for service.

An additional benefit of serving others is the example it sets for others.

The Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians, *“Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else”* (2 Corinthians 9:13). The service we render can motivate another far more than spoken words. Servanthood is perhaps better “caught” than taught. Acts of service done by others will be an encouragement to us in our lives of service. In this way, Christians *“spur one another on toward love and good deeds”* (Hebrews 10:24).

The ironic thing is that caring for and helping others often does more for us as caregivers than it does for those receiving the care. God always replenishes us as we give freely (2 Corinthians 9:11). Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). When we give our time and energy to serve and reach out to others, we will truly experience the joy of Christian giving. “Life at its best” is truly a life of giving.

Long ago, Jesus left His heavenly home and put on human flesh to bring us God’s great Good



News. If people want to know what God is like, they can look at Jesus. If they want to know what Jesus is like, they should be able to look at His followers. Can people see Christ-like service in you? Let us be the servants Jesus calls us to be.

USING OUR GIFTS FOR SERVICE

As an act of His grace, God has blessed each of us with talents, gifts, and abilities. *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good”* (1 Corinthians 12:7). Through His gifts, God has enabled each of us to serve others. We are called to employ what we’ve been given for higher purposes than simply to make a living or for our own selfish gain or recognition. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul urges us to *“ . . .eagerly desire spiritual gifts,”* (vs. 1) and to *“ . . .try to excel in gifts that build up the church”* (vs. 12). God has blessed us with talents so we can carry out His mission here on earth. To know Christ is life’s greatest treasure. To serve Christ is life’s greatest pleasure.

1 Peter 4:10 is one of the Bible’s most challenging and motivating verses: *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”* The verse outlines three truths. First of all, each one of us has received a gift. Secondly, we are to serve others. Finally, we are to be stewards in administering God’s grace, which has been entrusted to us.

God is watching, and He sees what we do with our talents in service to others. We will be held accountable. Romans 14:12 admonishes, *“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”* God gives us the responsibility and duty to help those in need. Our actions don’t escape His view. We are His hands, eyes, and feet to accomplish His purposes. *“For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:10). We are not to squander or hide our talents (Matthew 25:14-30), but to use them as God intended in service to others.

We demonstrate our love by serving others happily in a capacity that may not be our first choice. Giving up a football game to help a friend move or listening to someone’s burdens is showing Christian love. We must be able to make our interests secondary to serving others.

When our works of service are done for God’s glory, we are no longer responsible for the outcome of our work. The work to be accomplished is under God’s control and mastery. We are responsible to listen and follow God’s instructions; He will complete the mission as He sees fit. *“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, Who makes things grow”* (1 Corinthians 3:7). We aren’t called to be successful; we are called to be faithful.

When it comes to making things grow, we don’t stand a chance. It is God Who makes things grow. When it comes to healing our spiritual conditions, we

don't have a chance. We might as well be told to pole-vault over the moon. We don't have what it takes to makes things grow or what it takes to be healed. Our only hope is that God will take care of our hurts and helplessness as he did for the man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9).

We should take Jesus at His Word:

- When He says we're forgiven, let's unload the guilt (1 John 3:21).
- When he says we're valuable, let's believe Him (Matthew 10:29).
- When he says we're eternal, let's bury our fear (John 14:19).
- When he says we're provided for, let's stop worrying (Luke 12:27).

God's efforts are strongest when our efforts are useless. *"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

CHRISTIAN SERVANT CHARACTERISTICS

We put our faith into action when we become God's hands, arms, and feet in service to others. God's love is seen through us as we are empowered to do His work. A Christian servant is one who:

Serves with vulnerability: One of God's greatest servants was the Apostle Paul, who had many shortcomings. Paul showed his humanity when he wrote to the Corinthians, *"For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing' "* (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul was said to have poor eyesight and other physical problems.

Paul wasn't perfect, but he chose not to hide his imperfections. In fact, he said, *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me"* (2 Corinthians 12:9b). He admitted he had needs and handicaps, and he gloried in them, because they required him to be completely dependent on the Lord. Likewise, we, too, are imperfect sinners, not hiding our weaknesses but letting the power of Christ shine through us.

Serves to honor God: As Christians, we share God's love and assist others, not for personal gain or recognition, but to glorify Him. As Christians, we recognize all people are made in God's image. God's love compels us to reach out to others and to serve them in love (2 Corinthians 5:14). God's love is our motivator.



Serves joyfully, knowing it pleases the Lord: Our joy comes from realizing that our missions of service are fulfilled in ways that honor Him. If we complete the purpose given to us by God rather than those we choose for ourselves, we will hear God's words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:21). When we are in true fellowship with Him, He will keep us faithful to our calls to service.

Serves in the energy Christ gives: We are part of Christ Who enables us to bear fruit. With the Lord all things are possible, and without Him we can do nothing. "*Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me*" (John 15:4).

Serves as a blessing—not as a duty: Because we delight in the Lord, serving is a natural extension of wanting to share His love. We see serving as an opportunity, not an obligation. The Apostle Paul said, "*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2).

Serves with humility: Our service is possible because of our relationship with Christ. The love of Christ flows through us to energize our thoughts and actions. In our efforts to serve others, we will make many mistakes because perfection is impossible. Paul wrote, "*My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power*" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). How unfortunate it would be if we allowed our imperfections to prevent us from helping and serving others, or if our degree of perfection robbed the living Christ of His honor and glory!

Serves with honesty: As true servants, we are not driven by any hidden ulterior motives. Honesty and integrity characterize our lives in all of our activities. "*We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you His gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you*" (1 Thessalonians 2:2-3).

We must be honest with ourselves about our motives for service. Are we serving out of devotion to Jesus Christ, or are we serving because it both feels good and impresses others? It may be easier to give God service through our activities than to give Him ourselves. God wants our hearts before He wants our service (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). We must know God in order to be given the privilege to serve Him. "*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and*



acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). When we accept His love and plans for us, we can pour our lives out to Him and serve Him.

Serves unreservedly: There is a cost to following Jesus. In Luke 9:57-62, we read about those who determined to be His disciples, but “later.” One agreed to come, but first he had to “*bury my father.*” Another said he would follow the Lord as soon as he could “*say good-bye to my family.*” Jesus replied, “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*” We are called to serve without reservation, putting aside those things which would keep us from concentrating on the tasks God gives us.



We cannot allow fears of inadequacy to deter us. We are inadequate! Our confidence is not in ourselves but in God. “*I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength*” (Philippians 4:13), we exclaim with Paul. Therefore, we serve with boldness through faith in the One Who is our confidence (Proverbs 3:26).

Serves after the example of Christ: Jesus gave us the perfect example of servanthood. He lived a life in service to His Father and others. “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). Acts 10:38 reveals, “. . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.”

Serves at God’s pleasure: As faithful servants, we go where the Lord directs. God’s working through us makes the difference. With the Lord’s guidance and strength we go, we do, and we share where the Lord shows the need.

Serves as a channel, not as a source: God is the source of our love and compassion. He also gives us the abilities and tools to assist others. We are God’s channels, and through us He is glorified.

Serves with enthusiasm: All that we do for the Lord should be done whole-heartedly. We need to give 100 percent and be alert and industrious. Colossians 3:23 exhorts, “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.*” Those we serve should be able to see our inspiration and motivation. “*Whatever your hand*



finds to do, do it with all your might . . .” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). We serve with enthusiasm because we want to serve. *“I desire to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart”* (Psalm 40:8).

Serves with intensity: God has given us His wonderful creation, and He gave the world the best gift possible in His Son. How can we not give our best back in return? God will provide the strength and courage to accomplish His purposes. *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Opportunities for service abound, and God will direct us to places where He wants us to serve. With Christ’s love motivating us, we will take advantage of those opportunities to express our gratefulness for God’s goodness.

ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

LIFE-ENRICHING

Serving

Compassionate

Sharing

Humble

Is a channel

Receives joy from helping others

Is rich in Christ

Is involved

LIFE-DESTROYING

Being served

Self-serving

Keeping

Arrogant

Is a terminal

Finds boredom in his existence

Is absorbed in self

Is separate

WRAPPING UP

We are called to give our time, energy, and effort to serve others. As Christians we are to be giving people. While on earth, Jesus gave us the perfect example of a giving life full of service and compassion. When we intentionally fail to give our support to others, or if we ignore the pleas of the needy, we dishonor God. God is calling us to be His hands to help those who are in need, and God will lead us where He wants us to serve. Because of God’s calling and our devotion to Him, service becomes our way of life. Service is what emanates from a life filled with love and devotion to Christ.

God loves the world, the whole world. It is God’s love working through us that enables us to be servants to others. Our love for Christ is seen in acts of serving. We can be either other-oriented or self-oriented. Without God’s

Life at its Best

motivation within us, our focus is always directed inward, always aimed at fulfilling our own needs. He provides the love we need to love others and gives us the desire to serve them. As our relationship with Christ grows, we will be better able to see the world as He sees it, through eyes of love. “Life at its best” is only possible when we choose to live a life of service to the Lord and others. We are saved by grace through faith for service.

The neat thing is that when we help others, we end up receiving an equal or greater benefit from our acts of service. We discover that it is a greater blessing to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How can you imitate Christ (Ephesians 5:1)?
2. Why is serving others necessary for you to live “life at its best”?
3. What is the most important command? The second (Mark 12:30-31)?
4. How can the analogy of the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea apply to you?
5. Why is it important for you to realize your need to be humble and to accept your imperfections when you serve the Lord?
6. Which character in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) relates to the following phrases?
What is yours is mine, and I’m going to take it.
What is mine is mine, and I’m going to keep it.
What is mine is yours, and I’m going to give it.
7. What is the meaning of Matthew 25:40?
8. How can you improve or develop the talents and abilities God has given you to use in service to Him?
9. What does 1 Peter 4:10 say to you about your need to be in service? Identify its three parts.
10. What gifts has God given you?
11. What are essential attitudes of Christ-like service?
12. What Biblical story most motivates you to serve?
13. How can serving bless the server?
14. What may prevent you from seeing opportunities to serve?
15. What does it mean to serve with vulnerability?
16. What message about serving is given in Luke 9:57-62?

17. For what purpose has every person baptized into Christ been called (Mark 10:45; John 13:15-17)?

Notes:

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1981), 17-22.

² D.W. Kerr, "Living the Christ Life," *Herald of His Coming*, (Newton, Kansas: Gospel Revivals Inc., 1997), 6.

³ Glenn Van Ekeren, *Speaker's Sourcebook II*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 343.