



Discover God's Unique Design for Your  
SPIRITUAL GIFT OF SERVING

# YOUR GIFT:

SERVING



**Discover God's Unique Design for**

# **YOUR GIFT: SERVING**

by Dr. Douglas Porter



HOW TO DEVELOP AND USE THE GIFT OF SERVING  
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## FOREWORD

Serving is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus came into this world taking on Himself “the form of a bondservant” (Phil. 2:7) and calls us to be the “servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Everything we do for God is an act of serving Him and others for the glory of God and the good of those to whom we minister. This is the act of ministry.

To help the church effectively minister to meet the needs of others in their community, God gave *every* Christian the responsibility to serve and *some* Christians the gift of serving. According to our on-line research about six percent identify serving as their dominant spiritual gift when completing the *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory (or YOUR GIFTS Spiritual Gifts Survey)*. These gifted servants are often typically quiet and happy to serve in the background to meet practical needs in their local church. Sometimes they serve on church mission teams in practical mission projects like disaster relief or helping new churches build their first building. They get the job done, often doing the things others might think of as below their status.

Servants may be the ones no one notices faithfully doing things necessary for the ministry to succeed or they could be the servant leaders, guiding a ministering congregation as it reaches out to its community to touch it with the love of Christ. Unlike some other spiritual gifts, the heart of a servant expresses the desire to serve in a myriad of different expressions of service.

Whether you have the gift of serving or simply a heart to serve God more effectively, this book is a valuable tool that you should not be without. Written with the gifted yet inexperienced servant in mind, *How to Develop and Use the Gift of Serving* will help you grow in your giftedness to become a more effective servant of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Larry Gilbert, Founder  
Church Growth Institute



## INTRODUCTION

As the pastor of a local church, much of what I, and the church, do is focused on meeting the spiritual needs of people. Motivated by a passion for God and compassion for people, we exist to glorify God by making disciples of those in our growing sphere of influence. While that is the mission that drives us, we cannot accomplish that task without the help of gifted servants that do the jobs that need to be done so that we can together accomplish the job we want to get done.

The church is made up of people who do so many different things. Some prepare meals for church dinners; receive the offering in church services; count, deposit and record the funds received; write checks to cover expenses and make certain our missionaries get the funds they need; make repairs when necessary and keep the building well maintained; and set up the facilities for special meetings. Recently, one of our church members set mousetraps to catch a mouse that wandered into our kitchen to find a warm place for the winter. Some would discount these kinds of things in their view of ministry, but if someone did not do these things, the people who come to faith through our ministry might not even come to church to hear the Gospel.

When we think of the gift of serving, we really come to the heart of Team Ministry. Servants understand they are part of the team that gets the job done as they work together for a common cause. While God invites all Christians to serve, some are uniquely gifted in this area. According to research, about six percent of Christians are gifted in this area, yet many churches struggle to find people to do what is sometimes viewed as “menial tasks.” This book has been designed to help gifted yet inexperienced servants develop the potential of their gift to maximize their effectiveness in ministry. I trust the material discussed in the following chapters will help all of us become the most effective servants of God we can be.

Chapter one discusses what is involved in the gift and ministry of serving. When we know what a servant of God looks like, we have a better idea of the kind of ministry to which God has called gifted servants. We will discover what it means to be “others-oriented” and identify the big picture of the ministry of serving and God’s response.

Next, we will look at the heart of the servant of God. We will look at the difference between the confident and insecure servant of God and develop a personal growth strategy to address the needs in your own personal life.

While all servants by definition serve, they do so in different ways for different reasons. That is why chapter three focuses on the various motivations that drive servants. When you understand why you do what you do and why others do what they do, you have an important tool that will help you be more effective working together in serving teams.

Because God is excellent in His being and all that He does, chapter four discusses the subject of excellence in all we do for Him. Using research based on major companies characterized by excellence, you will apply those principles personally in the light of how the Scriptures define what it means to be a servant of God.



The great paradox of this gift is that although many gifted in this area prefer to serve in the background, the strengths of this gift tend to be the prerequisites for effective leadership. This issue is addressed in chapter five to help you cope with this responsibility through the strength of your gift.

Chapter six addresses a common problem with many people gifted in serving and others involved in ministry; balancing work and rest. This chapter looks at both work and rest from a biblical worldview in contrast with popular perceptions. Consistently applying the principles in this chapter will help you experience effectiveness and avoid burnout.

Although God gave gifts to His church to enhance ministry effectiveness, various gift abuses abound in many churches. Chapter seven addresses this issue by helping you recognize how other gifted individuals can also be involved in the ministry of serving and how you can contribute to other aspects of your church's ministry as part of the ministry team.

This book is written to help you begin to develop your gift of serving. Obviously, there is much more you can learn about serving and incorporate into your ministry than could be contained in a book of this size. Therefore, chapter seven also recommends how you can get started on a lifelong continuing education program designed to help you become the most effective servant you can be.

The book concludes with a couple of appendices. The first is intended to help you determine if you are gifted in serving, and if so, how you can express your gift in your church. The second includes a personal growth strategy to help you begin thinking of your gift and ministry the way God thinks of your gift and ministry.

The Lord bless you as you use your gift in ministry for His glory.

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Napanee, Ontario, Canada

## CHAPTER ONE

# What Is Serving?

As the 36-year-old evangelist made his way home that night, the eight-mile walk took him through the heart of London's East End. In 1865, that section of the world's largest city was known for its abject poverty and moral depravity. The dimly lit streets were home to every vice imaginable. In many homes, both parents spent what little they had in the gin houses leaving their children home unfed and uncared for. When the drunken parents returned home, the family violence began.

An estimated ten thousand people annually met a violent death in England, most of them in slums like the East End. The stench that filled the night air betrayed the lack of sanitation and hygiene that resulted in widespread illness, often adding to the mortality rate. Some devoted their time to weaving baskets or closet pegs to sell on the streets to those who had a few pennies to spare. Others stood in doorways appealing to men of means to take advantage of what they had to offer. As William walked through the streets that night, he could not help but notice the incredible physical and spiritual need of these people.

Earlier that evening he had preached to a mocking crowd on the street. He had come to expect the jeers and derision from a hostile crowd as he held up his Bible to share the gospel. It was hard work, but someone had to do it. There were other places he could preach where his message would be better received, but somehow he was drawn to this dark corner of the nation. Even as he walked along the streets, he seemed to hear a voice within asking, "Where can you find such heathen as these?" That to hear a voice within asking, "Where can you find such heathen as these?" That passion drove William Booth into a life of service to the poorest and most neglected people he could find. That passion gave birth to his movement that would extend his efforts around the world long after he had passed from the scene.

As Booth began his Christian Mission to "the heathen" of London's East End, it was an evangelistic outreach to a people generally hostile to the Gospel. Yet as he sought to minister to both the spiritual and physical needs of those he met, he came to understand an important principle that helped him break down barriers to the Gospel. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." By the time his Christian Mission became The Salvation Army, the movement was deeply involved in serving the poorest and most abused in society. The movement still exists, and today as then they demonstrate that serving others creates opportunities to share the Gospel effectively.

Serving is what Christians do, or should do. Early church leaders described themselves as "servants of God." Jesus said, "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). He described His own ministry focus with the words, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Over the years, I have met many Christians who understand this most basic principle of the Christian life.

Those who know Phillip know what a servant looks like. He is not the kind of guy that does well when called upon to do some form of public ministry, but he does know how to get things done. Often, he tends to notice problems and have them fixed long before others are aware there is a problem. No job is too small or menial. He was part of the volunteer crew on the last building project at the church but he was also at the church cleaning out backed up drains when he noticed the water was draining slowly from the church's kitchen sink. No one asked for his help because no one else noticed the problem. Many still don't know he fixed the problem.

Phil's servant's heart extends beyond his local church. As he cuts his lawn on a warm summer day, he usually pushes the mower over the lawn belonging to his widowed neighbor. When he digs the winter snow out of his drive in the winter, he is also clearing the sidewalk next door so she can get out to the grocery store. And when she needs to get out, he usually has his own car warmed up and ready to go.

His wife Judy is much the same way. Over the years she has earned a reputation for being the first one there with a casserole when the lady of the house is sick or a family is going through a difficult time. Each spring she plants a vegetable garden much larger than she needs, but the widows in her church appreciate the fresh vegetables all summer. The surplus ends up in the freezer to be brought out as needed by others. When the church gathers for a fellowship dinner, Judy is the one in the kitchen running hot water and washing dishes while others enjoy their dessert.

Most people don't see half of what Phil and Judy do for others, but they don't do it for others to see. They understand their Father who sees what they do for others in secret will someday reward them openly. They are willing to wait for that recognition. In the interim, they and a host of gifted servants like them continue to serve, always looking for opportunities to meet needs that might be neglected by others.

### **A Portrait of a Servant of God**

Because of the nature of this gift, people gifted in serving are often hard to describe. More than other gifts, the expression of this gift is often linked to acquired skills and learned abilities. Carpenters serve by building or repairing things whereas cooks serve by preparing meals. Both groups are doing ministry through exercising their gifts, but they do so in such different ways it is sometimes easy to forget the validity of their ministry. This variety exercising this gift is recognized in the many different words used to describe a servant. While some of these words may describe a particular kind of servant, three different Greek words describe the servant in his or her relationships.

The Greek word *diakonos* describes servants in relation to their method. This word is related to the term used to describe those who serve the church as deacons, but its meaning goes far beyond that church office. The verb *dioko* means "to pursue or chase after." Historically, the term was probably first used to describe the servant as one running after someone to wait on that person's needs. In the business community, there is often someone in the office described as "the gopher" because whenever something is needed, they "go for" it. The servant of God is need conscious and ready to run to meet that need as it becomes apparent.

A second Greek word, *doulos*, describes servants in relation to their master. The idea of bondage is always implied in this term. The New Testament uses this term to describe the bondage of sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:17, 20) and the bondage of corruption (2 Peter 2:19). But the term was widely used by the apostles and early Christians to describe themselves as “servants [slaves] of God.” The context of this description is probably based on an Old Testament practice open to freed slaves (Exod. 21:6). While never endorsed in Scripture, slavery was regulated by God to avoid the abuses common in its historical practice. One regulation involved the practice of setting slaves free after six years of service. Should the slave choose to forfeit his freedom and continue serving his master, he would confirm that decision by having an ear pierced. The pierced ear became the symbol of his choice to be a “bondservant” or slave for life to a master he loved. When the early Christians described themselves as “servants of God” using this term, they were announcing their choice to be a slave for life to the Master they loved.

The third Greek word describing servants is *leitourgia*, the same word from which we get “liturgy,” a term used in some faith communities to describe their church worship service. This describes servants in relation to their motive. Historically, this term passed through four stages of meaning. Initially it referred to the voluntary service one chose to do freely in the area of public service. Later the term was used to describe the same kind of work imposed upon one by the State. Eventually the term came to describe any kind of service, then the service of a priest or servant done in the temple of their gods. Commenting on the implications of this term, William Barclay suggests, “The Christian is a man who works for God and men, first, because he desires to, with his whole heart, and second, because he is compelled to, because the love of Christ constrains him.”

### **The Honor of a Servant of God**

While traveling in an Asian country, I was entertained at a restaurant by my host. When a waitress came by and filled my cup with tea, I instinctively acknowledged her kindness and thanked her. I was raised in a home where we were taught early to say “please” and “thank you” often. When the waitress left, my host explained to me they do not thank those who serve them in their culture. It was their job to serve and one does not thank one for simply doing their job.

Unfortunately, there are many people who think like my host. Those who serve are often taken for granted. They are not noticed until they are not there. This is sadly true even among Christians. Those who serve are more likely to be criticized than thanked. But the good news is that is not the case with God. Every act done in His name and for His glory is noticed. “Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). In the New Testament, Jesus said, “If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26).

While every servant looks forward to the day they hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23), some of the honor God promises His servants is also experienced in this life. Gifted servants tend to develop disciplines in life that result in God’s blessing in life. These disciplines might be described as the heart of a servant, the head of a servant, and the habit of a servant.

The heart of a servant is one of humility that is more concerned with serving God and others than seeking personal recognition. The Psalmist noted, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him" (Ps. 91:14-15). Honoring God in your life always results in God honoring you. Several proverbs remind us that a humble spirit is an essential prerequisite for personal recognition and honor. "The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility" (Prov. 15:33). "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life" (Prov. 22:4). "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Prov. 29:23). In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught repeatedly, "Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18).

The head of a servant refers to the servant's desire to learn how to best serve others. Servants desire to see the world as God sees the world and find a place or person where they can make a difference. Wisdom has been described as "seeing life from God's point of view" and once again, there are many proverbs that link the pursuit of wisdom with honor and recognition in this life. "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor" (Prov. 3:16). "Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor when you embrace her" (Prov. 4:8). "Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness" (Prov. 8:18).

The third discipline of a servant that brings honor is the habit of a servant. Because servants desire to honor their master in every way, they discipline their lifestyle so as to not bring a reproach on the one they serve. This is essential if they desire to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). How they live must be consistent with how they serve. The Bible teaches, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Certainly this principle applies to righteous people as much as it applies to a righteous nation.

### **The Best Is Yet to Come!**

But as good as life may get this side of heaven, the best is yet to come. Theologians describe the future state of believers as "a state of eternal bliss." While this is true of all who trust Christ as their Savior, it is especially true of those who have faithfully used their gift of serving in ministry for God and others. What we do now in this life impacts the quality of our life after this. God promises to make our experience in heaven more heavenly in recognition of the work we do for Him here. These promises are repeated throughout the Scriptures in the context of repayments, rewards, and recognition.

When Jesus taught the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, He illustrated the promise that God would indeed pay for services rendered in this life. Indeed, the Scriptures indicate that those who serve well are paid at a much higher rate than might be imagined in this life. When His disciples began wondering about the sacrifices they were making to follow Christ, Jesus told them, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29). Boaz greeted Ruth with the words, "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD

God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12). That is a promise every servant of God can claim personally.

A second term used by Boaz in his comments to Ruth was “reward.” The dictionary describes a reward as “something given in return for service.” It differs from the idea of repayment much like a bonus differs from a salary. In many businesses, people are paid a salary to do a job, but if they go above and beyond their duty, they are rewarded with a bonus at year’s end. Also, rewards are given to individuals for their service in helping solve crime or finding lost items. Jesus told His disciples, “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And who ever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matt. 10:41-42).

The third aspect of the honor coming to the servants of God is recognition. Jesus promised to identify His servants for God even as His servants identified Him before people. There are various ways to recognize and honor someone in different cultures. Among the Hawaiian people, it is customary to place a lei around one’s neck when they are greeted. In the First Century, it was common among the Greeks to greet guests with a crown of fresh bay leaves. This image is used in at least five contexts to describe crowns God will give to His servants in recognition of their service to Him.

*The Crown of Life for Staying True (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10)*  
*The Imperishable Crown for Strategic Evangelism (1 Cor. 9:25)*  
*The Crown of Rejoicing for Strengthening Believers (1 Thess. 2:19)*  
*The Crown of Glory for Shepherding Others (1 Peter 5:4)*  
*The Crown of Righteousness for Serving Well (2 Tim. 4:8)*

The Crown of Life recognizes those who have stayed true to Him in the midst of difficult circumstances. It is promised to those who are faithful in the midst of temptation. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). It is also promised to those who are faithful in the midst of intense persecution. “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

The Imperishable Crown recognizes those who have served in a way that brings others to Christ. Paul uses this term in the context of those who competed in the athletic contests of that day to win a crown that would quickly fade away. “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25). It is only fitting that those who serve for eternal results should be recognized with an imperishable crown.

The Crown of Rejoicing recognizes those who serve by strengthening other believers. Paul described those he discipled in the Christian life as his “crown of rejoicing.” He told the Thessalonians, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For

you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19-20). He felt the same way about others even as he encouraged them to stand strong. To the Philippians he wrote, “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved” (Phil. 4:1).

The Crown of Glory recognizes those who have helped shepherd others in the Christian life. This recognition is mentioned in the context of those serving in the pastoral office. Peter told them, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4). It is likely some who are not elders will receive this crown because the recognition is not based on the office held but the service performed.

Finally, the Crown of Righteousness recognizes those who have served well in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ. Toward the end of his life, Paul told Timothy, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

If you are gifted in serving and use your gift effectively in ministry, there may be many times you wonder if it is worth it. Often your efforts will go unnoticed while people gifted in other areas are publicly recognized for their work. It should not be that way, but in a fallen world people take others for granted. The good news is that your Father notices what others fail to see and ultimately He makes it worth our while.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **Developing the Heart of a Servant**

The heart of a servant is saturated with the desire to serve and expressed in a readiness to serve whenever and wherever possible. While some cultures encourage such an attitude, it is often viewed as inferior in the West. This is one of the most significant cultural differences between the East and West. In the East, people assume the broader community is most important and they are conditioned to think of doing what they can for the greater benefit of others. In the West we celebrate the individual entrepreneurial spirit and have a difficult time thinking of others except where they may be some benefit to us.

This situation may result in a sense of confusion and frustration for those gifted in serving. Because of the unique gifting of these individuals, part of them wants to be there for others, to help when they can by doing what they can. That inner desire runs so contrary to the cultural values they have learned their entire lives living in a consumer-driven culture. When human nature asks the question “What’s in it for me?” gifted servants want to shout back “Who cares. There is a job that needs doing.” But a part of them secretly admits they do care and it bothers them.

While the problem is specific to our culture and the economic climate in which we have been raised, it is in reality a spiritual problem as old as Christianity itself. While specific issues may vary, inevitably authentic Christianity consistently applied in life will always find a point of conflict with sin nature that dominates the human heart. Paul expressed the same confusion when he wrote, “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Rom. 7:15).

Paul understood his difficulty was a spiritual problem, a problem of the heart. Before he could serve God as he desired, he needed to overcome that aspect of his sin nature that hindered him and find personal victory in Christ. In the same way, developing the heart of a servant involves similar steps. First, those gifted in serving must address acquired attitudes that will hinder the effectiveness of this gift, attitudes like fear and pride. Then those negative attitudes need to be replaced with a more positive outlook shaped by humility and confidence. While that may deal with the problem initially, gifted servants will enhance the long-term effectiveness of their giftedness by developing a long-term personal growth strategy that begins to change the way they think.

### **Insecure Servants of God**

Many gifted servants are hindered in the exercise of their gift by fear. The word “fear” in Scripture is used in both a positive and negative sense. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7) and that is a good thing. The better we understand the awesomeness of our God, it is only proper that fear emerge in our thinking. In contrast, “the fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD



shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). This second expression of fear causes many problems in life.

In our contemporary culture we have given “the fear of man” many names. In describing the youth culture, we speak of “peer pressure” which is usually figured as negative. In a military context, “the fear of man” sometimes results in a phenomenon sociologists call “group think,” a condition when the entire group thinks the same way yet no one member of the group can give a rationale for why he or she thinks that way. When taken to an extreme, psychologists call “the fear of man” agoraphobia, the fear of being in public places.

Fear may be described as an insecure view of the future. Because we are uncertain of what lies ahead, our insecurity causes us to protect ourselves from any and all perceived threats. “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1). Somebody described fear as “false evidence appearing real,” using the word “fear” as an acrostic.

When people are dominated by fear, it shows in their behavior. They begin practicing behavior that tends to undermine rather than encourage building healthy relationships. Some begin hiding behind titles or positions. “I’m your mother (or father, or teacher, or boss, or pastor, etc.)” becomes a substitute for addressing issues when they feel threatened. They begin withholding information from others, especially if they think that information reflects poorly on them. When a wife began having trouble balancing the family books, she continued to tell her husband they were doing well when in fact they were falling deeper and deeper in debt every month.

Sometimes fear creates a level of insecurity in others to the point they begin intimidating others, another common tactic designed to keep people at a distance so they do not get close enough to be a threat. They increasingly seek to take control of resources and routines in life. Whereas open communication is essential to building healthy relationships, people who are insecure tend to discourage honest feedback fearing someone may not like who they are or what they do. As a result, those who stay around such people watch what they say and conversations tend to be little more than expressions of mutual admiration.

### **The Destructive Power of Pride**

In contrast to the insecurity that dominates a person consumed with fear, some people are dominated by an arrogant attitude when they are consumed with an overly high opinion of themselves. Pride may be described as thinking of yourself as something more than you are. When we have an unrealistic view of who we are, we tend to think we can handle anything that may come our way. As a result, we are not prepared for the things that can knock us off our feet nor are we inclined to get help when we need it because we do not think of ourselves as ever needing help. That is why the Scriptures warn, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 18:18). No wonder Paul warned the Corinthians, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The demand of pride is to satisfy self. One of the cultural values of an economic strategy based on consumerism is the idea that the consumer is the one who really

matters. As a result, many of us have been conditioned to evaluate choices on the basis of “What’s in it for me?” Many of the common marketing slogans of prominent and successful businesses only tend to inflate our already over developed ego. “You can have it your way.” “You deserve a break today.” “It’s all about you.” “You’re the boss.” The more media savvy we become, the more often we have been urged to think about making self satisfaction our primary goal in life.

As a result, the desire of pride is to promote self. If I really believe “I can do it alone,” my personal success is the focus of my celebration. Even minor moments of glory become a cause for repetitive reporting. “Did I tell you about the time I...?” “I remember when I...” Few conversations tend to take place without the abundant use of the first personal pronoun.

Jesus described this aspect of pride in His Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21). The story was about a farmer who had a prosperous year and decided to expand his holdings, not realizing he was about to die. One interesting thing about the parable is that of the sixty-two words attributed to the man in the parable, fourteen are personal pronouns or other terms used by the man to refer to himself. That does not include eleven verbs that imply references to himself. From his perspective, it was all about him and that focus forever earned him the reputation of being “the rich fool.”

Unfortunately, the disaster of pride is it destroys self. “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom” (Prov. 13:10). When left to themselves, the proud will always self-destruct. Those consumed with an arrogant spirit destroy potential relationships with others who could help them because of their tendency to separate, discriminate and renovate.

Because they think more highly of themselves than they ought, the proud have a difficult time finding people they believe are worthy of their presence. As a result they tend to separate from others who are not good enough. When pride dominates the Christian life, they have great difficulty finding a church that is spiritual enough, or professional enough, or where the music is good enough, or the preaching deep enough to justify their involvement. The expression, “Us four and no more,” describes many small churches filled with arrogant Christians.

The tendency to separate from others is often accompanied with a practice of discrimination. In a previous generation discrimination was practiced on the basis of racial differences. Most people today agree that was wrong and would be repulsed by any Christian leader who might advocate returning to the old practice of segregation. But proud Christians continue the practice but discriminate on the basis of different issues. “I don’t think we want those kids with tattoos and body piercings in our youth group.” “Somebody really should tell that new family in church they are not dressed appropriately for our worship service.” “Wouldn’t that new poor family attending our church feel more comfortable at the mission across town?”

The only way the proud can justify their ongoing destructive attitude is to “renovate” the apparent teachings of the Scripture. When taken at face value, the Scriptures confront the proud with their sinful behavior and attitude. But if they can redefine the meaning of words and reinterpret the clear teaching of Scripture as somehow meaning something different in a First Century culture, or being applicable only to that setting and

not us today, they can excuse their sin. Remember Jesus used the word “fool” to describe the ego driven rich man? Paul wrote, “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22).

### **Humility: The Key to Effective Ministry**

One does not have to read much of the Scriptures to recognize the high priority God places on humility. While this is especially true in the life and teachings of Jesus, humility is a theme in both the Old and New Testaments describing an attitude which is essential in our relationships with both God and others. Because our ministry grows out of our relationship with God and is expressed in our relationship with others, humility is also essential to effective ministry for the glory of God and the good of others.

But what exactly is humility? A lot of people have a lot of different ideas. The Hebrew word most often translated “humility” in the Old Testament comes from a root meaning “to bow low.” In many Asian cultures, people greet one another by bowing. The lower one bows, the greater the respect that is shown to another. When the peasant met the emperor, the peasant would lay prostrate before the ruler and the emperor may nod his head in acknowledgment.

In the New Testament, the Greek word most often translated “humble” contains the idea of lowliness of mind. Paul urged the Philippians, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3). In both languages, the words for humility convey the idea of giving high value and respect to others rather than giving preference to your own interests.

William Booth captured this idea in a telegram he sent to his officers during a difficult economic season in the life of the Salvation Army. For years it was his practice to give his troops a maxim at yearend that would give the movement a common focus to the coming year. One year, financial restraints were so tight he could only afford one word in the widely distributed telegram. The word: “others.” He wanted his followers to set aside their own interests in their efforts to take the Gospel to meet the needs of others.

Someone described humility as a willingness to bow low in our service to God and others. At just over six feet tall, I am an intimidating presence to many people, especially young children. When I stand over them and look down, I can see the fear in their eyes as they try to hide behind their parents. If I am in their presence long, their little chins may begin to quiver and tears begin to fill their eyes. But if I get down on my hands and knees and begin playing with them and their toys, suddenly I am less threatening and we become great friends. It may not look too dignified, but it is what it takes for a guy as tall and big as I am to relate to young children. And it is what it takes for you to have a relationship with those you are trying to help through your gift of serving.

Sometimes this concept is misunderstood. Having the mind of the lowly is not the same as having the mind of a loser. On His final night with His disciples, Jesus disrobed and wrapped Himself in a towel. He then began washing His disciples feet, a task usually reserved for the lowliest servant in the household. His action was a practical illustration designed to teach two important messages His disciples needed to learn. First, He was reminding His disciples how He had set aside aspects of His own glory

and humbled Himself to become a servant and accomplish God's mission on earth (Phil. 2:6-8). Second, He was urging His disciples to adopt the same attitude in their own ministry after He was gone. Years later, Paul summarized that part of the message with the words, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

That is not the place where most of us live. In light of that, how do we get from here to there? Part of the answer to that question is found in Paul's instructions to the Romans about spiritual gifts. First, be humble. "For I say, through the grace given me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). Next, be wise, "think soberly" (Rom. 12:3). Then, be grateful because your giftedness is God's gift to you, "as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). Fourth, be unique. By divine design, there is no one quite like you. "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:4-5). Finally, be active. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:6).

Obviously there is more to developing humility than these five steps, but they will give you a good start down a life-long path of learning and incorporating this attitude into your mindset and lifestyle. In the process of becoming increasingly more like Jesus, we will find it increasingly easier to begin acting like Jesus.

### **The Confident Servant of God**

If the humble servant is the counterpart to the arrogant servant, then the confident servant is the counterpart to the insecure servant. The insecure servant is dominated by fear but the Bible affirms, "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). If fear is "false evidence appearing real," the key to becoming a confident servant of God is resting on spiritual realities that will never fail. These realities include the nature, character, purpose, plan, processes, and provision of God.

The first step in moving toward a more confident attitude involves understanding the true nature of God. Many people, including many Christians, believe God sits in the heavens looking down on His creation looking for things they do wrong so that He can inflict His appropriate judgment on their life. Actually, that view of God finds its historic roots in the pagan religion of the Vikings. They believed the god "Thor" (after whom "Thursday" is named), sat in the clouds to judge people on earth. When he saw something he did not like, he would fire a bolt of lightning down and sit back and laugh at the destruction he caused. It was their way of explaining the phenomenon of lightning followed by thunder.

The God of the Bible is a God above all gods and nowhere is this clearer than in His nature. Part of any description of God's nature must include His benevolent attitude toward His creation. Indeed, this is at the core of what it means to truly believe. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). God wants to bless us more than we desire to be blessed. In every other theistic worldview, people live in fear of their gods. In Christianity, we live in love with our God.

God's character is closely related to His nature. God's character is an expression of His nature and describes the way He relates to us. Once again, understanding that character should help us gain greater confidence in Him and His dealings in our life. Attributes such as love, grace, mercy, compassion and faithfulness remind us we serve a God who is there for us and always will be there when we need Him.

One reason many people live with a sense of uncertainty or unsettledness in their life is that they don't know where they are going. Remembering that God has a purpose in our life that is best for our life encourages confidence even when we don't know the specific details of how God plans to work that purpose out in our life. God told Israel, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). When my children were young, they did not know the details of the trip to grandma's house, but they slept through the night in the back seat of the car, confident Dad knew what he was doing and where he was going.

It might be a good idea for us to commit to staying in the back seat of God's car as He works out His purposes in our life even when we don't understand and sometimes even resent the process involved. Most desirable things in life involve effort, discomfort and suffering. People work hard to earn money, women endure labor to have children, and couples make financial sacrifices to buy a new home. In the Christian life it takes trials to build character and tribulation to equip us to minister effectively to others. Jesus understood that when He "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). That was the example Paul used to conclude his most extensive discussion of the role of faith in the Christian life.

Ultimately our confidence is reinforced by understanding that God will and does provide everything we need. "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). When Abraham experienced God's provision in a critical moment in His life, he named the mountain where it happened "Jehovah Jireh" meaning "the LORD will provide" because, "in the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (Gen. 22:14). Thereafter, whenever Abraham or his son looked at that mountain, they were reminded of both God's past provision and His promised provision.

Serving confidently results in a transparent life and effective ministry. It also provides gifted servants with the liberty to exchange their "got to" projects with "want to" projects. A lot of people will tell you what you have "got to" do and there are always more "got to" projects than time to do them. But when we are confident in the Lord we don't have to be afraid of what people might think if we say "no." We are free to serve where we "want to," where we believe we can use our gift most effectively.

## **A Personal Growth Strategy**

The challenge for gifted servants involves moving from their insecurity into confidence or exchanging their arrogance for humility. Various first steps have been suggested in the discussion above. But servants of God are to maximize the effectiveness of their gift of serving, a personal growth plan is needed. Christians gifted in this area will typically tend to neglect themselves and their own needs while seeking

to meet the needs of others. The downside of that tendency is that they stagnate in their spiritual growth and never experience the degree of personal fulfillment they could experience if their gift were allowed to grow.

A good first step in the process of personal growth is to meditate on the names and attributes of God. These are two ways God reveals Himself to His people. When we learn His names and attributes, we get to know God better. As servants of God, it is good idea to learn as much about our master as possible.

The better you get to know God, the better you will get to know yourself. In the light of who God is, take time to identify your own personal strengths and weaknesses. While this process can be intimidating, it is an important step in your personal growth strategy. You need to build on your strengths and work on your weaknesses. Also, when you know your limitations, you have a context in which you can establish boundaries that will keep you in the sphere where you serve best. Remember, humility thinks soberly, not negatively.

A good second step is to take time to learn all you can about grace. This will help you understand how God wants to work in and through your life. In the process you will discover that grace is more than what God used to get you saved. Indeed it permeates every aspect of God's dealing in your life and will help you discover your potential in Christ. No wonder John Newton called it "amazing."

Third, change your way of thinking about the things you do and what is really important. Develop an eternal perspective by evaluating the here and now in light of the then and there. Washing dishes at a church outreach dinner is not just a hygienic thing to do. It could be part of God's plan to bring guests that evening into a personal relationship with Christ that will last for eternity. Helping physically build a church is not just providing a place of worship that can be identified in the community, it is providing a facility from which and through which a church family can reach their community for Christ and disciple new believers in the Christian life.

At some point, being a servant of God means you must abandon your personal ambitions to pursue God's agenda for your life. This is what Paul called the Romans to when he wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Part of using your gift of serving involves serving God by yielding completely to Him and His will for your life.

As you grow in your commitment to and understanding of God, you will need to periodically identify and review your personal core values in life. There will always be more opportunities to serve than there is time to serve. When you know what is really important in your life and begin implementing those values in your decision-making process, you will have a context that frees you to get involved in some opportunities while refusing to be involved in others.

If all this seems a little overwhelming, don't worry. Take your time and let it develop as you develop in your walk with God. But here is something you can do in the next week or so to help you get started using your gift. Set a goal of doing one good thing for someone else that they would not expect but would appreciate deeply. Make a meal;

cut a lawn; shovel the snow out of their drive; offer to watch the kids so mom and dad can have a night alone; or do something even better because you thought of it, you know them, and you know God has made you unique to do something like that.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Serving Others with Passion and Purpose

In the midst of the controversy that surrounded Him just days before His death, someone asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matt. 22:36). The inquirer’s motive was not to gain information but to entrap Jesus. He assumed he could argue against any of the 613 laws of Moses Jesus might choose to endorse as the greatest. The air was filled with tension as the Sadducees surrounding Him waited for His answer, ready to engage in a theological debate that would destroy His popularity with the crowd.

A lesser man might have walked from the test or simply refused to choose one commandment over another. After all, Jesus’ own brother would later note, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). That being the case, how could one law be greater than another? But Jesus had an answer that identified the greatest of the commandments without minimizing the importance of the rest.

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). In His answer, He not only silenced His critics; He also identified the priorities of the Christian life for all who would follow Him.

This lifestyle of loving God and loving people ought to be characteristic of all Christians, but it is an especially essential part of what it means to be a servant. Gifted servers exercise that gift out of a passion for God and compassion for people. While those who use their gift to accomplish God’s purpose always experience a sense of personal fulfillment, that feeling tends to follow ministry. Our love for God and others motivates us to minister in the first place.

While the Great Commandment motivates us to serve, the method by which we serve is conditioned by various other factors. Perhaps more than any other task-oriented spiritual gifts, our acquired skills and learned abilities shape the expression of this gift in ministry. As much as one might like to help meet a real need, he or she cannot do so without the skills needed to do the job. When the church needs a church pianist, they need someone who can play the piano. When a camp needs a waterfront director, they need someone with the proper certification. Likewise the camp nurse should have some medical training and background.

But even beyond our skill-set, the way we think about problems and needs also impacts our approach to serving. The questions we ask as we approach an opportunity to serve identify the context that characterizes our approach to serving God. The questions, (1) How can I help? (2) What needs to be done? (3) How do you want this done? (4) What are we trying to accomplish? and (5) What is most important? identify the thing that drives us to serve. While all those questions may be asked, the question we ask first reveals our real concern.



Before considering the five drives of God's servant, note they do not represent right and wrong ways to serve. Rather they help us understand why we are attracted to certain ministry opportunities and are not so interested in others. Also, as many who use this gift often serve in the context of work teams, it is helpful to understand that others with skills and a commitment to the project underway may look at the task at hand from a different perspective. The questions we ask to gain an understanding of the job shape the approach we take to getting the job done.

### **The Passion-Driven Servant of God**

When Bill learned a group of men from his church were going to another state to help a new church build their first building, he decided it was something he would like to do. He contacted the team leader and arranged for the time off work so he could go. Being the youngest member of the group, he respected the experience of others on the team, each one having particular work skills essential to the project. When they arrived on location, his first question was, "How can I help?"

Initially Bill was given a variety of tasks anyone could do. He brought in lumber for those who were framing walls and tile for those working on the washroom floors. When one of the men finishing the walls needed an assistant, Bill was called on to help mud the walls. It was only then the team learned of his skill in finishing a wall. After that, he spent the rest of the week finishing walls. When the next trip to build churches was scheduled, one of the first things the team leader did was contact Bill to see if he was available for that project.

Having recently moved to a new town, Dawn began attending a church that often had special meals after services and surrounding special events. When she saw a group of ladies in the kitchen after one such meal, she asked, "What can I do to help?" Someone handed her a towel and she joined the group by the sink washing and drying dishes. At the next church dinner, she arrived early to help set the tables. In the course of conversation, other ladies learned Dawn had been a chef at a high-end restaurant before her husband was transferred to a new office in a new city and that she had just started work in the kitchen of a favorite dining establishment in the area. Thereafter, she was given greater responsibilities in the church dinners enabling her to use her acquired skills and learned abilities more effectively in ministry.

Bill and Dawn are examples of the passion-driven servants of God. They have never gotten over the fact that God loves them and they find themselves compelled to love God and share God's love with others. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). As a result, no task is too small or insignificant if they can help meet a need in the life of another. Passion-driven servants seek to emulate the aspect of Christ's character that moved Him to do things beneath His dignity to meet the needs in the lives of others.

The fulfillment they experience in serving God any way may also be their greatest frustration. They see so many opportunities around them where they could do something but can't find enough hours to do everything. Passion-driven servants need to do something to help, but also be comfortable doing the thing they do best when they

find their niche in ministry. When they do this, they make room for others gifted in serving to join the ministry team.

### **The Problem-Driven Servant of God**

Andy rarely asks when it comes to serving. He has an instinctive way of identifying a problem and doing what he can to fix it. When he woke up early one morning, he remembered some painting needed to be done at the church, so he dressed in old clothes, made his way to the church basement, and before long had the first coat on the walls. By the time the work crew arrived at 9:00 a.m., they were pleasantly surprised to learn they only needed to add the finishing coat.

Although Andy does not ask others, he subconsciously asks himself, “What needs to be done?” whenever he sees a need. Most often that draws him to very needy people. His service in their life usually begins with offering them a ride or cutting their lawn. Before long he is giving them a ride to church where they hear the gospel and trust Christ as Savior. Then he does what he can to help get them on their feet until they can manage on their own. When that happens, he is off to find something else that needs to be done and the process repeats itself.

Cathy knows there are many things she can't do, but the things she can do often bring her into contact with people who are struggling in other areas of their life. She is often there for people in need with a nourishing meal she has prepared and delivered to them or served to them in her home. On occasion her hospitality has extended to actually providing a place for an unemployed person to stay until he or she can settle into a new job and find a place live. Like Andy, she may not ask others but when she sees someone in need, the first question that comes to her mind is, “What needs to be done?” Then, as much as she is able, she does what she can to meet that need.

Like Bill and Dawn, Andy and Cathy are consumed with a passion for God and compassion for people. That is true of all gifted servants who use their gift in ministry to meet the needs of others. When they help by doing what needs to be done, their compassion for people is seen and felt by those who appreciate the help. But they also realize what needs to be done is often deeper than the problem that first appears. Needy people are often people who have lost hope.

The Bible teaches, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). The loss of hope experienced by so many with significant needs is itself demotivating and often results in complicating the problems they already have. Beyond the apparent needs other may see, the problem-driven servant also sees this deeper need to break the downward spiral of despair and help people recover hope. They know when that happens, those in despair will be energized to act and resolve their own problems. That is why they “DARE” to help others recover hope. The acronym “DARE” describes their work in displaying confidence, acting courageously, remaining committed, and encouraging creativity throughout this process.

When helping meet the needs in the lives of others, your personal confidence in their ability to recover from their present situation is essential. When people object that Cathy or Andy is doing too much for them, Cathy and Andy usually use that opportunity to

suggest someday the person in need will be doing far more for someone with greater needs. While it may be hard for the needy to consider that reality, the comment often births hope back into their life because someone else believes in them. They may reason, “I don’t think I could ever do as much as my friends are doing for me, but I may get to the place where I can help a little.”

Acting courageously on behalf of people in need is a second way of restoring hope in their life. In a pit of despair, it is hard to think of getting out when all you can remember is how far you have fallen. Sometimes it takes a gifted servant to help the person in need to take those first steps of recovery. Cathy often sits down with the people she is helping to help them plan a budget that enables them to live within their means. Andy has been known to take people who need a car to a dealer he knows to negotiate a fair price for a reliable used car. They step out courageously to help those they are helping begin to help themselves. When the recovering people discover their budget works and they are able to save money, or they are able to drive their new car to a new job across town, they can’t help but believe maybe there is hope after all.

Remaining committed is a third essential step in helping people in need recover hope. One reason this is so important is that many people in need have never experienced a committed relationship. The single mother struggling to raise her children does not know what it means to have a man committed to her in a married relationship. Her children do not know what it means to have a father committed to their care and well-being. When a problem-driven servant refuses to accept a bandage solution and remains committed until the problem is resolved, he or she demonstrates God’s commitment to all of us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. That truth produces hope in our life and it will do the same in the lives of others.

The final step in the DARE process involves encouraging creativity. When people can think beyond their problem to begin looking for solutions, many stop with one possible action. In most cases, there are many ways to address a need or problem. Each possibility may work in different circumstances more or less effectively, so resolving problems and meeting needs is often best done by implementing various strategies. This requires creativity in looking for things that might work.

The problem with the single-strategy approach to resolving a problem or meeting a need is a problem of results. What if it doesn’t work? If a person is convinced there is only one way they can deal with the situation, a failure will drive them into deeper despair. However, if he or she has thought of other creative possibilities, hope remains that they can do something to resolve things. If time has been invested in looking for workable solutions, it is unlikely that every option will fail. When something works, hope grows and the person in need is even more motivated to resolve the problem.

### **The Practice-Driven Servant of God**

Before he retired, Fred worked for a North American auto manufacturer. For thirty-five years he showed up to work to do the same job he did the day before. He understood he was part of a larger team turning out cars to satisfy consumer demand. When he returned to work following the plant’s annual shut down to retool for the new model year, that first day involved a little reorientation. When the line foreman told Fred

about his new job, Fred's first question was always, "How do you want this done?" He understood his actions on the job impacted the way others did their job. He noted the space he had to accomplish his job and listened as the foreman explained how to do what needed to be done. And for the rest of the year, he did his job the way he was supposed to within the time and space allotted on the assembly line. He understood the company was looking for compliance, not creativity.

When the kids went to school, Elizabeth looked for a part-time job that would allow her to help with household expenses and be home when her children were home. The only job she found was at a call center that answered people's questions about products built by another manufacturer. Elizabeth did not know much about the products she was being asked about, but that did not matter. She was given a card index with the standard answers for how to deal with known problems for the products she represented. When people called, she would look up the problem in her index and read the assigned response printed on the card. Customers were happy to learn how to get their product fixed and functioning again and it made Elizabeth happy to know she was able to help people. When a problem came up that did not have a preprinted response, those calls were forwarded to others with a better understanding of the product in question. Her job was simply to use the assigned answers to deal with the most common problems people had with their product.

It is not surprising that both Fred and Elizabeth adopted the same approach to their volunteer work at the church and in the community. "How do you want this done?" was their first question once they were assigned a task. When the job was explained to them, they did not respond by discussing alternative ways to do it. They simply did what they were told to do within the limits of their abilities. If the task at hand were something outside their ability, they would politely explain they did not think they could do that and asked if there was something else they could do.

Some gifted servants are practice-driven. They do what they have always done to get the job done. While this approach to service is sometimes looked down on by others, it does get the job done and done right. Also knowing what they are supposed to do helps them remain focused on the task at hand. When invited to do something different outside their abilities, it provides them a context in which they can politely refuse. This does not mean they don't want to work. Rather, they want to work where they can work best in a way that gets the job done.

The strength of the practice-driven servant is seen in the life of Peter. Peter is known for doing many things, some very well and some very poorly. But after the resurrection of Christ, Peter had a private meeting with Jesus on a beach in Galilee. During their conversation that day, Jesus gave Peter a new direction and focus in his service for God. Three times He told his wayward disciple, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). When you trace the later ministry of Peter in Acts and the epistles, his success can be measured by his commitment to doing what God had called him to do. And when he wandered from that commitment, once again he failed.

## **The Purpose-Driven Servant of God**

When a job transfer moved George and Hope to a new community, they also looked for a new church where they could use their gift of serving in ministry. When they learned a new church was being started in a school several blocks from their home, they attended and quickly discovered a new church home. The new church met in rented facilities, which provided many opportunities for servers. George and Hope began arriving early to help set up chairs each week but longed to do something more. They decided to invite Pastor Frank and his family to their home for lunch one Sunday after church so they could learn more about his vision for the church.

Over lunch, the pastor described the church as someday having a campus of its own where people could gather for worship each week but also meet in small discipleship groups in homes throughout the region. Unfortunately, the work of getting the church started had consumed so much of his time that he had not had time to find a new campus and the only discipleship group in the church was the one he and his wife hosted on Tuesday evenings. Still, the vision remained although even the pastor had to admit he did not know when it could be implemented more fully.

When the pastor and his family left, George and Hope began talking about how they could help move their pastor's vision closer to reality. They enjoyed having people in their home and wondered if they should consider hosting a second discipleship group. Neither of them considered themselves a teacher, but if the pastor could find a group leader, they could provide a place to meet. Also, through his business contacts in the community, George was certain he could help the pastor find a building for the church that would provide a meeting place for the next phase of the church's growth and have a high resale value when it was time for them to move to a larger facility. Later that week, George met the pastor over lunch near his office and shared the ways he and Hope thought they could help. A month later, George and Hope were hosting the church's second discipleship group on Thursday evenings. Six months later, the church moved into a small vacant building near George's office, about a mile and a half from the school they had met in for several years.

Servants like George and Hope want to use their gift in ways that are compatible with the big picture. The question that helps them clarify the things they should be doing is, "What are we trying to accomplish?" They are people who serve to accomplish God's purpose in their life. They look at ministry from a perspective similar to that of Peter when he wrote, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (1 Peter 4:11). They were not teachers, but their home became a place of teaching where God could be glorified. They were not preachers, but they could do what they could to find a place where God's Word could be preached and God would be glorified as people came to Christ.

The strength of purpose-driven servants of God is the harmony in which they serve with others in different ministries with different gifts. They understand they are working toward the same goal, each in their own way. The common commitment to purpose and

understanding their unique gifting builds a strong team working together to accomplish more than they could accomplish alone. The purpose becomes the glue that unifies the team.

### **The Priority-Driven Servant of God**

When Jerry arrived at the church Saturday morning for the annual spring “Clean up the Campus” day, he noticed how various people tended to gravitate toward various tasks that needed to be done. Some were washing windows while others had climbed ladders to clean out eave troughs. In the green space of the campus, he saw several of his friends putting branches that had fallen from trees in the winter storms into the back of a trailer to be taken to the recycling depot in town and knew they would soon be raking the lawn to and adding to the pile of yard waste. Because he had been involved in previous years, he knew people were inside dusting the furnishings and applying lemon oil to the pews, pulpit, piano and organ to help preserve their finish. Every year was the same. People arrived, did their jobs, enjoyed fellowship with each other both in the work and over lunch together and the church looked so much better the next morning. But the weeds kept on growing in the gravel parking lot.

It had always bothered him that the parking lot seemed to be neglected, but not this year. He reached into the back of his pickup truck, picked up one of the hoes he had brought with him, and began digging up the weeds that seemed to grow well in gravel. He had talked about this problem with a couple of friends and knew they would soon be there to use the other hoe and rake to attack the problem. He and his team would make the parking lot their priority today, first removing the weeds growing where people were not already parked hoping they would move their cars during the lunch break so the rest of the lot could be done in the afternoon. He also hoped some who spent the morning hoeing in the gardens would lend a hand in the lot when they were through.

Ingrid had a few errands to run that morning and arrived late, as she walked through the building to find something to do, she saw Helen alone in the kitchen putting together a nourishing vegetable soup for lunch. She also noticed a quantity of rolls on the counter. Within a matter of minutes talking with Helen, she realized that while everyone was working on cleaning up the campus, no one had volunteered to help Helen prepare the mid-day meal. Ingrid had found the thing that needed to be done that she could do best. She began cutting rolls and preparing sandwiches to go with Helen’s soup not just because it needed to be done, but because she knew preparing the meal would enable the workers to stay longer and get the task at hand done. That is also why Helen had been working along in the kitchen in the first place.

When people like Jerry, Ingrid and Helen approach various ministry opportunities, the question that drives them to action is, “What is most important?” They know they cannot do everything nor are they necessarily needed to do something others are already doing. They tend to look for the important things that are sometimes neglected or overlooked in the business of taking care of so many other details. They want to use their serving gift to do things that matter and make a difference. Often that involves serving in ways others have not considered. Those who serve in this way are driven by priorities. Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all

these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). The priority-driven servant applies this command as Paul did when he said, “one thing I do” (Phil. 3:13).

### **Time to Take Inventory**

It is easy to look at others who serve God in different ways and with different motives in a vain attempt to determine who is doing it right and who is doing it wrong. Before going down that path remember there is no wrong way to serve God and others. God has shaped each of us individually to serve Him in our own unique way. Part of the way we serve God is based on our gifting and past experiences. Part of it is also based on our conditioning, ways we have been taught to look at serving. Because serving is so often a team ministry, it is a good idea to take inventory by asking five questions to clarify the way you serve and how you relate to those you serve with.

The first question you need to ask yourself is, “Why do I serve where I serve?” This question looks to your ministry motive. Perhaps you are attracted to a specific kind of ministry; you like working in the kitchen or doing construction. Understand your learned abilities and acquired skills impact the way you serve, especially when the work you do in using those skills and abilities is something you enjoy. There is nothing wrong with enjoying what you do for the Lord. In fact, when you use your spiritual gift in a compatible ministry, you will experience a deeper sense of personal fulfillment. But it is important to understand that not everyone serving with you may serve with the same ministry motive. They may be serving because it needs to be done or they lack the confidence to serve in an area they might enjoy more.

Next ask, “What kind of servant am I?” As you read the descriptions of various servants above, there was a moment when you said, “That’s me!” When confronted with an opportunity to serve, what is the big question you ask that determines what you do about the need? When you understand why you serve you will have insight into the kinds of ministry opportunities in which you will find the greatest personal fulfillment. Serving where you serve best usually means you will continue to use your gift of serving longer.

The third question to ask is, “What kind of servants do I work with?” Someone has wisely said, “If two people are exactly the same, one of them is not necessary.” Couples involved in a healthy marriage understand the value of diversity in a ministry team. Failure to recognize that may result in conflict as one person attempts to impose his or her way of doing things upon another. One of the greatest threats to the effectiveness of a ministry team is conflict. When you understand what kind of servants you work with, you will be able to discern their strengths and the value they add to the team. Understanding is a good first step in building a healthy team spirit.

Perhaps as you evaluate yourself, you are not sure your current approach to serving is really you. Many of us have been conditioned to think of doing ministry in a particular way and have tried to conform to that paradigm. What kind of servant do you want to be? If the answer to that question is different from your answer to the second question you asked, dare to think outside the box and begin approaching opportunities to serve from a different perspective. Those who have been conditioned to think one way about ministry may find this difficult and need help. Share this issue with someone you trust

who can help you clarify how God has shaped you and walk you through the change you desire one step at a time.

Finally, “How am I bringing balance to my life and service?” There is an old English expression, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” It is important that each of us learns to balance our service for God with times to rest and be refreshed. This issue is so important that a later chapter in this book is devoted to balancing your life and service for God. But first, you need to consider a couple of other issues.





## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **Pursuing Excellence in All You Do**

My dad was an auto worker in an age before robotics, faithfully making his assigned spot welds or affixing the right bolt in the right place as the car he was building rolled along the assembly line while others did similar jobs to supply cars for the North American market. The job was the means by which he provided for our family. But when he began working in that industry, economic times were turbulent. Between layoffs and union strikes, there were many times he was out of work. In those times he went back to his former trade as a tile and cement man. And when he had jobs on weekends or during the summer school break, he would often take his son out to the job site with him.

Dad knew he could always find work in the construction industry because he had a reputation for excellence in his workmanship. He also believed working in construction provided him the opportunity to teach his son a trade. To my personal frustration, I soon discovered dad's standards were much higher than those of others on the job. The work I did that could have passed inspection did not necessarily pass dad's inspection. I learned some important life lessons working with my dad in construction. One that comes to mind is an expression I often heard both him and my mom say in various contexts over the years. "If it is worth doing, it is worth doing well." Not many people were using the word "excellence" in those days, but I know at least one tile and cement man that made it a part of every job he did.

When we think of excellence, we usually think of that which is superior in quality and worth. The idea of excelling involves surpassing others in what we do. That which is excellent is better than the rest, setting a new standard for quality. The Bible uses this word in the same way. Because the Lord's name is "excellent" (Ps. 8:1, 9), it is "exalted" above all others (Ps. 148:13).

Part of the challenge of using your spiritual gift of serving in ministry relates to the One you are serving and your ultimate goal in serving Him. Peter reminded his readers, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to who belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11). That being our goal, the pursuit of excellence in all we do is not an option. It is a core value birthed deep in the heart of a servant.

### **The Pursuit of a Servant of God<sup>i</sup>**

Because excellence is who God is and what He deserves, gifted servants want excellence to characterize all they do. Solomon urged, "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Eccl. 9:10). This moment is all we can count on, so today is the day we need to put forth our best effort to accomplish the task at hand. In the New

Testament, Paul urged the Corinthians, “therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 9:32).

In their book, *In Search of Excellence*, Peters and Waterman researched conditions at many of America’s best-run companies to identify the qualities that characterized excellence in those companies. In publishing their findings, they identified eight qualities that distinguished those companies from others. While the book was written with a business orientation, their findings describe an orientation in these businesses best reflected in the life of the gifted servant who performs well. Adapting these qualities to life suggests one way gifted servants can pursue excellence in all they do in ministry.

Peters and Waterman began their list identifying a “bias for action.” While many companies choose to study problems by referring them to consultants or committees for analysis and evaluation, companies marked by excellence prefer to do something, anything to address the issue. Those gifted in serving tend to be more task-oriented than others. When there is a commitment to getting the job done and a problem arises, the question is not, “What do we do about the problem?” but rather, “How do we get this job done in spite of the problem?”

Second, excellent companies maintain a close relationship with their customer base. They understand their customer’s preferences and choose to cater to them. Once again, this describes the norm in the orientation of the gifted servant. Serving is not serving because of what one does but because of how that service meets the needs of someone else. While other gifted Christians may become so immersed in the task associated with their gift they lose track of people, servants can only exercise their gift effectively if they know the needs of those they serve and consistently meet them.

Next, companies marked by excellence tend to promote autonomy and entrepreneurship within their corporation encouraging individuals or groups to think independently and competitively. In manufacturing, many executives know those working on the line see things they don’t and encourage employees to make suggestions to improve productivity. Because servants work on the front line of getting a project done, they too need to be free to identify better ways of getting the job done and incorporating that into what they do. When a group of dishwashers line up in the kitchen to clean up after a meal, they may do this without thinking about what they are doing. One rinses, another washes, and a couple others dry. In the process, they have found a way that works best and implemented an effective work strategy.

Peters and Waterman also talked about pursuing productivity through people. Excellent companies create awareness in their people that their best efforts are essential to the company’s success. This is often done through some kind of profit sharing program or public recognition. While those gifted in serving may not view themselves as very important in the context of the larger ministry of their church, they are often the first contact the church has with those outside their congregation. If excellence is going to characterize their ministry, they need to recognize their actions and attitudes define a perception of their church to many and be certain that perception is positive.

A fifth characteristic of excellent companies is the involvement of company executives in insuring the values of the company are maintained in all that it does. Just

as it is easy for a business in the midst of its activities to drift from the core values that made it what it became, so it is easy for Christians, especially those gifted in serving, to become so busy doing things that they forget why they are doing what they are doing. It is good to periodically view what you believe is important and determine if your actions are consistent with your core values. This process will be addressed later in this chapter.

Peters and Waterman coined the phrase “stick to the knitting” to describe the sixth characteristic of excellent businesses. The phrase was used by a lady involved in a sweater knitting company to describe that company’s commitment to focus on doing what it knows best rather than diversifying into other fields. That may be a problem for some gifted in serving because of their eagerness in wanting to help. Walter wanted to be part of a work team doing renovations at the church, but he really was not handy when it came to construction. As a result, others on the team lost time fixing what he had done before they could do what they needed to do. In contrast, he was an excellent painter, something the others preferred not to do. When he agreed to paint and let others work on the rest of the project, the project moved forward faster and was done well. The big challenge for those gifted in serving is to recognize and accept their limitations. When we all focus on what we do well, the body functions best and completes the task at hand with excellence.

Next, excellent companies tend to minimize administrative layers and maximize those who are actually doing the work. Expressions “too many cooks in the kitchen” usually reflect a problem that needs to be fixed. While gifted servants often work well under supervision, they do not need to be micromanaged or multi-managed. I have often thought the hardest job in the church is that of the church janitor. While he or she may technically be accountable to the church board, a property committee or a member of one of those committees, often everyone in the church thinks they can tell the janitor what needs to be done and do it with the expectation of an immediate response. If only they knew how much their actions hindered that willing servant from pursuing excellence in his or her work.

Finally, excellent companies foster a climate where a deep commitment to the core values and mission of that company is the basis of tolerance for all employees that share that commitment. If there is anywhere that ought to be the norm, it is the local church. We are all on the same team, sharing the same values, committed to the same mission. While others gifted in different ways may approach ministry differently, it is the same ministry after all. Paul’s repeated use of the metaphor “body” to describe the local church emphasizes that we all need each other just as the body needs its various parts. We use the term “Team Ministry” to describe a gift orientation to ministry because it takes the whole team to do the whole ministry.

### **The Performance of a Servant of God**

As the servant of God pursues excellence in all he or she does, at least seven biblical descriptions of the resulting service are rendered. These descriptions deal less with a strategy and more with attitudes that show up in the work accomplished by the servant. These attitudes are the spiritual factors that empower the strategic plan developed in the previous section.

Paul urged the Romans, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). This is a good starting point for someone gifted in service. The language Paul uses in this verse is drawn from the sacrifice rituals practiced by the Jews at that time, the details of which are outlined in the early chapters of Leviticus. Just as the priest examined and offered the whole sacrificial animal to God on the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem, so Paul called the Romans to let God examine their life and offer themselves completely to God, not so much as martyrs (which some would be), but as a “living sacrifice.” He called them, and us, to a lifestyle of consecrated service to God. The only agenda that is important to a consecrated servant of God is that established by the God whom he or she serves.

Once the commitment issue is settled, it is likely we will recognize the task to which we have been assigned is beyond our natural abilities. Ministry has been described as partnering with God in what He is doing and doing our best to stay out of His way. Perhaps that is why Jesus so often taught His disciples about humility. The Proverbs taught, “Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble” (Prov. 3:34). Understanding this important life principle, Jesus modeled humility before His disciple in one of His last acts in His life on earth. After they had eaten together, He took off His outer garment, wrapped Himself in a towel, and began washing His disciples’ feet. After completing the task, He explained His actions concluding, “I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done” (John 13:15). Paul urged the same attitude when he described the incarnation to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). He apparently practiced what he preached. Toward the end of his ministry, he reminded the Ephesian elders they had seen him “serving the Lord with all humility” (Acts 20:19). That ought to be the reputation earned by every servant of God.

One way we demonstrate our dependence upon God and personal humility is through the discipline of prayer. The New Testament uses six different Greek words to describe prayer. Blended together, these words describe the mosaic of prayer as directing humble requests for help, results, and favors to God as an expression of our deepest personal desires. That describes the nature of the prayers that have produced results throughout history. Examples of that kind of prayer abound throughout the Old Testament. Prayer was also a significant part of Jesus’ life on earth. When the disciples saw Jesus praying, they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). They must have learned that lesson well because prayer was widely practiced by the early church as the foundation of their service for God (Acts. 4:31).

This sacrificial service for Christ is not simply our duty; it is also our joy. The Psalmist wrote, “Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Ps. 100:2). Nehemiah reminded the remnant “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). Even when the task we are called to do is difficult, the joy of success is a strong motivator. Jesus modeled this on the cross; an example the writer of Hebrews urged his readers to follow. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Three more words describe this kind of service. The first word is “diligent.” In his final epistle to his protégé, Paul told Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Diligence described well the work of the Lord and should also describe the work servants do for the Lord. Describing the current ministry of Christ in the context of our salvation, the writer of Hebrews notes, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). But Paul did not believe it was only Christian leaders who needed to be diligent in ministry. Rather, all of us need to be “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11).

Steadfastness is another discipline involved in our service for Christ. In light of all Christ has done for us, the power of His resurrection at work in our life through the Gospel, and the hope of the resurrection that we will someday experience, Paul urged the Christians, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). How we start serving God is not nearly as important as how we finish. God is looking for steadfastness in our commitment to use the gift of serving that produces a continued faithful service to Him regardless of the circumstances of our life. After all, He is the One in control of those circumstances.

Ultimately, our service for God will be described as a rewarded service. We all look forward to the day when we hear the Lord saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23). We do our best for the Lord knowing the day will come when it will be evaluated and we will receive an appropriate reward for the quality of work we have done: “gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). So when the work gets hard and the results are not always obvious, remember the One who sees in secret promised, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work” (Rev. 22:12).

### **The Problem of a Servant of God**

Excellence is essential in all we do and will become evident in the results of our work. “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men” (Prov. 22:29). As the pursuit of excellence becomes a core value in our service for God, God will reward our work for Him with greater responsibility and opportunities to serve Him. For those gifted in serving, this produces a sense of personal fulfillment in life that can only be realized when we serve God the way He has designed us to serve Him, using our spiritual gift as part of the Team Ministry of the whole church. We experience moments when we just know “the universe is unfolding as it should.”

But the pursuit of excellence sometimes becomes a problem for the servant of God. This usually is the result of confusion between the concepts of excellence and perfection. Some Christians who claim to be pursuing excellence are really pursuing perfection. Others know perfection is beyond their capability so they neglect the pursuit of excellence and rise to a minimum standard in their work for God.

While both excellence and perfection are attributes of God, perfection is one of those attributes that belongs to God alone. The reality of sin in our world at its most basic level means nobody's perfect. In contrast, excellence is one of the attributes of God we are responsible to reproduce in our life to some degree. While perfection involves being flawless, something we are not, excellence involves doing the very best we can do, something we can always do. Perfectionists need to back off the unattainable standard and follow Paul's advice to the Colossians. "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

The Old Testament sacrificial prohibited offering lame lambs as sacrificial animals. It was a prohibition many Christians need to think about today when it comes to serving God. Sometimes our lack of respect for God is reflected in the donation of old appliances we no longer want to churches or other charitable institutions. The attitude that says something is not good enough for me but it is good enough for God's work is wrong in its basic presupposition. The same can be said of serving through the completion of practical projects when we put less than our best into that project. If it is for God, it ought to be the best we can offer. We will never achieve perfection in this fallen world, but that should never be the justification for doing less than our best in our service for Him.

### **The Perspective of a Servant of God**

In our pursuit of excellence in all we do, the servant of God needs a perspective different from that of the world. In the workplace, employees tend to work up to the minimum standards of their employer. When the workplace is healthy, they will sometimes exceed that standard because of their deep respect for and appreciation of their employer. In the context of our service for God, those gifted in serving seek to excel in what they do because of all that God Himself has done for us. Having this perspective involves hearing the voice of God, pursuing the vision of God, and embracing the values of God.

When some people talk about hearing God's voice, they think of some deep mystical experience in which they hear audible words from heaven. That has never been the norm in how God relates to His people. Even in His relationship with Jesus, which was rather unique, God only broke the silence of heaven three times. Those who literally hear voices are usually diagnosed by competent physicians and can often have that problem fixed with the right medication.

What then do we mean by hearing God's voice? It begins with an understanding that God has consistently spoken to His people in many different ways (Heb. 1:1). While He has enabled us to make wise decisions, He always reserves the right to change our plans so they line up with His agenda. "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel – that will stand" (Prov. 19:21). He is committed to revealing His person, purpose and path to His people (Isa. 55:8). "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Sometimes that is done by the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life (1 Cor. 2:9-12). At other times He speaks to us through the Bible (1 Cor. 2:14-15) or through prayer. He may guide us in His ways through the circumstances He controls or people

He brings into our life including our family and church. Sometimes the spiritual landmarks in our life, our track record in serving God, provide clear direction on how God wants to use us in the days ahead.

As important as hearing the voice of God is, it is even more important that we not be hearers only but act on what we know. It is important to evaluate our life periodically to insure we are still pursuing God's vision for our life as we understand it. Three questions can guide us through that process. First, ask yourself, "What am I doing?" Is it what you believe God would have you do at this point in your walk with Him? Next ask, "Why am I doing what I am doing?" This question will help you identify your real motive in life. Many people who think they are serving God are simply trying to impress their spouse, parent, or someone else in their family, church or network of friends. In that case, it is not God you are serving but the person or persons you are trying to impress. Finally, ask yourself, "What do I expect to accomplish doing it?" Knowing what you are trying to do will guide you in developing the best strategy to get that job done.

Because we are serving God, it is also important that we evaluate our personal core values in light of God's values. Some people and ministries have made a list of the core values they want to characterize when they do for God. While this is a good first step, simply putting words on a list does not make it so. How committed are you to the things you say you believe? How are these values shaping your life, relationships and decisions? Are these values consistent with the apparent values of God in Scripture?

When we think of God's values revealed in Scripture, it is clear He values the eternal over the temporal. This life we live is only a very small part of all He has planned for us in eternity. He also values the important over the urgent. Just because something is urgent, it may not be important. There have been times when I have been out of the country on a ministry trip and phone messages have piled up on my voice mail while I have been away. I am always amazed at how many "urgent messages" I get that are irrelevant to life two weeks later. God also values the principled life over the popular life. In our case, that involves making decisions based on God's pleasure rather than people's applause.

Obviously, these values are just a small sample of the values that ought to characterize us and the ministry we do. To study this matter further, look up the word "better" in a concordance, then study each use of the word in its biblical context. You will notice two things in particular. First, the word is used often in Hebrews describing Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, as better in many contexts. In this, Jesus confirms by example that every servant should strive to be the best he or she can be. Second, the word is used often in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) to describe the best of two conditions or situations. As you study the use of the word in this context, you will come to realize how different God's core values are from those of the world.

### **The Passion of a Servant of God**

The gift of serving usually results in what might be called "the ministry of the trowel." That expression is drawn from the example of Nehemiah and the remnant that rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem despite opposition and threats from their enemy. "Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one



hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon” (Neh. 4:17). When Charles Spurgeon read that verse, he coined the phrase “the sword and the trowel” to describe the work of Israel and his own ministry in Nineteenth Century England. Gifted servants are usually involved in a practical ministry project that involves some kind of tool in their hand. Your trowel may be as dishcloth, a hammer or a paint brush. Who knows? You may even find yourself using a trowel as you serve on a church or mission building project.

But if we serve well, our service ought also to involve “the ministry of the towel.” Just as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, we ought to have the same attitude of humility in all we do on His behalf. “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (John 13:16). That makes it rather difficult to justify a place for pride in our life, doesn’t it?

Remember my dad? I remember one day in particular when I finished a tile job in the apartment building in which Dad and I were working. When it was done, Dad came in to check the work so I could move on to the next assignment. The job did not pass his inspection because there was a gap between the tile and the wall. It was a small gap that would have been covered by the baseboard. The gap was smaller than other workers in other apartments routinely left. The building in question was for subsidized housing and even if the job was substandard, I knew the building inspector would let it go. Needless to say, I was a little ticked with Dad’s decision. When I tried to explain all of the above, I still remember his response. “I don’t care,” he began. “My name goes on this job and you are going to do it right.” At that point I knew I had lost the argument and began tearing up tile along the walls to do the job right.

One of the things I have come to learn about ministry is the life lesson I learned that day laying tile. Our Father’s name goes on every job we do, so we had better do it right!

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Influencing Others Through Character and Service

Most gifted servants are quite content to fit into the background unnoticed by others. They like to be encouraged or thanked for a job well done, but appreciate more if that's done in private. In fact, many gifted servants are deeply embarrassed when publicly identified or recognized for the work they do. Some may even become angry that what they did privately is being talked about publicly. That reality makes it ironic that many gifted in serving may become the most influential leaders in their church.

Historically, people did not equate leadership and service. In fact, the norm for centuries has been that leaders lead people who serve. Yet in recent years, a new leadership style has been identified and promoted as "servant leadership." Many believe this is the leadership style of the Twenty-First Century. Those gifted in serving need to recognize this trend and way of thinking will probably be around for a long time. As they become increasingly more effective in using their gift of serving, it is very likely they will emerge as people of influence within their church family.

### The Challenge of a Servant of God

The last thing gifted servants want to do is lead, yet the very nature of this gift establishes an essential precondition for leadership. Jesus taught His disciples, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be the last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). This principle of servant leadership is no longer unique to the way things ought to be done in church. It is also the way things are being done in the broader culture. In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins notes, "We were surprised, shocked really, to discover the type of leadership required for turning a good company into a great one. Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities, the good-great leaders seem to have come from Mars. Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will." <sup>ii</sup>

While there are many ways to describe leadership, the idea of influence is at the heart of what it means to lead. Someone expressed it well when he said, "If you think you are leading and no one is following, you are just taking a walk." It could also be said if you think you are not leading and everyone is following, you might want to think again.

In an earlier chapter, we looked at developing the heart of a servant. Those who use their gift of serving most effectively do so with a meek and humble spirit. From the perspective of a gifted servant who desires to work behind the scenes without recognition, the downside of humility is that it produces honor. When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. As Collins discovered by accident, truly effective leaders "are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will."

Using your gift of serving as a leader may be the most challenging expression of your gift in ministry. The good news is that servant leadership does not necessarily

involve assuming a high profile. Rather servant leaders lead and influence others using a radically different approach. You can use your gift of serving by using the “4-C” approach to impacting the lives of others. The “4-C” approach to influencing others focuses on (1) character, (2) credibility, (3) commitment and (4) conduct.

### **The Character of a Servant of God**

When Paul taught the Galatians about character, he contrasted the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. In his description of the works of the flesh, he described a series of self-destructive behaviors commonly practiced in the culture of that day and ours. Then he added, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Producing spiritual fruit is the primary means by which the Holy Spirit continually transforms us into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). In describing the unique relationship that exists between himself and believers, Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). While His reference to bearing fruit may include many things, many Bible teachers believe part of that emphasis is the development of a distinctive Christian character as a byproduct of our relationship with Him. The longer one walks with God, the godlier he or she should become.

The process of fruit bearing takes time in both the orchard and Christian life. From Paul’s perspective, three principles are essential to make this process work in the Christian life. First, he identified the principle of death when he wrote, “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Part of what it means to be united with Christ as branches of the True Vine is that we were freed from the dominion of sin when He (and we with Him) died to sin (Rom. 6:3-11). Second, the principle of decision is implied in Paul’s encouragement, “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). It is our responsibility in life to make decisions compatible with the spiritual realities that are our experience in Christ. Third, he encourages us to practice the principle of discipline in his exhortation, “let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26). While the work of developing character in our life is a work of God, it is also a byproduct of living a disciplined Christian life.

The character God seeks to develop in our life begins with *love*, generally considered the greatest of all Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13:13). Some Bible teachers believe love is the foundational virtue of the Christian life and that all other virtues are expressions of that love. In the Christian life, love grows out of our relationship with God and permeates every other relationship we have. The Scriptures have more to say about love than any other topic, emphasizing God’s love for us, our response to that love in our love for God, and our responsibility to love others even as He loved us.

A second aspect of Christian character is *joy*. Some mistakenly confuse happiness with joy. Someone defined happiness noting, “Happiness happens when things happen to happen to make you happy.” That is, happiness is circumstantial. In contrast, the joy of the Lord belonging to every Christian can be joy in spite of the circumstances. This

was the theme of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. Even though references to joy and rejoicing abound in that epistle, Paul wrote it from a prison cell. It is one of several epistles Bible teachers describe as the Prison Epistles.

A similar perception problem exists with some people's understanding of the nature of *peace*, which is another fruit characteristic in the life of a Christian. Peace is not the absence of problems, but rather a calm assurance that God has everything under control in the midst of our problems. When we come to Christ we receive "peace with God" as the result of our justification (Rom. 5:1). But as we grow in our relationship with Christ, we can come to experience the "peace of God" to help us make the right choices in life (Phil. 4:7). Peace is an important part of our Christian life because our God is the God of Peace (Rom. 16:20).

Another word that describes Christian character is *longsuffering*. Even pronouncing that word can sound painful to some. No one likes to suffer and certainly fewer are attracted to the idea of suffering for an extended period of time. The root idea of this word is not suffering for the sake of suffering but putting up with the faults of others to effectively minister to their needs. We do this in our relationships with others because this is what God did with us. He put up with our offenses toward Him giving us "time to repent" (Rev. 2:21). Hurting people often act offensively to others because they do not want others to get close enough to hurt them again. When we "put up" to serve, we break that barrier to better serve and meet the real needs of people in pain. The problem is God's "time to repent" is often much longer than our "time to repent" and we end up usurping God's role as judge to make our own judgments of others.

*Kindness* is one of the first things most children learn from the Bible but sometimes one of the last things we practice in life. A common memory verse used in ministries to children at an early age is "be kind to one another" (Eph. 4:32). Once again, when Christians express kindness to others, they see how God relates to them. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness" (Jer. 9:24). By definition, kindness is not kindness until it is expressed in loving and kind expressions like others. Jesus told a parable about a Samaritan that saw a man with significant needs and demonstrated love and kindness to him by caring for his needs and arranging for others to do the same. Jesus concluded the discussion about that parable with the words, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Next, God expects Christians to be good. There is a sense in which "no one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). In that sense, God's call for *goodness* in our life is a call to be like God. It involves both moral character and ethical action. It is a fruit of the Spirit because our sin nature would normally produce something vastly different among its works of the flesh. So how can a person with a sin nature be good and act good? David struggled with that problem and found the answer in a strategic plan, deep commitment, and spiritual discipline. "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word" (Ps. 119:9 – his strategic plan). "With my whole heart I have sought you; oh, let me not wander from your commandments" (Ps. 119:10 – his deep commitment). "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11 – his spiritual discipline). It worked for David and will work for us today.

The effectiveness of our ministry of serving is not always measured in how we start but how we finish. That is why *faithfulness* is among God's list of positive character traits to develop in life. Faithfulness is marked by steadfastness in our commitment to the things we value. In the early church, Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). That is a good pattern for us to follow today, faithfully adhering to our core values and relationships with others and the Lord. That faithfulness was the foundation to their faithfulness in ministry, the thing God looks for when rewarding us for our labor (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Another mark of Christian character is *gentleness*. The word Paul used to describe this character trait was often used to describe a wild animal that had been tamed, an ointment that drew out the sting and infection of a wound, and people who treated others with dignity and respect. While gentleness is sometimes perceived as a mark of weakness, it takes real strength to face the challenges of life and ministry and respond with gentleness rather than anger and hostility. Jesus referred to His gentleness when He appealed to people to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-29). God uses gentleness in our relationships, to draw other people to Himself.

Finally, *self-control* is part of what the Holy Spirit is trying to produce in our life. It was no mistake that the most commonly used term to describe the early Christians was "disciple." Discipline is involved at the core of what it means to be a Christian. Much of the fruit of the Spirit is produced through the practice of various spiritual disciplines such as prayer, reading the Scriptures, worshipping and giving to God, etc. When we take control and make these disciplines a regular part of our Christian life, that self-control will spill over into other areas of life. When people see the discipline of our life and lifestyle, they will recognize our commitment to Christ.

### **Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in the Garden of Your Life**

The process of growing the fruit of the Spirit in the garden of your life is similar to that of a gardener who grows vegetables each summer in a backyard garden. The process always begins with preparing the soil before the seeds are ever planted. As you look at your own life, you might want to ask the question, "What kind of mud am I?" That question is drawn from Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20). In the parable, Jesus described four kinds of soil in which the seed was sown. As the sower and seed were the same throughout the parable, the variable impacting the harvest was the soil in which the seed was sown.

The first type of soil mentioned in the parable was the hardened ground that the seed could not penetrate. This may have been the result of people cutting a path through the field. Sometimes this happens when a farmer lets a field lie fallow so it can regain some nourishment it would lose if it were over-farmed. It was to people who understood this phenomenon that Hosea wrote, "Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to see the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you" (Hos. 10:12). If you determine your life is best described as hardened ground, you need to disturb the soil so it is more receptive to the seed of the God's Word.

The second soil type is described as stony ground. Here seed falls into the crevices between the stones and begins to grow, but because it does not grow deep roots it withers in the heat of the summer sun. One of the things I learned when I moved to the rural community where I currently pastor is that each spring farmers hire people to walk through their fields to pick rocks. These rocks are piled onto wagons and taken out of the field to prevent the kind of problem described in the parable. Paul understood the importance of creating conditions where we can be “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 2:7).

The third soil type is described as thorny ground. Here the seed finds a place to grow, but is later choked by the weeds that grow around it. So there would be not confusion, Jesus described the seed sown among thorns as “the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19). That is a good checklist to evaluate the priorities of our own life. Are the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things hindering the Spirit of God in developing our character? If so, it is time to deal with the problem by insuring our values are consistent with the things God values and our focus is on the things God wants to do in our life.

When the problems of the previous soil types are dealt with, we end up with good soil. This soil is productive. If you are seeing the fruit of the Spirit developing in your own life, you know you are sowing seed in the right kind of soil. Remember, even in the good soil there was some variation in the degree of productivity (Mark 4:20). There are always ways to prepare your mud to be more receptive to what God wants to accomplish in and through you.

Once the soil has been prepared, it is time to plant the seed. The law of sowing and reaping governs this phase of the gardening process. Paul warned the Galatians, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7-8). The fundamental principle of reproduction established in creation is that like produces like (Gen. 1:11-12, 21-22, 24-25). As one old farmer put it, if you always plant what you’ve always planted, you will always get what you have always got. This principle is also illustrated in the definition of insanity. Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

After the soil is prepared and seed is planted, the gardener’s work is not done. Throughout the growing season the garden must be maintained. Part of that involves pulling weeds that spring up and thinning the rows as plants begin growing so the vegetables can grow larger. Jesus spoke of pruning as part of our growth experience (John 15:1-5) and Paul spoke of putting off old attitudes and actions to put on new attitudes and actions that would encourage our spiritual growth (Eph. 4:17-32). While this can sometimes seem like a long and tedious process, it is one that must be done to get the harvest we desire. “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9).

And when the harvest comes, the work is still not over. The produce needs to be picked and the backyard gardener moves his work indoors to preserve the harvest for the winter. Some things are put into cold storage; others things find a place in the freezer; still other things end up pickled or preserved in jars for later use or dried to be added to meals prepared over the winter months. Jesus reminded His disciples that one of His goals in their life is that their “fruit should remain” (John 15:16). As you harvest the fruit of the Spirit in the garden of your life, be certain it remains visible to others.

### **The Credibility of a Servant of God**

When asked to describe the character of the kind of leader they would be most likely to follow, an overwhelming majority of leaders surveyed identified four characteristics above all others. This survey has been repeated for over thirty years in different economic climates and various cultures, yet the same four characteristics remain at the top of the list. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of *The Leadership Challenge*<sup>iii</sup>, coined the phrase “the credibility factor” to describe this group of character traits. The four traits people identified as what they look for most in people they want to follow are (1) honest, (2) forward looking, (3) inspiring, and (4) competent.

When people describe their leaders as honest, they usually mean they are people of integrity and character. It is closely tied with a sense of having the right values and practicing ethical behavior. We want those we follow to be this way because their character will ultimately reflect on our own character. Just because a leader turns out to be dishonest does not mean everyone around that leader is dishonest. But it does mean that others might perceive a lack of integrity on our part when our leader experiences moral failure or is exposed for unethical behavior.

A second trait people admire in their leaders is a clear vision, a positive perception of what the future might be. It is not just that a leader needs a dream; he or she must also be able to communicate that dream at a level where followers can identify with that dream and make it their own. They want to follow people of vision that can make them people of vision.

Perhaps it is only natural that inspiring should be the next trait people look for in a leader. Doing something different, working toward a different tomorrow is hard and there will be many moments of discouragement along the way. The bigger the dream, the bigger the commitment and the greater the likelihood people will become discouraged and drop out. Servants who lead well do so by encouraging others when they are down by reminding them how the things they are working toward will make life better than what they are experiencing today.

Finally, people look for leaders who are competent. This refers to the leader’s track record and the perception of followers that he or she knows what to do to get the job done. While it takes years to earn a reputation, that reputation can be lost very quickly. Therefore, those who lead must know what they are doing or learn what they need to know before leading others into an area of personal incompetence. When we find ourselves moving outside our comfort zone, it is important to enlist the help of others to guide us along the way.

Although Kouzes and Posner completed their research in a business environment to help business leaders uncover what it takes to lead their business to success, they uncovered four marks of committed servants that become the credibility that influences others. Honesty is a value to be part of the life of every Christian. If Jesus described Himself as “the truth” (John 14:6) and the Scriptures as “truth” (John 17:3), then truth ought to be a part of who we are. Further, unlike many other world views, hope is an essential part of what it means to be Christian. The hope that springs from the resurrection of Christ gives us confidence in a better life and world and inspires us to serve God as part of His work in our world. And what we do for God must not only be good, it must be the very best we can do.

Honest, forward looking, inspiring and competent; these words describe what it means to be a servant of God. If this is what people look for in a leader to follow, then those gifted in serving must recognize the influence that belongs to them and use it wisely. If we influence others through character and service, it would be good to use that influence to lead them into developing better character and engaging in service to God and others.

### **The Conduct of a Servant of God**

The gift of serving has a two-fold interest. First, like all Christians, ultimately our service is a service to God. But the nature of this gift and the kind of ministries servants get involved in means we also serve people. While some Christians speak of past accomplishments, those gifted in serving validate their gift only as they continue serving. The most common description of that work is “ministry.”

Ministry may be described as the communication of truth through personality to people at their point of need. That description identifies several essential elements of ministry. First, ministry involves meeting the needs of others. Second, it involves at least two people: me and the person I am serving. Then it recognizes the uniqueness of my personality in the way I serve. Fourth, it recognizes the idea of communication or sharing as an essential part of ministry. Finally, it notes that truth in general and more specifically the truth of God is at the core of effective ministry.

Ministry has sometimes been described as finding a need and meeting it or finding a problem and fixing it. Need is often the starting point in the process of ministry. Sometimes that need is obvious and everyone agrees something needs to be done about it. We call that a felt need because pain or discomfort are often associated with the need. But people also have an ultimate need; the need to have a personal relationship with God. As we serve to meet felt needs, we must also look for ways to help those we serve recognize their ultimate need.

Ministry does not take place in a vacuum. It involves people; people serving and people being served. Sometimes that is what makes ministry so difficult, especially when people on the ministry team are not agreed on how something needs to be done or the people we serve fail to realize what needs to be done to fix the problem. As we serve, we need to be sensitive to where others are and gently guide them to where they need to be.



Sometimes we forget the first thing the Bible teaches about God is that He is creative. Parents are reminded of that when they consider their children. While fathers and mothers see bits of themselves in their children, they also recognize the uniqueness of each child in the family. You are unique in the family of God. That is why when you serve, you do it in a way different from others. That difference reflects the various ways God has shaped you for ministry. To try to bypass who we are when we serve is to reject the way God made you so you would serve Him in a unique way.

The root idea of communication is to have something in common. As we serve others, we break down barriers that separate us from one another and separate people from considering a place for God in their life. Sometimes this happens as part of the ministry team as we serve along side of others. Often it happens as we share with those we are serving. Ministry does not work well apart from relationships, and communication is essential in every healthy relationship.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). While many are inspired to serve others by those words, often they fail to clearly communicate to others why they are doing what they are doing. If I do something good for someone, it is likely that person will thank me and perhaps say something nice about me. But if I tell them someone else has arranged for me to do something for them, the person who hired me and sent me is likely to get the good things said about him or her. It is only as we share how God has changed our life, equipped us for ministry and motivates us to serve others will people stop glorifying us and begin glorifying Him. It is only then we have accomplished the task we were sent to do.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Balancing Your Life and Service

The best part of the gift of serving is the work involved in meeting the needs of others. The worst part of the gift of serving is the work involved in meeting the needs of others. If those two statements look confusing on paper, they make perfect sense to those who have used their gift of serving in ministry for long. There is nothing more fulfilling than working hard to meet a need in someone's life and see the way your ministry has begun to change their life. But sometimes there is nothing more frustrating than working hard to meet the need in someone's life and see that ministry simply be taken for granted or fail to accomplish its intended purpose. That is especially true when you have been working hard and are beginning to get tired.

We all have days, sometimes weeks, months, seasons or years, when it seems like an Irish guy named "Murphy" rules over our lives. You remember his rule: "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong, at the worst possible moment." Interestingly enough, some people face those days and go on unfazed. Others, usually those who start the day tired, are crushed beneath the crisis of the moment.

There are days when we all feel a little like Solomon concerning the work in which we are engaged. "Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me" (Eccl. 2:17-18). If that were not bad enough, he went on to add, "Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun" (Eccl. 2:20). But wait, there's more! "For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity" (Eccl. 2:22-23).

Too much of a good thing can turn into a bad thing. People who fail to find the balance between rest and labor often begin to develop an attitude like Solomon. As counterproductive as that attitude is in general, it can be deadly for those gifted in serving. Discouragement at that level can suck the motivation out of the one thing most likely to give you a sense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. It is a problem many gifted servers will face, so it is important for us to be proactive in understanding the issues involved and overcoming the problem before the problem overcomes us.

### Is Work Part of the Curse?

Some people believe the attitude of Solomon is only to be expected. After all, isn't work part of the curse, God's judgment on Adam for eating the forbidden fruit? Didn't God say, "Cursed is the ground for your sake: in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (Gen. 3:17-19). Why wouldn't you expect people to be miserable doing something they were condemned to do? There is no joy in serving on a prison chain gang.

While the argument may make sense, the presupposition is wrong. Work is not part of God's punishment upon the human race because of sin but rather part of God's plan for the human race from the beginning. "Man goes out to his work and to his labor until evening" (Ps. 104:23). God designed us to work and it was part of that work He described as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). His original intent for humanity in His perfect world involved giving people authority over and responsibility for His creation. "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Gen. 1:28). "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Gen. 2:15).

Not only did God design us to work, He has given each of us a specific work to do. In a parable describing in part our stewardship responsibility between the first and second coming of the Lord, Jesus taught, "It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch" (Mark 13:34). God wants each of us to do something and it is probably much different from what others around us need to do.

God also equips us for our unique work. When God wanted the Tabernacle to be built, He equipped some artisans giving them the ability they needed to make the ornate objects of the Tabernacle. Concerning Bezael, son of Ur, God told Moses, "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. 31:3-5).

God is also proactive in the timing and purpose of our work. Solomon noted, "I said in my heart, 'God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work'" (Eccl. 3:17). Ultimately, God establishes our work. The psalmist understood this and prayed, "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands" (Ps. 90:17). Indeed, "He has made everything beautiful in its time."

In light of how involved God is in our work and service for Him, it may seem strange that He also commends us for our work. Concerning the woman who anointed Him with an expensive perfume, Jesus told His disciples, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me" (Mark. 14:6; Matt. 26:10). In another of His stewardship parables, Jesus described God's response toward those who are faithful with the resources entrusted to them. "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Perhaps one reason God commends the things we do is that our work habits reveal our character. The Bible reminds us, "Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right" (Prov. 20:11). Another proverb confirms this is an accurate life-long gauge by which we can evaluate one's character. "The way of a guilty man is perverse; but as for the pure, his work is right" (Prov. 21:8).

If God designed people to work, it is only natural that part of our personal sense of fulfillment comes from our work. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the

desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). In contrast, “a desire accomplished is sweet to the soul, but it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil” (Prov. 13:19). One of the descriptions of God’s coming kingdom states, “They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:22). In the interim, we would do well to follow Paul’s advice to the Galatians. “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4).

Of course, like anything else, there is a right way to work and a wrong way to work. Part of God’s revelation in Scripture is designed to teach us the right way to work. God told Moses, “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do” (Exod. 18:20).

When our work is done right, God blesses our work in many ways. First, He blesses our work by using it to provide for the needs of others. Under the Mosaic Law, a portion of the harvest was always set aside to meet the needs of others. Most often, that tithe was taken to Jerusalem but “at the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do” (Deut. 14:28-29).

God’s blessing also extends to the one who does the work. “The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 30:9-10). In keeping with the law of sowing and reaping, we always reap what we so.

A third aspect of God’s blessing upon our work extends beyond what we might expect in the law of sowing and reaping. God plans to reward our work beyond our expectations. Boaz told Ruth, “The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12). In the final chapter of Scripture, Jesus said, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work” (Rev. 22:12).

Just as God blesses good work, there are also consequences for the wrong kind of work. “The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands” (Ps. 9:16). Even in that judgment, God is merciful. “Also to You, O LORD, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work” (Ps. 62:12). Really, the choice is yours to make. “The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his death” (Prov. 11:18-19).

## Seven Ways to Work Effectively

The better we understand the concept of work, the more we recognize the need to work effectively. Scientists describe this discipline as the science of ergonomics. This teaches us how to work to accomplish the greatest result with the least expenditure of energy. From this perspective there are seven ways we can work more effectively.

First, we need to work smart. The key to working smart involves first planning your work, then working your plan. “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty” (Prov. 21:5). As part of the planning process in working smart, we need to learn how to prioritize the projects we need to do. In an agricultural society, wise advice called people to first, “prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house” (Prov. 24:27).

Second, we need to work hard. In a big game, professional athletes talk about giving 110%. While mathematically impossible, most people understand the hyperbole as meaning “give it all you’ve got.” Solomon agreed when he wrote, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl. 9:10).

Next we need to work diligently. While this is good advice for anyone, it is especially important for Christians to apply this principle. Remember, you are accountable to God for everything you do, “for God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14). Paul explained this concept of accountability and rewards to the Corinthians noting, “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Understanding this truth changes everything. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

We also need to work expectantly to break through the tough times that tempt us to quit and give up. We can work through the tough times by looking to the future with hope. This principle has been consistently applied to encourage people in every generation to keep going when they think they cannot go any further. The prophet Azariah encouraged King Asa with the words, “But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded” (2 Chron. 15:7). Jeremiah encouraged Israel with the promise of God, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border” (Jer. 31:16-17). In the New Testament, Paul urged the Galatians, “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9).

Fifth, work productively. Some people confuse activity and achievement. Achievement is only related to activity when we work toward the goal of accomplishing something specific. For those gifted in serving, that goal is “that you may walk worthy of

the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

Then we also need to work together. A team always accomplishes more than each member of that team could accomplish independently when they work together as a team. This is called the law of synergism. To work well together, we need to learn to encourage others in their work. Paul was a master of this. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians he wrote, “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing” (1 Thess. 4:10-12). In a later epistle he added, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

Finally, one of the keys effectiveness in all we do involves learning how to work less. Various studies suggest we lose productivity at such a rate after our optimum performance level that we actually undo the good we have done when we do not find the right balance between labor and rest.

### **Work Less to Work Best**

Quite frankly, the idea of doing less to accomplish more is a hard concept for Type-A people like me to grasp. Although relatively few people gifted in serving might be described as Type-A, it is also a difficult concept for many of them to grasp. Something always needs to be done and we justify our workaholic attitude by promising ourselves we can always rest later when the task at hand is completed. Unfortunately, something else will always need to be done. If we don't learn to rest we will ultimately undermine our productivity level until we become part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Just as work was part of God's initial plan for humanity, so also was rest, even for God Himself. “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (Gen. 2:2). Obviously the One who needs no rest (Ps. 121) did not rest to meet a need in His own life. Rather, He rested to establish a pattern in our life.

Many who understand this principle point out just as God worked six days then rested the seventh day, so we need to have a common pause day, a day of rest weekly in our life and culture. While that approach to life is good, a closer look at the teaching of Scripture suggests there may be a better application. As God created people on the sixth day, humanity's first full day on planet Earth was a day of rest. It is true God rested from His work on the seventh day, but He apparently designed people to work from their rest.

God actually built into life several periods of rest followed by work. From the beginning of time, there has been a daily rest (evening) followed by a time to work (morning). In the Jewish calendar, the various Feasts of the LORD provided a period of seasonal rest in the spring and fall. Also, under the law of Moses, there were periodic years of rest prescribed for the whole nation (i.e., the Sabbath year). Perhaps if we

observed more of these rest times in our own lives we would experience less of the stress times in life.

God sometimes provides an opportunity to rest just to break from “the tyranny of the urgent.” At a particularly hectic time in His own ministry, Jesus told His disciples, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). The sign at the entrance of a Christian conference ground captured the importance of rest with the words, “Come apart before you fall apart.”

In a study of the lives of greatly used people of God, it is apparent God sometimes intervenes in the lives of His servants to provide extended seasons of rest in preparation for significant work assignments. This was true in the lives of Joseph (Gen. 41:1), Moses (Exod. 2:23), Elijah (1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:80; 3:1-2). Even Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before launching His public ministry on earth.

### **Five Core Values of the Sabbath**

Working less to work best involves more than just getting a good night’s sleep once and a while or spending a day at the beach to get away when things get tough. The concept of the Sabbath involved five concepts we need to incorporate into our own down time.

The first of these concepts is of course rest itself. “Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death” (Exod. 35:2). As noted above, this concept was established within the pattern of creation itself. “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exod. 20:11).

As important as it is to have a down time to unwind, another core value of the Sabbath was that of refreshment. “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed” (Exod. 23:12). Most people routinely violate this principle during their vacation time. As a result, they return home feeling like they need a vacation from their vacation. Remember, while God rested from His work He designed people to work from their rest.

A third concept built into the Sabbath laws was that of remembering. In the midst of the stress of our hurry-up world, it is important to take time and pause to remember the great things God has done for us. Moses told Israel, “and remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath” (Deut. 5:15).

Closely related to the value of remembering is that of reflecting. God used the expression “afflict your souls” to describe the idea of abstaining from food to reflect more fully God’s work in your life. Under the Law, Jews were required to fast only one day of the year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Law stated, “This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a

stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever” (Lev. 16:29-31).

The final core value built into the Sabbath was that of responsibility. According to the Law of the Sabbath Year, “Six years you shall sow your land and gather its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove” (Exod. 23:10-11). The Sabbath was a time to be reminded of our responsibility to care for those less fortunate than us.

### **Developing the Six Disciplines of Rest**

In the ongoing battle to balance our life we need to be proactive in developing the various disciplines of rest. Most of us are surrounded with people who will help us find things to do and get involved in. If we do not build periods of rest into our lifestyle, we will quickly wear out, tire out, burn out, and turn out needing more help than we can offer others.

In simpler times, the discipline of solitude was more widely practiced and became an effective tool to help people make sense of life. Somehow, a farmer standing alone in the field could find the rest he needed to prepare for the harvest and determine how that would provide for the needs of his family through the long winter. In an era when people crossed the Atlantic by boat, the six weeks at sea meant people arrived at their destination rested and refreshed and the word “jetlag” was foreign to their vocabulary.

As he concluded a psalm that describes a world full of chaos and confusion, the psalmist urges the reader, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46:10). The Hebrew word translated “be still” could be translated “calm down.” The emphasis of the verse is that in the context of all that is happening around us, there are times we need to separate ourselves from life as we know it to focus on God and what He is doing. That can’t help but have a calming effect in our life.

Even Jesus understood this principle and made it a practice to find time to spend alone with God. Early in His ministry, Mark records one such instance with the following words: “And in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). On other occasions He found times in the evenings to separate Himself from others to spend time with His Father. There is a lesson to learn in His example for all of us, especially those gifted in service and devoted as He was to a lifestyle of ministry.

The discipline of focus is closely related to the discipline of solitude. For many, life is filled with stress that produces distress as the dominant condition of their mind. In contrast, the prophet Isaiah noted, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isa. 26:3). Jesus taught the same principle when He taught, “But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). We maximize the impact of our times of rest when we take time to refocus on the things that really matter.



The discipline of prayer is a third discipline we need to incorporate into our rest strategy. When we pray, we pass the things that tend to overwhelm us to the One who is never overwhelmed by anything. That's why Paul urged the Philippians, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

In the same context, Paul also urged the Philippians to practice the discipline of meditation. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:8-9). It is significant that meditation is linked to success in life in the only verse in the Bible that uses the word "success." God told Joshua, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

Many people think of meditation as a discipline that involves emptying your mind of all thoughts and relaxing. Actually, the word most often translated "meditate" in Scripture incorporates the idea of "muttering." When people meditated, they would usually quietly repeat a verse of passage they had committed to memory. Speaking the words aloud enabled them to focus on a promise of God, implement a principle of Scripture, turn loose the power of God in their life and resolve a problem with which they were wrestling. Success was a natural byproduct of that process. In the most significant example in Scripture of a meditation on God's Word, the psalmist wrote, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Ps. 119:165).

While it is important to find times of solitude in our life and practice the various spiritual disciplines of rest best practiced in that context, it is also important to connect with others. God designed people to relate to Him and each other. That is why the fifth discipline of rest is the discipline of abiding in Christ. Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). Our productivity in life is directly tied to our relationship with Christ. That is why He invites us to partner with Him in ministry to find the rest and enablement to accomplish what He wants us to accomplish. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Finally, we need to practice the discipline of fellowship with our fellow believers as part of our rest strategy. God never intended for people to live apart from people. He designed us to need one another and established institutions like the family and church where we could relate to one another in healthy way to draw the resources we need and contribute to others the resources they need for life. The New Testament urged First Century Christians, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"

(Heb. 10:24-25). That is also good advice for today's Christians. As you are busy exercising your gift of serving, remember you need balance in your life. Take time out for refreshment and fellowship so you can continue to give your best to fulfill your ministry of serving.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Finding Your Place on the Ministry Team

As the evangelical church in North America transitioned to ministry at the dawn of the Twentieth-First Century, she began to return to the biblical practice of team ministry. Some view this change as a result of the Boomer Generation's influence in the leadership of the church. While that may be the stimulus that brought about this much needed change, there is a valid biblical precedent for a team approach to ministry.

Team ministry was practiced throughout the New Testament beginning with Jesus. While no one would dispute the ability of our Lord to meet needs in the lives of others without the assistance of others, He chose to gather disciples (first the twelve, later seventy others) to assist Him in His ministry objectives. The fact that these others were so unqualified for ministry only serves to emphasize the importance Jesus must have placed on the ministry team concept.

In light of Jesus' use of the ministry team, it is not surprising the apostles continued ministering as a team in the early days of the church. They were recognized as a distinct group within the church and together were involved in the ministries of evangelism (Acts 2:14; 5:42), teaching (Acts 2:42; 5:25), miracles (Acts 2:43; 5:12), prayer (Acts 3:1; 4:24) and administration (Acts 4:37; 6:2). They chose to appoint ministry teams to solve problems whether those problems were as simple as feeding widows (Acts 6:3) or as complex as confirming the authenticity of a reported new ministry (Acts 8:14).

The Apostle Paul also used team ministry effectively throughout his ministry, particularly on his second missionary journey. Before engaging on this mission that brought the gospel to Europe, he gathered a team that included Silas, Timothy and Luke. At times, various members or groups within his ministry team were sent off on special assignments and on at least one occasion Paul found himself involved in ministry alone (cf. Acts 17:16-18:4). But his preference was apparently ministry as a team. Twelve of the thirteen New Testament epistles that bear his name in the introduction also include a reference to others with him at the time he wrote that epistle. The only exception is his first epistle to Timothy, a long-standing member of his ministry team.

There are two approaches to forming a ministry team depending upon what that ministry team is trying to accomplish. Some establish highly specialized teams that tend to resemble a colony of similarly gifted individuals. This may be planned or result as gifted individuals naturally gravitating toward each other. The resulting team tends to prove extremely effective in a particular area of ministry and less effective in other areas. While this plan has inherent long-term problems, churches may elect to take this approach in forming a team to initiate a new ministry and get it established.

A second approach to team ministry recognizes the strength of pluralism and blends various individuals with differing gifts into a ministry team. Just as the more highly specialized team may be established to initiate a new ministry, this alternative approach

may be better utilized to build greater stability in existing ministries. A team that has different spiritual gifts means various perspectives are applied to the ministry. This helps insure a more balanced approach to ministry.

Knowing our spiritual gift and how it can be utilized in various aspects of ministry is the key to finding our place on the ministry team. As we come to understand how God can uniquely use us in ministry, our desire grows toward our own gift(s) and away from someone else's gift(s). Also, as we identify our own God-given gifts and develop our understanding of spiritual gifts, we recognize how others gifted differently can also be involved in ministry without imposing our gifts upon them.

### **Spiritual Gifts and Ministry Potential**

Some people confuse the gifts that only certain people have with the ministry in which every Christian should be involved. Each of the nine task-oriented spiritual gifts is apparently related to a particular ministry in which all Christians should be involved. There is a natural tendency for Christians gifted in a certain area to also be deeply committed to a particular ministry pattern because they are most effective in exercising their gift in that area. It is important that we understand where the ministry bias of each member of the ministry team lies as we work with those who are gifted differently.

If you gathered nine people, each gifted in one of the nine task-oriented gifts, and ask them the question, "What is the most important ministry in our church?" you most likely would get nine completely different responses.

The person gifted in evangelism would claim ministries that result in people coming to Christ as Savior represent the most important ministries.

The person gifted in prophecy with a strong desire to make a statement for righteousness would probably identify the church's involvement in political and social action as the most important ministry.

The person gifted in teaching would tend to identify ministries that effectively communicate biblical truth to people as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in exhortation would tend to identify people-helping ministries that effectively motivate others in their Christian life as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in pastoring-shepherding would tend to identify ministries that are effective in assimilating others into the church family as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in showing mercy would tend to identify ministries which best express the church's concern for hurting people as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in serving would tend to point to ministries that most effectively meet the practical needs of others as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in giving might identify the most cost-effective ministries that release funds for other aspects of the church's ministry as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in administration would tend to look at areas of the church's total ministry that help insure the efficient management of church affairs as the most important aspect of the church's total ministry.

So who answered the question correctly? The correct answer is, "All of the above!" Each person identified an aspect of the church's ministry in which he or she is likely to be most effective. Of course, they can also use their gifts effectively as part of a ministry team in any of the other eight ministry areas, but like us, they prefer to use their gift in the ministry that suggests their greatest potential for growth and effectiveness. In light of our team approach to ministry, it is important that we understand both (1) how other gifts can be used effectively in team projects and (2) how we can use our gift of serving in other ministry areas.

### **Spiritual Gifts and Practical Ministry**

While each person is uniquely gifted in such a way as to make him or her most effective in a particular ministry area, every Christian can use their gift(s) in a serving ministry. Few would dispute a role for servers in practical ministries, but as one understands ministry more fully, it becomes clear that certain other gifts fill a vital role if team projects are going to be most effective.

Team projects include ministries primarily concerned with meeting the practical needs of people, the local church or missionary ministries. These ministries tend to enable others to minister more effectively because basic and essential needs are met. While gifted servers are most likely to be attracted to and be effective in these ministries, all Christians can and should be involved in meeting the practical needs of others.

When we understand how different people minister according to their unique giftedness, it will be easier to recognize the ministry potential in others. Evangelists tend to have a strong commitment to reaching people for Christ and will be involved in these ministries as they recognize how working on these projects will make the church more effective in its outreach ministries or will help others become more open to the message of the gospel. Prophets tend to have a strong commitment to biblical truth and may be effective in maintaining a high quality control standard in specific projects. Teachers tend to have a strong commitment to biblical truth and can help train others for greater effectiveness in the project. Exhorters tend to be effective communicators and may assist in enlisting and encouraging others in the project. Pastor-shepherds tend to have a strong commitment to people and will help keep a human side to each job to be done. Mercy-showers tend to be sensitive to the needs of others and can be helpful in identifying priorities for ministry projects. Givers may be key to raising the funds needed in various work projects. Administrators tend to have a strong commitment to organization and may be helpful in managing resources and schedules to insure the project is completed on time within the allotted budget. There is a place for each member of the ministry team in doing practical ministry projects.

### **The Gift of Serving and Team Ministries**

Your gift of serving colors the way you look at other ministries. When you understand this principle, you can utilize it to your advantage to become an effective

member of the ministry team serving outside your preferred ministry area. If you realize your different perspective on the ministry is the result of a God-given gift, you do not need to be intimidated by others who may appear more effective in that ministry area because of their unique gift(s). God will use someone gifted in an area that is most complementary to a particular ministry emphasis to make a good ministry better. But He will also use the rest of us to make that better ministry best.

When an evangelist involves you in *Team Evangelism*, you can multiply his or her effectiveness by demonstrating the love of Christ in practical ways.

When a prophet involves you in social action, you can help find practical ways to assist victims of society.

When a teacher involves you in team teaching, you can be effective in helping others apply the lessons they learn in ways that impact others.

When the exhorter involves you in team building, you can help that happen in doing the things others fail to notice in your own quiet way.

When the pastor-shepherd involves you in team nurturing, you can be there in practical ways to assist those who need extra encouragement.

When the mercy-shower involves you in team caring, you can help distressed people by helping them make their home environment physically less stressful.

When the giver involves you team funding, you can help find ways to reduce the costs of projects by enlisting volunteer help.

When the administrator involves you in administrative aspects of the ministry, you can contribute unique insights to practical details often overlooked in the big picture.

Part of what God expects of us as stewards of the resources He has entrusted to us involves knowing how to use our spiritual(s) as part of a ministry team. At times, you may be part of a highly specialized team caring for people in the midst of a personal crisis. At other times, your perspective as a server may be needed on a more balanced ministry team. Regardless of the situation we find ourselves in, it is important that we continue developing and using our giftedness in ministry to the glory of God.

## **Where Do I Go From Here?**

This book has addressed several issues that are important to servers who want to be good stewards of the spiritual gifts God has entrusted to them. While I hope you have learned something that has enhanced your understanding of the gift of serving, it was never my intent nor that of the publisher simply to produce a book to add to the sum total of knowledge on this subject. Rather, this book was produced as a tool to help you develop your gift of serving. Before you put this book on the shelf along side of others you may own, let's talk about making this book work for you!

## **You Can Become More Effective in Serving**

One of this book's objectives was to describe ways you can become more effective in exercising your spiritual gift. Using chapter two as your guide, take time to review what it means to have the heart of a servant. This chapter is designed to give you a

basic understanding of an area of life that is at the very core of expressing your spiritual gift. Are there things you need to do to grow in this area?

In exercising your gift of serving, you demonstrate to others the love of Christ in so many practical ways. That is one reason why it is so important to be passionate about the opportunities God has given you. Sooner or later, all of us get tired and down. When that happens, use chapter three as a guide to help you reignite that first love for the Lord so that He can pour out His love on others through you.

In all that we do, we do it for the glory of God. That being the case, excellence in all we do is not an option, but a requirement. As you review chapter four, take time to evaluate your own work. Is your standard of excellence where it ought to be? Remember, there is a difference between excellence and perfection. All God wants us to do is the very best we can do for the glory of God and the good of others.

While many servers do not aspire to assume a leadership role, the spirit of serving is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian leader. As you interact with others you will influence them through your character and service. Is your character the kind of character you would want others emulating in their life? If not, what is one thing you need to work on to become who God wants you to be?

People who have the kind of others-orientation that characterizes servants need to be sure to find the balance God intended us to have in our work and rest. Take time to review chapter six to understand God's purpose and your need for both. Then as you evaluate your own situation, identify one or two things you can begin working on this week to make the changes you need to make to achieve the balance that is right for you.

While studying your gift is important, ultimately your effectiveness in ministry will only be realized as you begin to use your gift in ministry. If you are not currently involved in a ministry where you can effectively use your giftedness in serving, take steps this week to find such a ministry opportunity. It may be that God could use you as part of a new ministry team in your church.

### **Additional Serving Ministry Resources Available**

Part of this book has described specific ways of developing your gift and ministry of serving. No attempt has been made to exhaust the subject here. Many aspects of ministry have only been alluded to in these pages, while others have been overlooked completely. Ministries not specifically mentioned are in no way inferior to those discussed. The book is intended to serve as an introduction to a vast field, a guide to get you started in your personal ministry as a gifted servant.

Many churches, missions and parachurch ministries constantly struggle with a variety of practical needs that could be met by volunteers and help them reduce their overhead costs. This may involve things as mundane as cleaning their facilities, light office duties, and minor repairs and maintenance projects. Even if you are not sure you can accomplish these tasks, many groups will offer to train you in exchange for your help.



Many educational institutions offer personal interest courses that may help you hone skills that could make you a more effective servant. These courses include such things as flower arranging, cooking classes, carpentry, welding, plumbing, etc. Take time to review the life-long learning brochures published by your local school board or community college to see if courses are available that interest you. As you learn new skills, you will open new opportunities to serve others.

The publisher of this book is committed to helping people develop their spiritual gifts and build growing churches. Church Growth Institute has published this book and other resources designed to help individuals and churches be more effective utilizing a gift-based approach to ministry. As you prepare a personal growth plan by which you can further develop your giftedness in serving, you will want to check their web site (<http://www.ChurchGrowth.org>) to learn what specific resources are available.

## APPENDIX ONE

# Identifying Your Gift of Serving

Among the various Team Ministry gifts, serving is one of the gifts widely used but rarely noticed within the church. Servants, by definition, like to serve. They are embarrassed when placed in the limelight. As a result, servers may not be aware of others who share their spiritual gift. In fact, this may be the easiest gift to write off as not being a gift. Many gifted in this area tend to look at their practical work in the church as part of their responsibility as a church member rather than the fulfillment of a ministry for which God has specially gifted them.

How can I know if I am indeed gifted in serving? Many people may indeed be involved in various church work projects because “someone has to do it.” But even some who get involved for that motive may in fact be gifted servants, unaware of their spiritual gift or that serving is a spiritual gift. How can I determine if I am attracted to these kinds of ministries because of a sense of responsibility as a member of the church or because of the unique spiritual gift God has given me?

There are at least three ways to evaluate your giftedness to determine if you have the gift of exhortation. First, you can complete a *Spiritual Gifts Inventory* to help you determine probable areas of giftedness. Second, you can look at your own ministry passion (what you would prefer doing) as an indicator of giftedness in that area. Third, you can compare yourself with a standard profile of a gifted servant to note important areas of similarity or difference.

### Using the Spiritual Gifts Survey

Your dominant area of giftedness will tend to impact the way you think and feel about things much as other influences such as family or educational background also contribute to the person you are. The *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory* (revised and updated edition: *Your Gifts Survey*) has helped many people discover their spiritual gift(s) by matching certain attitudinal statements to probable areas of giftedness. Servers tend to identify closely with the following statements:<sup>iv</sup>

1. I am fulfilled by performing routine tasks in the church for God’s glory.
2. I am usually involved in a variety of activities that help other people.
3. I prefer to be out of the public eye to be fulfilled.
4. I am burdened with the physical needs of others.
5. I enjoy working with my hands.
6. I often let people talk me into things I don’t want to do.
7. I am impressed when exhorted to serve.
8. I like to meet needs immediately.
9. I am already helping people while others are still talking about it.

10. I am quick to respond to other people's need for help.
11. Some people think I neglect spiritual needs.
12. I enjoy mechanical jobs in the church.

### **Confirming Your Test Results**

While the *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory* has proved an effective tool in helping people identify their dominant area of giftedness, be careful about coming to conclusions too quickly on the basis of a single test. In the Old Testament, a matter could not be legally confirmed without two or three witnesses who agreed. When you evaluate your response to the *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory*, apply this *Law of Two or Three Witnesses* to your test results by asking the following questions:

1. Is this conclusion consistent with what I know about this gift? Something in your background or even the way you felt as you completed the inventory may have colored your answers slightly, resulting in a false conclusion.
2. Do other Christians who know me see evidence of this gift in me? If you possess this gift, it should be apparent at least in embryonic form to more mature and spiritual Christians who know you.
3. Is the exercise of this gift effective in ministry? When you use your spiritual gift, you will tend to experience maximum effectiveness with minimum effort.

### **Gifts, Passions, and Learned Abilities**

Some Christians confuse their spiritual giftedness with a passion for ministry and/or learned abilities they have acquired. Normally, God also gives His people a passion to serve Him in some area in which they are uniquely gifted. Also, as Christians begin using their gifts in ministry, they tend to find other learned abilities they have acquired over the years can be used to open ministry doors or enhance the effectiveness of their gifts. Therefore, the challenge of gift stewardship involves determining how to use your gifts and learned abilities in a ministry for which you have a passion. When this balance is achieved, you will realize your maximum effectiveness in ministry and greatest sense of personal fulfillment.

As you look for an opportunity to use your giftedness in ministry, ask yourself, "If I could serve in any ministry in my church, which would I choose?" This will help you identify your passion for ministry. If you have difficulty deciding between several options, determine what these ministries have in common that make them attractive to you. For example, the Christian that has difficulty choosing between a summer day camp ministry to children or accompanying the youth group on their winter retreat may have a passion for a camping ministry rather than children's or youth ministry.

Once you have identified your ministry passion, begin investigating opportunities within that ministry area that would enable you to use your gift(s). This will probably involve talking with others currently involved in that ministry. In some cases, you may need to do some creative thinking to help others see how your unique giftedness could contribute to the effectiveness of the ministry team. In other situations, God may give you a passion to use your giftedness in a ministry that is not yet established in your

church. Many pastors and church leaders are waiting for people like that to begin much-needed new ministries in the church.

Having determined a role for your gift(s) in the area of your passion, the third step in gift stewardship involves using your learned abilities to enhance your ministry effectiveness. Some of our learned abilities (perhaps most of them) may not readily lend themselves to the ministry we have chosen. Others may only contribute slightly to enhancing your effectiveness. Still others may open significant doors of ministry that might have otherwise remained closed.

### **Practicing Gift Stewardship**

God has uniquely gifted each of us for effective ministry in our church. He is the giver of the gifts, but as the recipients of His gifts we have a stewardship responsibility (1) to discover our unique giftedness, then (2) to demonstrate that giftedness in ministry, and finally (3) to develop the potential of our spiritual giftedness. The Lord bless you as you are found faithful as a steward of the gift(s) He has entrusted to your keeping.

### **A Profile of the Servant<sup>v</sup>**

The gifted servant has the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by rendering practical help in both physical and spiritual matters. When there is a job to be done around the church, servants are the ones who show up to address a practical need. Although Jeremiah once used a hammer as a metaphor for God's Word, gifted servants are content to use their own hammers for the glory of God.

Because of their practical orientation toward life in general and ministry in particular, gifted servants tend to struggle with others who appear less inclined to get involved in various work projects. They may try to impose their gift on others by expecting them to commit to ministries in areas where they feel uncomfortable. It is easy to justify their expectation that Christians "practice what they preach" by doing something practical rather than just "praying about the need". Sometimes they forget that not everyone can drive a nail straight. If they fail to remember that God gifts people differently according to His will and purpose for the church, they may put undue pressure on others to live up to their standards, to impose their gift on others. A balanced understanding of spiritual gifts should eliminate this problem of gift imposing.

### **I. CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT**

- A. He/she is usually ambitious.
- B. He/she doesn't need to be in the public eye to be fulfilled.
- C. He/she enjoys manual projects.
- D. He/she is often involved in a variety of activities and volunteers for many different jobs.
- E. He/she is loyal, sincere, tolerant, faithful and devoted.
- F. He/she is usually easy going, likable, congenial, inoffensive.
- G. He/she usually wants people to like him/her.

- H. He/she listens to others without being critical.
- I. He/she is usually inhibited publicly, not usually expressive.
- J. He/she is not dominating – more a follower than a leader.
- K. He/she is usually good with mechanical work.

## **II. BURDENS, DESIRES, AND STRENGTHS OF A SERVANT**

- A. He/she is burdened with others' needs; quickly responds to the needs.
- B. He/she is impressed with the need to respond when exhorted to serve.
- C. He/she is usually unable to say, "NO."
- D. He/she will very seldom step in as a leader.
- E. He/she likes to meet immediate needs.
- F. He/she likes to have a good leader he/she can support.
- G. He/she enjoys doing mechanical and simple jobs in the church.
- H. He/she often has a high sense of empathy.
- I. He/she is usually very patient.
- J. He/she avoids drawing attention to himself/herself.
- K. He/she is often considered a workaholic.

## **III. SPECIAL NEEDS AND WEAKNESSES OF A SERVANT**

- A. He/she may emphasize practical needs over spiritual needs.
- B. He/she is not as concerned about the completed task as he/she is about the immediate service; has a tendency to not follow through.
- C. He/she may under-emphasize verbal witnessing.
- D. He/she may jump to meet needs in the church or other homes before those of his/her own family.
- E. He/she often has a low self-esteem.
- F. He/she needs to know that his/her efforts are appreciated.
- G. He/she will take his/her own time, usually working slowly and deliberately.
- H. He/she does not stand out in a crowd.
- I. He/she likes for a task to be challenging.
- J. He/she will attach himself/herself to someone who is doing exciting things and will allow that excitement to spill over on himself/herself.
- K. He/she is controlled more by circumstances than principles.
- L. He/she is only satisfied when he/she has done more for you than you have done for him/her.

- M. He/she avoids long-term responsibilities.
- N. He/she is the master of decisive indecision.
- O. He/she reads the directions when all else fails.

#### **IV. HOW THE SERVANT IS MISUNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS**

- A. Others think he/she is pushy, doing things without asking leaders.
- B. Others think he/she excludes them.
- C. Others think he/she is impatient and jumps in too fast.
- D. Others accuse him/her of interfering with the Spirit's work.
- E. Others think he/she neglects spiritual needs.

#### **V. HOW SATAN ATTACKS THIS GIFT**

- A. Causes pride because of work he/she has done.
- B. Causes feeling of insignificance.
- C. Causes lack of burden for people.
- D. Causes lack of concern for spiritual growth.
- E. Causes lack of quality workmanship due to lack of knowledge or skills.

#### **VI. WHERE TO USE THIS GIFT**

- A. As person in charge of maintenance and grounds.
- B. As a baptismal helper.
- C. As a nursery, kitchen or choir helper.
- D. As an office assistant or errand runner.
- E. As an audio-video worker.
- F. As a record keeper.
- G. As a librarian in the church library or CD ministry.
- H. As a greeter or an usher.
- I. As an instrumentalist or choir member.
- J. As a stagehand in drama productions.
- K. As a photographer.
- L. As a helper in special ministries such as migrant, deaf, etc.
- M. As a hospitality worker for newcomers or visitors.
- N. As a member of the benevolence team, helping people with manual tasks.



## APPENDIX TWO

# A Two-Year Plan to Begin Thinking Like a Servant

One of the things Jesus accomplished when He ascended into heaven to grant spiritual gifts to all Christians to use in the ministry (Eph. 4:8). Specific spiritual gifts are identified by different names in Scripture. When the various biblical lists of spiritual gifts are examined, there appear to be three kinds of spiritual gifts. One group may be described as miraculous gifts or “signs and wonders.” This group includes gifts such as speaking in tongues and gifts of healing. Then there are four enabling gifts that each Christian appears to have to some degree. These include spiritual discernment, faith, knowledge, and wisdom. These four gifts enhance a third group, the task-oriented spiritual gifts (TEAM gifts). These task-oriented gifts are tools for effectiveness as part of the ministry team. Each of these nine tools for ministry is the subject of one of the books in this series on spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are given to Christians for several reasons. They equip Christians with tools for effective outreach ministries (Eph. 4:12). These same tools equip Christians with the ability to edify, encourage, and care for fellow believers (Eph. 4:12). They also enable each Christian to contribute practically to the unity of the church (Eph. 4:13). Spiritual gifts provide the means by which Christians can experience their greatest personal fulfillment, that which comes from using their gifts in ministry to others (Rom. 12:4-8).

While the focus of this and other books in this series is spiritual gifts, it is important to remember that all gifts are given by the same Giver who distributes those gifts “to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). When churches develop a gift-orientation to ministry, they recognize Christ’s authority as the head of their church to determine the nature of their ministry. Ultimately, the key to an effective gift-oriented ministry is not the gift, but the Giver. He determines who gets which gift and in doing so, He also designs the unique gift mix within each congregation to accomplish the specific ministry He intends for that church. That is why, despite the failings of the Corinthian church in many respects, Paul could affirm with confidence that they came “short in no gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). God gave them and us every gift we need to accomplish the ministry He wants us to accomplish.

### Looking at Spiritual Gifts from the Perspective of the Giver

When Paul addressed the Corinthians on the subject of spiritual gifts, he used five different Greek words to describe the nature of these gifts (1 Cor. 12:1-7). Each term tends to emphasize a different aspect of our spiritual giftedness. Paul used the word *pneumatikon* that is translated “spiritual” (1 Cor. 12:1). This adjective describes the character of these gifts as spiritual. The second Greek word used was *charismata* that is usually translated “gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4). This term emphasizes gifts as God’s free and gracious gifts. The word *diakonia* is the third term used to describe gifts. This word is



translated “ministries” (1 Cor. 12:5) and reveals gifts as opportunities for ministry. Fourth, the word *energema*, translated “activities” (1 Cor. 12:6), suggests that gifts are an endowment of God’s power or energy. The fifth the word used by Paul, *phanerosis*, translated “manifestation” (1 Cor. 12:7), means that gifts are evidence of God working through us.

That last word creates a problem for many Christians. If my spiritual gift is a manifestation of God working through me, it will be frustrated unless I get out of the way. God and the people He made have two different ways of thinking. Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “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). At some point in the development of our spiritual gifts, we need to begin thinking like the Giver of our gifts.

Paul understood this principle. Just before discussing spiritual gifts in his epistle to the Romans, he wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). The key to that renewing of our mind is found in saturating your mind with God’s Word. Paul urged the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). The psalmist wrote, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:9-11).

### **A Two-Year Strategy to Begin Thinking Like God about Your Gift**

In our hurry-up world many people look for quick solutions to fix problems, but learning to think like the Giver is a challenge bigger than can be accomplished in a weekend seminar or by reading a book or taking a course. The gap between our way of thinking and God’s way of thinking is so great it could take a lifetime to bridge. Even then we may discover we still have more to learn. But the more we allow God’s word to saturate our thinking process, the more inclined we will be to begin thinking like Him.

As you strive to begin thinking like God about your spiritual gift two spiritual disciplines will help you accomplish that goal. The first is the discipline of reading through the Bible. Christians who depend exclusively on the ministry of their pastor to teach them the Scriptures often end up with a piece-meal understanding of the Scriptures. If a pastor preached on a different chapter each week, it would take him 1189 weeks to preach through the Bible (about twenty-three years and five months). Of course some chapters might take several weeks to preach through and sometimes the pastor may choose to preach on some doctrine, problem, social issue or other topic. Most people don’t stay in the same church long enough to understand their Bible using this approach exclusively. But despite the size and scope of the Bible, you can read it through your self in a year by devoting fifteen minutes daily to personal Bible reading. There are many “through the Bible” Bible reading guides published as tracts or special edition Bibles to help you accomplish this goal.

The second spiritual discipline to help you begin thinking about your gift from God's perspective is Scripture memory. While most people believe they cannot memorize, throughout history, this has been the most often used means of teaching the Scriptures. Even those who cannot read can memorize the Scriptures because it involves only two steps, repetition and review. To learn a new verse, continually repeat the verse until you can say it without error. Then to remember the verse, review it often on a regular basis. In the Old Testament, parents were encouraged to review the principles of the law they memorized with their children four times each day, "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7). Regardless of our lifestyle we can still find time to repeat and review the Scriptures during our wait time and commute time and when we go to sleep and wake up each day.

### **One Hundred and Four Key Verses on Serving**

To help you get started in your own personal spiritual gift development plan, the following list identifies one hundred and four key verses on serving. Don't let the list overwhelm you and don't try to memorize them all at once. Instead, take the first verse and read it over until it becomes familiar. Set a goal to memorize that verse this week and begin thinking about how that verse relates to your serving ministry. Then review that verse daily for the next month, even as you begin learning the next verse on the list next week. At the end of the month, set the verse aside to be reviewed monthly so you don't forget it.

The following list does not include every verse related to your gift, but it will help you get started and develop this discipline over the next two years. You may come across other verses to add to the list as you read your Bible daily. In addition to changing the way you think about your gift, this plan will also help you experience accelerated spiritual growth. Peter understood the link between the Scriptures and spiritual growth when he wrote, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). As you mature in Christ and begin to think like God about your spiritual gifts, you will find yourself using your gift with greater effectiveness in ministry. In doing so you will also experience a greater sense of personal fulfillment as you serve God the way He designed you to serve Him.

1. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability that God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).
2. "Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes. I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies" (Ps. 119:124-125).
3. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household" (Matt. 10:24-25).

4. "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6).
5. "'You are my witnesses,' says the LORD, 'and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me'" (Isa. 43:10).
6. "Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23).
7. "He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend" (Prov. 22:11).
8. "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5-6).
9. "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).
10. "Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established" (Prov. 16:3).
11. "The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame" (Prov. 14:35).
12. "But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it" (Num. 14:24).
13. "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God" (1 Peter 2:15-16).
14. "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9).
15. "His lord said to him, 'Well done good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matt. 25:21 [25:23]).

16. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:10).
17. "A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Prov. 11:13).
18. "Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel answered, 'Speak, for your servant hears'" (1 Sam. 3:10).
19. "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).
20. "'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is my reverence?' says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'" (Mal. 1:6)
21. "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16).
22. "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).
23. "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" (Prov. 27:2).
24. "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).
25. "A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men" (Prov. 18:16).
26. "Surely He scorns the scornful but gives grace to the humble" (Prov. 3:34).
27. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more" (I Cor. 9:19).
28. "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Prov. 29:23).
29. "Servants, be submissive to your own masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Peter 2:18-19).
30. "Therefore give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9).

31. "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12).
32. "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" (Rom. 12:10-11).
33. "Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place" (1 Kings 8:28).
34. "Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).
35. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).
36. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to all men" (Titus 3:8).
37. "That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him (John 5:23).
38. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).
39. "Please let your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned" (Neh. 1:6).
40. "He that is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).
41. "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4).
42. "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" (Job 1:8).

43. "Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant" (Ps. 119:76).
44. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).
45. "Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11).
46. "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:8-9).
47. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Prov. 16:32).
48. "Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me" (Ps. 27:9-10).
49. "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what is our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).
50. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments (Ps. 119:176).
51. "Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for your mercies' sake" (Ps. 31:16).
52. "But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:22).
53. "You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word" (Ps. 119:65).
54. "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord" (Zeph. 3:9).
55. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16).

56. "Does the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21).
57. "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression" (Ps. 19:13).
58. "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isa. 57:15).
59. "These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment" (Prov. 24:23).
60. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).
61. "O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD" (Ps. 116:16-17).
62. "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption" (Acts 13:36).
63. "A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame, and will share an inheritance among the brothers" (Prov. 17:2).
64. "Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing" (Ps. 100:2).
65. "For there is no partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11).
66. "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" (Prov. 25:28).
67. "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12).
68. "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9).
69. "The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your hearts shall live" (Ps. 69:32).

70. "Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed'" (1 Sam. 2:30).
71. "LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear" (Ps. 10:17).
72. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1).
73. "Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49).
74. "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11).
75. "Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it" (Ps. 119:140).
76. "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (James 2:1).
77. "And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty" (1 Cor. 12:23).
78. "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:26).
79. "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" (Prov. 29:11).
80. "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15).
81. "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).
82. "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name" (Deut. 6:13).
83. "Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You" (Ps. 119:38).
84. "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the



other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

85. “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things” (1 Tim. 6:1-2).
86. “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:18-19).
87. “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).
88. “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9).
89. “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23-24).
90. “When they cast you down, and you say, ‘Exaltation will come!’ then He will save the humble person” (Job 22:29).
91. “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24).
92. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17).
93. “Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes” (Ps. 119:23).
94. “A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies” (Prov. 14:5).
95. “With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free” (Eph. 6:7-8).
96. “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread

alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:2-3).

97. “Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility” (Prov. 18:12).
98. “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21).
99. “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” (Gal. 5:13).
100. “Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes” (Ps. 119:135).
101. “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17).
102. “When a man’s ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7).
103. “Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word” (Ps. 119:17).
104. “So you shall serve the LORD Your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you” (Exod. 23:25).

## END NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The eight basic principles described in this section are drawn from Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Warner Books, 1982) and are adapted to suggest how gifted servants might pursue excellence in their individual ministries.
  - <sup>2</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), pp. 12-13.
  - <sup>3</sup> Jim M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), chapter 2.
  - <sup>4</sup> Attitudinal statements taken from the Classic *Spiritual Gifts* Inventory, now available in a new, revised edition: *YOUR GIFTS Spiritual Gifts Survey* published by ChurchGrowth.org. This diagnostic tool is available through <http://www.ChurchGrowth.org>.
  - <sup>5</sup> Gift profile based on *How to Find Meaning and Fulfillment through Understanding the Spiritual Gifts within You*, which was revised and updated to *YOUR GIFTS: Discover God's Unique Design for You* by Larry Gilbert (for individuals/small groups) and *TEAM MINISTRY: Gifted to Serve* (for pastors/church leaders), Forest, Virginia: ChurchGrowth.org, 2015.