



First Baptist Pulpit

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Why Serve in God's Church?

John 13:12-17

If you remember, our theme a first for this series on Spiritual Growth is 1 Timothy 4:7-8. It's on the flip side of the Spiritual Growth Card: **1 Timothy 4:7-8** *7Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

Spiritual growth is all about growing toward "godliness" and godliness is simply becoming more like God, more like Christ, in our actions and our character. If we are growing spiritually we should, one year from now, be able to love a little more like Christ loves, forgive a little more like Christ forgives, serve a little more like Christ, etc..

Today we look at another of the 5 spiritual disciplines outlined on the Spiritual Growth Card to help us to become more godly, more like Christ. - *Serving in at least one Ministry.*

I KNOW I've said it over and over, but EVERY believer should be serving in at least one area of ministry. If you're not, you are stunting your spiritual life, and it's even questionable WHY God has you here on earth?

Charles Spurgeon once prayed before his congregation, *"Lord, we need labourers, not loiterers. We need men on fire, and I beseech you ask God to send them. The harvest can never be reaped by men who will not labour."*

Today: Why Should We Serve in the Church? Because...

I. SERVING MAKES US MORE LIKE JESUS

This is fundamental. If you want to grow in Christ likeness, then being a servant must be tops on your list. Jesus said it numerous times in numerous ways -- Jesus came to be a servant, and when we serve we become more like Jesus. Period.

Matthew 20:25-28 ²⁵Jesus called them together and said, *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Luke 22:24-27 ²⁴Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵Jesus said to them, *"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? **But I am among you as one who serves.**"*

John 13:12-17 ¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. *"Do you understand what I have done for you?"* he asked them. ¹³*"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."*

Mark 9:35 ³⁵Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Philippians 2:5-8 ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Are you getting this? There is nothing that makes us more like Jesus than when we become people who serve.

Does it matter to you how much you are like Jesus? Do you ever wonder how you can become more like Jesus? One key thing you can do is serve as Jesus served. The work of the church is the work of God on the earth.

If Jesus were in our church, can you imagine that He would do nothing? Would He simply attend the worship service, perhaps give a little on occasion, and then leave? Do you think He would serve or merely observe? You know the answer.

II. SERVING BRINGS GLORY TO GOD

Philippians 2:9-11 ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Turn to 1 Peter 4. If you are a Christian, God has given at least one spiritual gift to you. Whatever your gift, God gave it to you for you to use in His service. And the result of serving Him with your gift is glory to God. Follow Peter's thought carefully:

1 Peter 4:10-11 ¹⁰Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Notice that Peter, who was writing to Christians, spoke of serving one another. Taken in context we learn that using our spiritual gifts to serve in and through the church is one of the ways we bring glory to God. Any service for God in His church—teaching, committee work, elder or deacon ministry, nursery service, showing mercy, serving food, music ministry, taking care of the facilities—brings glory to God.

On the other hand, a professing Christian who fails to serve in the church of Jesus Christ fails to give glory to God in a very noticeable way.

When I was in high school and college I worked for my father who built homes. He taught me how to do many things with hammer and saw that I am still grateful for today. When I worked for him I realized that what I did as his employee would be a reflection to others on my father. If I did a poor job, the homeowners and anyone else who saw the work would consider my father a bad builder. What I did was a reflection on him in the end.

The same is true in the family of God. When a person will not serve God within the local church, or does a poor job because it is simply out of guilt or obligation, what does that say to others about that person's God? Who would be attracted to a God who evokes no more devotion than that?

No, we should serve God not just because it is a duty, we should serve Him because it glorifies God. He is worthy of everything we can do for Him and church. Wouldn't you agree?

III. SERVICE EXPRESSES LOVE FOR GOD

Serving in the church of God is one of the clearest manifestations of loving God Himself. The writer of Hebrews reminded his readers that God would never forget the love they showed to Him by ministering to His people: **Hebrews 6:10** ¹⁰God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. The people of God show their love for God by serving the church of God.

Obviously, the church is not the only place to serve God. **Luke 2:37** says that Anna "served God with fastings and prayers night and day."

- You serve God when you do your job as unto Him (Colossians 3:23-24).
- You serve Him when you give a cup of cold water in His name.

- According to **Matthew 25:40**, Jesus will say at the Judgment regarding how we've ministered to others through providing nourishment or clothing or visitation, *"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."*

But serving Him through serving in His church is another *unconcealed* way the Lord wants us to express our love for Him. Consider the implications of **Galatians 6:10**, *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"*. And what better way is there to regularly do good to the household of faith than by serving in church ministries to them and with them?

Serving God becomes like the labor of the Jacob, who worked in the flocks of his future father-in-law as a bridal price for the one he loved: **Genesis 29:20** *"So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her"*. Has love for God ever caused you to feel that way in the service of God? I have served and seen people serve in church ministries that would be prison-like drudgery to those who don't love God, and yet I, and they, found deep fulfillment in them.

A missionary in Africa was asked if he really liked what he was doing. His response was unexpected. *"Do I like this work?" he said. "No. My wife and I do not like dirt. We do not like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse. . . . But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? God pity him, if not. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to 'Go,' and we go because Love constrains us."*

Love for God makes a delight out of duty. It lifts even the most mundane ministry—whether overseas missionary work or service in the local church—out of the realm of repetitious responsibility.

Some may try to serve God without loving Him, but no one can love God without serving Him. As Spurgeon boldly declared, *"He is no Christian who does not seek to serve His God."*

IV. SERVICE BRINGS PLEASURE TO YOURSELF, OTHERS AND GOD

Christians who serve God with the right motives experience what King David exclaimed in **Psalm 40:8**, *"I delight to do Your will, O my God."* There is delight in doing what we were created to do (remember Ephesians 2:10). The will of God is that

His people serve in His church, and to do this brings them great delight and pleasure.

What if God would not allow you to serve Him? How would you feel? Suppose you were told by those in your church, "Just sit back relax, and enjoy the ministries of the church. Everything will be done for you."

For a short while, perhaps, it might be enjoyable. But let's imagine that, with a growing restlessness to do something useful for the work of God, you said, "May I help take up the offering today?"

"No thanks," would be the response, "we'll manage just fine."

Later you might offer, "Let me set up for the event tonight."

"No, no," you kept hearing, "don't do a thing. We don't need you. Let us do everything for you."

Could you stand that? That would drive me insane. The pleasure is not in the avoidance of service, but in serving. How could any child of God find pleasure and satisfaction in not serving God?

Service Gives Pleasure to Others

When you serve in the church it brings pleasure to the people of God too. In **Acts 20:17-38**, where the apostle Paul gives his farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church, he recounts how he served them for three years. We're told that when he finished talking *"they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him"* (Acts 20:37). Why did they react so? Because his ministry had brought so much pleasure to them. God had blessed them through the words and works of Paul, and they couldn't bear the thought of not seeing him again.

Think of some of the people who have served God greatly. —a favorite preacher of yours, or a or teacher, or a missionary or Christian businessperson you've known. They have served God, and as a result they've blessed others and blessed you.

That's because serving God brings blessing and pleasure to other people. When you serve in the church it gives you pleasure, but it also gives pleasure to others.

Service Gives Pleasure to God

Additionally, serving in the church brings pleasure to the heart of God. *"But do not forget to do good and to share," Hebrews 13:16* reminds us, *"for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased."*

The last chapter of the Bible gives us a glimpse of eternity in heaven in **Revelation 22:3**, saying, *"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants*

shall serve Him". What service does God need in heaven? There are no more people to evangelize, no more needs to meet, no more church buildings to build and maintain. And if there is something to do, why not let the angels do everything? We will serve because it brings pleasure to the heart of God for us to serve Him. It will bring Him (and us!) pleasure then when we serve in His city, and it brings Him pleasure now when we serve in His church.

HOW IS YOUR SERVICE QUOTIENT?

1. Is my church STRONGER because of me?

Nutritionists speak of "empty calories." In order for these calories to be processed the body must use some of its nutritional resources, yet empty calories do little or nothing to nourish the body in return.

ARE YOU LIKE EMPTY CALORIES TO YOUR CHURCH?.

Do you receive more ministry from the church than you minister to it? God intends for every member of the church body to be served by it, and there are times when even the most spiritually mature members will receive more ministry than they give. Nevertheless, the goal for each of us should be to serve in the church in such a way that it is stronger because we are there.

Everyone who really wants to, can do something to strengthen the work of the church.

2. Do you do a servant's WORK with a servant's HEART?

The reason some are unwilling to serve or unwilling to serve very long is that they don't have servants' hearts. Then when they are treated like servants—which inevitably happens to those who serve—they quit.

Every ministry becomes mundane or difficult at times. Every ministry is under appreciated. Every ministry feels the sharp sting of criticism sooner or later. Every ministry sometimes seems barren of God's blessing. And unless in these times you can fall back upon the call of God to be a servant, you will become disillusioned and eventually walk away from every place of service you ever fill.

Honestly, there are moments when I, want to walk away from the ministry. That happens to everyone who serves in the church, whether vocationally or as a volunteer. Despite the discouragement I may feel at any given moment, I know there is no happiness in not serving Him.

Remembering my call—that I am the Servant's servant—helps me maintain a servant's heart and stay faithful to my ministry in the church.

3. Are you a CONSISTENT worker, not a CONVENIENCE worker?

Too many people have decided that they will serve in the church only occasionally and when it's convenient. They are *convenience* workers rather than *consistent* workers. The church needs servants: people who will make long-term commitments and be dependable. The classic example is a Sunday school or Bible study teacher. She or he prepares faithfully every week and serves God and others loyally and steadfastly. Of course, many other ministries require the same regular commitment. No church can be effective without people like this.

However, more and more leaders hear, "*I'll help out when I can,*" and, "*Call on me when you really need me.*" The most important ministries of a church cannot function well with that level of involvement. The church needs soldiers who will enlist and fill the ranks, not people who will help only as last-minute reinforcements or if the battle won't last too long.

To quote Spurgeon again, "*We need labourers, not loiterers.*"

4. Will you resolve never to RETIRE from serving in the church?

Paul warned his readers in **2 Thessalonians 3:13**, "*But as for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.*" Why does he warn of this? Because it happens to all of us. Everyone tires of his place of service sometime. When year follows year, some are ready to say, "I don't want to keep on."

One pastor/author wrote of a woman who worked in the nursery of the church for six years. Then she "retired." Perhaps she did need a break, but she saw it as a permanent change. In a few months, though, she volunteered for regular nursery duty again. This was what she said:

"I went to the adult class and received some wonderful teaching," she explained. "Then I went to the morning worship service and received more wonderful teaching. The same is true for the evening service and Wednesday night. Finally it hit me that at most services, all I did was receive. The nursery program was the one main place in the church that I gave!"

Don't quit serving when you are most qualified to serve. Don't lay aside your experience when it is

most valuable. Don't put yourself out to pasture. Don't look for a rocking chair in the church.

You've Got to Serve Somebody

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, a strike force launched an aerial attack on Pearl Harbor. The bombs and torpedoes caught the American forces completely by surprise. The Japanese scored a brilliant tactical victory. In less than two hours it appeared that they had crippled U.S. naval power in the Pacific.

But the raid proved to be a colossal blunder politically and psychologically. Overnight, America went from a "somewhat unconcerned" country trying to stay out of the war, to a unified nation intent on winning it. All over the land on Monday morning there were long lines at recruiting offices. Volunteers rushed to join the armed forces without a second thought to their plans for the future. Teenagers and middle-aged men alike lied about their age and physical condition in order to put on the uniform. Grown men wept when they were told they were unfit to fight.

Something quite similar to that happened nine years ago after 9-11, when terrorists leveled the World Trade Center and other targets. Young men and women heard the call and voluntarily enlisted in droves to fight for freedom and defend our country.

Both times, they understood the stakes, they believed in the mission and they put themselves in the game.

All of that is a huge contrast to the national conditions when I was a young man. American soldiers were again needed for the battlefield, but this time the war was not so popular. Far fewer volunteered for Vietnam. Many of those who fought had to be compelled into service through a military draft. And when drafted, some left the country in order to defer or dodge the draft.

When it comes to serving in the local church, most professing Christians seem to follow either the World War II model or the Vietnam model.

Some are eager to serve. Regardless of their age, and even though it may involve great personal cost, they will volunteer because their heart compels them

to do something for the work of God in the church. You couldn't stop them if you tried!

But others appear to do all they can to avoid serving. They don't come looking for ways to serve; leaders have to go to them and *draft* them. When they do serve, they do so reluctantly. They accept a ministry only out of a sense of sheer obligation, and they count the days until their hitch is up.

- Which of these two kinds of "servants" is more like Jesus?
- Which brings more glory to God?
- Which has more love for God?
- Which experiences more pleasure and brings pleasure to others and to God?
- I THINK YOU KNOW.

I wonder if the problem is the same as during our great wars. When people realize the stakes and believe in the mission, you can't keep them away.

Which sounds more like you?

Do you realize the stakes are the Kingdom of God, the spiritual destiny of people in our community?

Do you believe in the mission of Jesus?