

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 3, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



AUTHENTIC SERVANTHOOD “The Servant as a Giver” *2 Corinthians 8-9*

Throughout history there have been a number of non-Christian perspectives which all purport to speak the truth about how we should live. But all of these views revolve around the self. And as we have seen, the self is a demanding tyrant, an archenemy of true righteousness. It will only lead us away from God and a life of real satisfaction. What we need to learn is how to look beyond ourselves and become servants of Christ. In this lesson, we will continue to move in that direction by learning about servants as givers.

I. ISN'T THERE A BETTER WAY?

Jesus Christ replaced the self-centered philosophies of His own day and ours with the “others-centered” perspective of God... be a servant... give to others. A passage that presents this divine philosophy well and assumes that it’s attainable is found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians Christians in Philippians 2:3-4, ³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,* ⁴ *not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

In other words, we should not let selfishness and conceit play a part in our lives. Instead, we should regard others as more important than ourselves. That involves looking for ways to encourage, support, and build up others. And this requires an attitude of giving rather than receiving or taking.

6 Admonitions from Paul on Developing an Others Centered Perspective: *(This is the true heart of authentic servanthood)*

1. **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition”** – The Greek word, translated here as “selfish ambition,” which is sometimes rendered “strife” because it refers to factionalism, rivalry, and partnership, speaks of pride that prompts people to push for their own way.
2. **“Do nothing out of vain conceit”** – The Greek word, translated here as “vain conceit,” literally means “empty glory,” and often is translated “empty conceit.” This word refers to the pursuit of personal glory which is the motivation for selfish ambition.
3. **“Have a lowliness of mind”** – Here is how Paul says it in verse 3, *“³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others...”* The New King James and King James says it this way, *“³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind...”* Paul calls it an attitude of “lowliness of mind.” This translates a Greek word that Paul and other New Testament writers apparently coined themselves. It was a term of derision, with the idea of being low, shabby, and humble... like a beggar. Think... beggar so destitute and self-effacing that he (or she) won’t even lift his head and look those passing by in the eye. He just shyly and meagerly holds out his hand or cup for pennies. In other words, he doesn’t consider himself worthy of anything great or mighty, just the simplest most modest means for getting by. It is, perhaps, the spirit behind the idea that given our sinful condition we have it “better than we deserve” or “there by the grace of God go I.”
4. **“Humbly value others above yourselves”** – The New King James says, *“... let each esteem others better than himself.”* Someone has said, “This is the basic definition of true humility”(Dr. John MacArthur). This call is a Biblical call and mandate that is repeated in Scripture. In **Romans 12:10** we read, *“¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”* **Galatians 5:16** says, *“¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”* And in **Ephesians 5:21** we read, *“²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* And Peter writes in **1 Peter 5:5**, *“In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’”*
5. **“Do not look out for your own interests”** - If I could just simplify and reword a bit here.... “Put your own interests, desires, wishes, wants, agendas, plans on hold!” Or to say it another way, “Acquiesce (give consent, assent, submit, yield) to others.. give deference to others” Yield way to others!
6. **“Look out for the best interests of others”** – Not only are we to “acquiesce” to others, but we are commanded to “look out for” their best interest. We are to have their best interest in mind... always! If we are told in Scripture to be imitators of Christ... and we are in Philippians 2:5 told to have the same mind as Christ Jesus, and in Ephesians 5:1 we are told to be imitators of God and Christ Jesus, and in Romans 8:29 to “conform” (to be like, to take on the shape

and form of) to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ... then we must recognize and acknowledge that God always, always has our best interest at heart, therefore we are to have the best interest that one sitting next to you at heart... always. And we are to have the best interest of that one sitting behind you, and in front of you, and others at heart... always. Not our own interest, but the interest of others is to be our concern.

Key Take Away Principle: Scripture calls us to give up our very selves for others just as Jesus gave up Himself for us.

Perspective: *These are practices within the church that make us or break us. If we do these things and if these things are being practiced regularly... habitually by the membership of a church body and you will find a healthy church, that is honestly making and impact for Christ. Let one of these fall or fail and division, discord and disharmony and an unhealthy church emerge. And, I might add, people get hurt and leave the church.*

II. IS ALL THIS BIBLICAL?

No doubt about it... a lifestyle of giving of our very selves is thoroughly supported in Scripture. Many passages could be cited, but a few key ones will meet our needs here. Don't run over them quickly... instead, take time to read them reflectively.

5 Perspectives Passages on the Giving of Ourselves:

1. **2 Corinthians 3:5-6a = What we have comes from God -** *"⁵Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ⁶who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant..." (NAS)*
2. **2 Corinthians 4:5 = What we have from God puts us in debt or bond to Him -** *"⁵For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake." (NAS)*
3. **Galatians 5:13 = What we have from God put us in a debt of service to others -** *"¹³For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (NAS)*

Does all this instruction about servanthood imply that we are incompetent and inferior? Not in the least? Authentic humility and an unhealthy self-image are not bedfellows in Scripture. Rather, we need to make an accurate assessment of ourselves as being valuable before God and completely dependent on Him. These are key elements of true servanthood. Perhaps the following passages from the Apostle Paul's pen will put this in perspective for you.

4. **2 Corinthians 11:5 = What we have from God puts us on an equal playing field with others (not greater than and not less than others) -** *"⁵For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles." (NAS)*

5. **2 Corinthians 12:11 = What we have from God we did not earn, work for or deserve -** *“¹I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.”* As Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and ^[a]that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* (NAS)

III. WHAT ARE THE BASICS?

Now that we have a biblical foundation for servanthood, we need to know what the characteristics of a servant are so that we can begin to move in the right direction. Remember Jesus said in **Mark 10:45** (one of our key passage from our previous study), *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* If it is our goal as believers, to “conform” to or be like Jesus than we must acknowledge that we are to imitate His purpose in coming... what He was here for... what He did... and how He did it. By this simple understanding, and based on Jesus’ own words about Himself, there are three essential qualities of a servant.

3 Essential Qualities of a Servant:

1. **Giving**
2. **Forgiving**
3. **Forgetting**

We will concentrate on the first one here and then the other two in subsequent lessons. So let’s turn our attention to the servant as a giver... one who willingly and generously give so that others might benefit.

IV. HOW SHOULD SERVANTS GIVE?

A prime example of servant-giving is found in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, *“¹And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”* Here Paul refers to a great need of the Christians in Jerusalem and relates how the Macedonian believers reached out to meet that need. In this text we can discern at least four (4) truths about how an authentic servant gives.

4 Truths On How an Authentic Servant Gives:

1. **Anonymously (v.1)** – Paul began by saying in verse 1, *“¹And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.”* Although there were several churches in the area known as Macedonia, Paul didn’t name any of them. Neither did he give

“honorable mention” to any individual. Instead, the churches and persons who gave to others remained anonymous. True servants give out of genuine concern and not for the need to be noticed.

2. **Generously (v.2)** – We are also told, in verse 2, “² *In the midst of a very severe trial, their (these Macedonian Christian) overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*” In spite of their own affliction and extreme poverty they gave. They didn’t clutch their belongings and take a vow of un-involvement. Instead, they gave of their possessions, time, energy, and finances, and when it seemed they had not more to give.
3. **Voluntarily (vv.3-4)** – The Macedonian Christians gave because they wanted to. Verses 3 and 4 says, “³ *For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,* ⁴ *they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people.*” Have you ever heard of someone begging to help someone else? No one had to hound or force these Christians; they begged others to allow them to participate in fulfilling the needs of others. They did not want to be left out of the opportunity to give.
4. **Personally (v.5)** – Paul goes on to say in verse 5, “⁵ *And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.*” Did you see it? “They gave themselves first...” It’s impossible to give ourselves to others at arm’s length or in absentia. Personal involvement requires first, giving ourselves to the Lord, and then being willing and flexible to adapt our ways and schedules to fit another person’s needs.

V. HOW MUCH DOES GIVING COST US?

In **Luke 9:23** Jesus summarizes the cost of being His servant, “²³ *Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’*” To be Christ’s servant, according to these words of Jesus, Himself we must do three things... this is the cost of truly being His servant.

3 Costs to Being A Genuine Servant of Christ:

1. **Self must be dethroned**
2. **Jesus must be enthroned**
3. **The coronation must take place everyday**

So, to be Christ servant, we must dethrone ourselves and enthrone Him, and we must do this daily. Back to 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul suggests that this kind of giving will cost us at least three different ways.

3 Ways Servant-Giving Cost Us According to Paul:

1. **It cost a thorough self-evaluation** – After Paul spoke about the Macedonian Christians, he turned his attention to the Christians at Corinth. He exhorted them to abound in their giving in the same way they had grown in other areas of the Christian life. To help them accomplish this, Paul sent Titus (2 Cor. 8:6-7). Embedded in Paul’s counsel are four pieces of sound advice that will help each of us to evaluate ourselves better. Look at **2 Corinthians 8:6-9**, “⁶ *So we urged*

Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

4 Pieces of Sound Advice from Paul for Evaluating Ourselves:

- (1) **Utilize the objectivity of another person (v.6)** – We are often blind to our own faults and biased toward our own strengths. To counterbalance this, we need the perspective and insight of another person to aid us in our self-evaluation and personal accountability. For the Corinthians this objective person was Titus.
 - (2) **Ask hard questions of yourself (v.7)** – Paul observed that the Corinthian Christians were strong in many areas yet weak in their giving. We need to take a periodic assessment of the many areas that comprise the Christian life, and not allow our strengths to divert our energy from working on our weaknesses.
 - (3) **Examine your motives (v.8)** – Paul indicated that the Corinthians’ lack of giving raised questions about the sincerity of their love. What we do or don’t do often betrays our motives, be they good or bad. But this does not negate our need to examine why we engage in certain activities, refuse to get involved in others, or struggle in one area while we fail in another.
 - (4) **Deal with your own possessiveness (v.9)** – Because we are all sinners, we are all selfish in varying degrees. That fact often makes it extremely difficult for us to give of ourselves to others. And when we do overcome our selfishness, many times it takes a conscious effort on our part. However, when we as Christians reflect on the cost Jesus Christ paid to redeem us, it will challenge our tendency to keep and hoard. It will also provide an excellent model of both the personal cost and the benefit to others attached to authentic servant-hood.
2. **It costs our determined commitment** – Apparently, the Corinthian Christians had begun to give of their resources but then faltered on their commitment. So Paul encouraged them to follow through on what they had started. Notice 2 Cor. 8:10-11, *“¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.”* It’s true that we often begin a new task with zeal and exuberance, but it doesn’t take long for that to fade. Yet when it does, we need to buckle down and finish the work we began. The same holds true with giving.

3. **It costs our exercising a bold faith** – Paul lays down the principle in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, “⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion...” There is not hard-and-fast rule here about how much anyone should give... it’s an individual matter. However, the text does indicate that whatever a person sows, he or she will also reap. And we find here that in deciding the degree to which we should give, we should do so trusting God will reward our gift according to its measure.

VI. IS IT WORTH IT, AFTER ALL?

2 Scriptural Truths that Let Us Know Servant –Giving Is Worth It:

1. **It is worth it, after all, because God loves it (2 Cor. 9:7)** – Listen to Paul in 2 Cor. 9:7, “⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” God loves it when we give. Giving is one of His most dominate characteristics, and He loves it when we are a chip off the old block, so to speak. We are truly reflecting Him when we give. So we ought to do so, generously, regularly, with great delight, and with great joy. God get much delight from our giving, it make us look the most like Him!
2. **It is worth it, after all, because God blesses it (2 Cor. 9:8)** – Okay listen to Paul again in 2 Cor. 9:8, “⁸And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” When you give, God bless you. And Paul says He does so “abundantly, so that in all thing, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in very good work.” Wow! As Proverbs 22:9 says it, “The generous will themselves be blessed...”

God not only “loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), but He says that “he who is generous will be blessed” (Prov. 22:9a). What God says is true. What we need to do is believe it and act on it and watch God accomplish the rest. To be sure, giving is costly, but in the end the rewards will far outweigh the price we paid.