

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 26, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP “Strengthening Your Grip on Servanthood” *Selected Scriptures*

Today the word “servant” often conjures up images of a person who is ignorant and can’t do anything else, or maybe mistreated by those who are ordering them around, or perhaps crushed in spirit by constantly having to do work that is beneath them, or maybe even someone lacking in self-esteem because they have been looked down on and ordered around by others their whole lives... perhaps someone who performs menial tasks, or does the common day labor jobs no one else wants to do. With this sort of picture, it comes as no surprise when people scoff at the idea of being a “servant.” Who wants that kind of life anyway? A life of menial labor with no acknowledgment, just expected servitude. But God’s Word does not convey this attitude because it gives us a much different understanding of servanthood – one that is compatible with true Christian living and even serves to revolutionize what a genuine believer is and does. Moreover, God exhorts all those who have been born into His forever family to become true, biblical servants. So if we are going to obey the Lord’s command, then we need to know what a servant is and how we can become one. In essence, that is the focus of this study. So let’s get prepared to do some real digging... to strengthen our grip of becoming and exhibiting a true servant’s heart. The process of becoming a servant is hard work, and it demands our commitment and involvement.

I. A GROUNDING PERSPECTIVE ON SERVANTHOOD

A. What God desires of the life of a Christian?

Couched in the grand declaration of assurance in **Romans 8:28-29** is a brief, yet foundational statement about what God desires to do in the lives of His people.

Look at these verses carefully even though they are familiar;

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, and have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

In regard to being a Christian, God is committed to one major objective in the life of a Christian: to conform them to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

B. What it look like for the life of a Christian to “conform” to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ?

Well, what is the “image of His Son”? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in **Philippians 2:5-8**;

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross...” (vv.5-8)

Christ, Himself, explained it very simply when He declared His primary reason for taking on a sinless human nature;

“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.” (Mt. 20:28)

Characteristics of the Christian Life:

1. **servicing others**
2. **giving of yourself**

Jesus’ life on earth was characterized by serving and giving. Indeed, these qualities are inseparable; they are the very essence of servanthood. And it is a servant’s heart that the Heavenly Father wants to develop in the lives of His people... nothing less.

II. A CHRIST-LIKE TEACHING ON SERVANTHOOD

“³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ ³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’ –Mark 9:33-37

Capernaum (v.33) – Capernaum was a prosperous fishing village on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee, and was a more important city than Nazareth; it contained a Roman garrison and was located on a major road. Jesus made the city his headquarters after his rejection at Nazareth.

the house (v.33) – The use of the definite article “the” suggests this to be the house Jesus habitually stayed in when in Capernaum. Whether it was Peter’s house or someone else’s is not known, but most suspect he was in Peter’s house.

they kept quiet v.34) – Convicted and embarrassed, the disciples were speechless. They didn’t want to tell Jesus, who already knew of their conversation, of their petty through revealing

conversation. Aren't we just like that? What a difference it would make if we realized that Jesus "always" hears our conversations?

who was the greatest (v.34) – A dispute possible triggered by the privilege granted Peter, James and John to witness the Transfiguration. The disciples' quarrel highlighted their failure to "get a grip" on applying Jesus' explicit teaching on being a true servant, genuine humility, and the example of his own suffering and death which he has just told them about in verses 30-32. He was literally going to give Himself for others... even them. It also prompted them to ask Jesus to settle the issue, which He did – though not as they expected.

sitting down (v.35) – Rabbi usually sat down to teach. We have many example of Jesus doing precisely this to exhibit to the Jewish mindset that He was teacher (Rabbi), to show His authority to teach the truth (i.e. Mt. 15:29, Lk. 4:20 and 5:3, Jn. 8:2).

if anyone wants to be first (v.35) – As the disciples undeniably did (v.34). If you doubt their desire notice **Mark 10:35-37**, "³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'³⁶ 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. ³⁷ They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'" What were they asking? They wanted to be the "greatest" or most important one, to be the honored one in the Kingdom of God.

must be the very last, and the servant of all (v.35) – The disciples' concept of greatness and leadership, drawn from their culture, needed to be completely reversed. Not those who lord their position over others are great in God's Kingdom, but those who humble serve others. This was completely consistent, not only with Jesus' teaching, but the way He lived His earthly life and conducted His ministry all along the way (i.e. Mk. 10:31, Mk. 10:43-45, Mt. 19:30, Mt.20:16, Mt. 23:11-12, Lk. 13:30, Lk. 14:8-11, Lk. 22:24-27)

little child (v.36) – The Greek word indicates an infant or toddler. If the house they were in, as suspected, was Peter's then this may have been one of Peter's children. The child became in Jesus' masterful teaching an example of believers who have humbled themselves and become like trusting children... a trait most important for a genuine follower of Christ and true servanthood.

whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name (v.37) – Not actual children, but true believers – those who have humbled themselves like little children.

Jesus not only exemplified, to perfection, the marks of a servant in His personal life, but his teaching in stories like these conveyed the truth in numerous ways, all of which can be classed under the following three categories that emerge from this story:

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.'³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among

them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ *‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’* –Mark 9:33-37

THE CONTRASTING DANGERS: Contrast of the World View vs Christ-like View of Greatness - The world has an opposite view of what Jesus taught. We sometimes get this view/perspective mixed up with our Christian faith.

1. **The importance of “position”** – The world says, “Be on top!” “Be number one!” “Be the most important.” And do anything you have to, to get yourself there... scratch, claw, scrap your way to the top, take others down, put others down. The disciples in our story had been arguing about their position... “Who is the greatest!”
2. **The importance of “priority”** – The world says, “I am the top priority!” In order to get to that “top position” you must exalt yourself. The priority, by the world view, must be “me,” “I.” You must exalt yourself to a place of importance. Others are second to you. The world says, “Look out for #1,” “My wants, needs, wishes are more important than anyone else’s.”
3. **The importance of “practice”** – The world practice of greatness involved the practice of getting ahead, success by the world’s standards, material wealth, power, prestige.

Now I want you to think about these things? Do these things ever find their way into the church? How? What effect do they have on the church, the body of Christ? Are they having an effect on the church today? How?

Often our service in the church is not rooted in honesty: (check yourself out)

- **Ulterior motives** – Our motives behind our service may be impure, to draw attention to ourselves, to get our name in the lime light, or get a pat on the back. Sometimes we must really do some soul searching to get to the bottom of this. We can even deceive ourselves at this point. What really motivates you to do what you do?
- **Hypocrisy** – We are serving more out of a sense of duty than from a servant’s heart, and we may serve but we don’t really want to and we serve grudgingly or with a sour attitude.
- **Duplicity** – We are serving because we have been caught in double talk.
- **Political games (agendas)** – We are serving to forward our own agenda or cause, to garner respect in order to have the authority to push our own ideas and plans. Some may view their service as a “power grab.”

**These things do no mark a genuine servant’s heart.*

3 Important Categories in Genuine Christ-like Servanthood:

1. **The importance of “position” in genuine Christ-like servanthood** – *According to our passage what is the importance of “position” in relation to this discussion on genuine Christ-like servanthood?* Second, better yet “last” as Jesus says
2. **The importance of “priority” in genuine Christ-like servanthood** – *What is the “priority” here in Jesus teaching to His disciples on genuine servanthood?* Servant of “all,” He said... not servant of some, the one’s I choose, when I choose. That is not the idea. The idea is that a genuine servant’s heart “serves”... constantly serves... where can I serve... how can I serve... who can I serve... show me where to serve... Serves with his or her whole life. Remember again Jesus’ (the one we are to conform to) words in **Matthew 20:28, “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.”

3. The importance of “practice” in genuine Christ-like servanthood - *What does the practice of genuine servanthood look like according to this passage? What example did Jesus give them and what was he showing them? Think about this how does the child in Jesus’ encounter with his disciples illustrate genuine servanthood? What does a child have to do with servanthood?* The practice of genuine servanthood is genuine humility and transparent honest and unquestioning trust of a child. Let’s look at these traits for a moment:

3 Ways a Child Illustrates Genuine Christ-like Servanthood:

1. **Genuine Humility** – *How does a child exhibit genuine humility? What is so “humble” about a child (infant, toddler)?* They are small and dependent on others for their needs. Infants and toddlers do not exalt themselves over others. They can’t! They are too little and they know it! They depend on others, they look to others. They are helpless in the face of others. They submit or are made to submit to others. There is an innocence there. Let’s face it infants and toddlers are at the mercy of those in care of them... there is an innocence there. That is why we get so mad when we see children abused or mistreated. Simple humility from a child... they love unconditionally.

Remember our passage from **Philippians 2:5-8**, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross...”* Remember, Jesus first came as a child!

3 Tests of Genuine Humility:

1. **Do you exalt yourself over others or consider yourself better than others?**
 2. **Do you exhibit a non-defensive spirit when confronted? This test involved a willingness to be accountable.**
 3. **Do you express an authentic unconditional love for others? This test involves a sensitive awareness of the needs and struggles of others.**
- *These features characterize a genuine servant’s heart.*
2. **Transparent Honesty** – *How does a child exhibit transparent honesty? What is so “honest” about a child (infant, toddler)?* Because of the nature of a child, they don’t know how to be anything else but transparent and honest. If they have a weakness or a need they are not afraid to express it and be honest about it. Infants and toddlers only cry because they are being honest. They don’t wear masks! They don’t hide behind who they really are! They don’t try to be something they aren’t. At the infancy state of our lives we are just trying to survive, so we are honest about our need to survive, and we are transparent about it. *Now what does transparent honesty, like we find in a child have to do with Christ-like servanthood?* Well, it means being honest about yourself. You are not better than anyone else. No need to exalt yourself, or feel that you are above another. It goes right along with genuine humility, being honest about who you are... just a sinner saved by grace, in need of a Savior. Therefore you are able to serve others who are needy

just like you. Let's go back to Philippians 2 for a minute and back up to the first few verses of that passage in **Philippians 2:1-4**. Just listen to what Paul says here, ¹ *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,* ² *then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* ³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* That is what leads up to Paul telling us to be like Jesus in **verse 5**, ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...* In other words, just be honest about who you are before Christ and all that He has done for you in your great need, and honestly serve others, putting them ahead of yourself as Jesus did!

3. **Unquestioning Trust - How does a child exhibit unquestioning trust? What is so "trusting" about a child (infant, toddler)? And how is this like genuine Christ-like servanthood?** Well a child has an innocent trust, an unquestioning trust (Ex. My story about Sarah leaping for me to catch her). A child just depends and trust... lives by faith if you will. A genuine servant heart doesn't see the need to exalt itself over anyone, or push ahead of others, they don't have to put themselves first, or be concerned about their needs getting met. They just trust that God will take care of them, therefore they are free to take care of others. To serve! Unquestioning trust! Let's go back to **Philippians 2** again and look beginning in **verse 12**, ¹² *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³ *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.* ¹⁴ *Do everything without complaining or arguing,* ¹⁵ *so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe* ¹⁶ *as you hold out^{al} the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.* ¹⁷ *But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.* ¹⁸ *So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.* You know what he is saying, "Just trust Him as you continue to serve with a Christ-like servants heart... "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure." (v.13) Paul says that is what I am going to do. Notice **verse 17**, *But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.* "I have this unquestioning trust in Him who called me!" He is faithful!

III. TRAITS OF A GENUINE SERVANT'S LIFE

Traits of a True Servant's Heart:

1. **A true servant puts others and their needs ahead of his own - **Matthew 19:30**,** ³⁰ *But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.* **Matthew 20:16**, ¹⁶ *"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."* **Mark 10:31**, ³¹ *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.* **Luke 13:30**, ³⁰ *Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.*
2. **A true servant exhibits genuine humility - **Matthew 23:11-12**,** ¹¹ *The greatest among you will be your servant.* ¹² *For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and*

whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” **Luke 14:8-11**, ⁸ *When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.* ⁹ *If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.* ¹⁰ *But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.* ¹¹ *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

- 3. A true servant sacrificially gives of himself - Mark 10:43-45**, ⁴³ *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.* ⁴⁵ *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.”* **Luke 22:24-27**, *“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.* ²⁵ *Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.* ²⁶ *But 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.* ²⁷ *For 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.”*