

Service: A Key To Spiritual Success

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When we were first called into the church and made some basic commitments to God's way of life, most of us were excited. Events in the world seemed to be unfolding rapidly. A whole new perspective on life and the afterlife opened before us. We seemed to learn new things every day, though they were new only to us in our spiritual infancy.

Unfortunately, as time wore on, most of us settled into a groove, a routine, a rut, using our new knowledge as a security blanket. We reached a comfort zone and slowly eased off our almost-frantic search for biblical truth about our character growth and development. Enthusiasm soon faded into apathy. Some of us became discouraged as a result of the trials that, we thought, were devastating our lives. Some even fell away, leaving the faith they had once wholeheartedly embraced.

When we find this spiritual monster beginning to take over our lives, we must go back to those commitments we made in the beginning. We have to remind ourselves that God has revealed some basic principles to which we must adhere to enjoy a relationship with Him and His Son. If we keep them, we will have the strength to throw the monster off, but if we neglect them, the monster can destroy us.

We hear and read frequently about prayer, Bible study, fasting and meditation. However, it seems the subject of service - servanthood - arises less often. Yet servanthood is one of the keys to success, not only in our spiritual lives but also in our other activities, responsibilities and relationships. It is a major part of our Christian walk. As Paul says in Galatians 5:13:

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.

A Proper Perspective

The first thing we have to realize about serving is that it is not something we do for God, but something God does through us. He gives us opportunities to serve each other to facilitate our spiritual maturity and eventual salvation. Service to others is part of "work[ing] out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

Even our Savior Jesus Christ credited the Father for the manner and success of His service during His earthly ministry:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. (John 14:10)

With Christ's perfect example as our standard, we can be confident that if God opens a door for us to serve another, we will be successful in fulfilling God's will in this.

We do not need to be concerned about lacking the skills to do the job. The Father does not need to search out an extremely talented individual to carry out the service He has in mind. We will not have to draw on our inadequate abilities because God will supply our lack by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26 tells us, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses."

What is our part in serving? We must have an attitude to be available to help and be focused enough to recognize the call to serve when it comes. Many of us have a tendency to draw back, thinking that we could not do the particular job, or perhaps remembering that we "failed" to do it the last time we tried. This is what happens when we depend on ourselves rather than trust God to use us as His vessel (see II Timothy 2:21).

This does not mean that we will accomplish every task to perfection. But as we practice serving, we will grow more accustomed to God working through us, gain confidence and learn how to move our human nature out of God's way. Knowing that it is God who does the work, we can humbly direct the praise and credit to God.

With all this in mind, we have to realize that we cannot dictate to Him in which areas we will serve. Each year at the Feast of Tabernacles in Pasadena, my wife and I offered to serve wherever there was need. One year I was assigned restroom duty, washing and polishing all the toilets, sinks and fixtures. My wife's job was cleaning bird droppings off the benches scattered over the campus.

These were definitely not "glory jobs," but in just a few days, I was amazed at how pleased I was in knowing that those exquisite gold, porcelain and marble fixtures gleamed after I was finished with them. I was elated that I helped make those restrooms show the quality Herbert Armstrong taught should reflect the Kingdom of God.

There is not a single thing that God calls us to do that we cannot do well. It may not match our expectations, but if we have done it to the best of our abilities, we will not displease our Creator.

Serving God

A second major principle we must keep in mind is that no matter who is the object of our service - and no matter how that person reacts to it - it is really God that we serve. When we look for someone else's approval, we can know we are doing it for the wrong reasons and the wrong person, usually ourselves. If we get our feelings too involved, we can be sure our attitude is not right. We can expect an emotional roller coaster ride as long as our service lasts.

We must serve God through commitment, not according to our emotions or need for approval. We should serve as we tithe. When we get paid, we do not stop to decide whether or not we will tithe, or how much or little we will send. We made the decision to follow God's way long ago, so we write the check, lick the stamp and send it on its way. Service should have this same level of commitment. As a part of a Christian's growth - part of God's way of fashioning us into His Son's image - we should serve whenever the opportunity arises.

Paul speaks specifically to bondservants in Ephesians 6:5-8, and his instruction applies to us spiritually as servants of God:

Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as

servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will 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.