

## Christian Service

### Why and How To Serve

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I do not know if you have ever noticed, but service is not an American virtue. I do not know if you have ever thought about it that way, but Americans tend to take pride in a virtue (I guess you would call it a virtue) that is more selfish. We call it self-reliance. It is not wanting to serve other people, but it is actually pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. Everything that you do is, therefore, done in your own self-interest.

So, we prefer, rather than service toward others, self-service. Frankly, it is a self-serving self-interest! That is basically just human nature coming to the fore.

As a people, as a group, as Americans, we do not have a history of service. Except maybe military service. And even there, our history is somewhat checkered in terms of our military service being selfless and righteous. Most of the time it has been for selfish reasons like self-promotion.

There have been the noble and the honorable in our military, but for the most part, it has not been for the good of the country, but rather for the good of the personal career and finances.

In the main, (probably my own cynical way of thinking) Americans tend to look down on any kind of service as beneath them. We would rather be served. We would rather "hit the big-time" so that others can serve us. That is just plain human nature.

Now I am not saying that the British do not have human nature, or that somehow they are a cut above, but the British, in fact, have a long history of voluntary, faithful service.

I do not know if you know it, but it was a common belief (at least until the Victorian era) that the English were on this earth to serve it. They felt that all the English people were servants of the rest of the world, and it was one of those ideas that catapulted them into their empire. They felt that it was the British Empire's responsibility to educate the world, and to rule the world, because God had made them servants of the world.

There is even a serving class in England made up of people who have decided to make a life out of tending to the needs of (in this case) the aristocracy. At one time in about 1841 there was a survey done. It was found out that this serving class of people in England made up about 18 percent of the English labor force. 18 percent of the English people were employed in houses great and small as servants.

Through the Victorian era up until about World War II, or maybe a little past that, the serving class was still a significant part of British life and culture. There are vestiges of it still today.

I would like to read a few excerpts from a summary of the literature on the British serving class that I found on the Internet. It is kind of funny how it is titled. It mixes this idea of their service with religion. This is a quote from a prayer that was common among the serving class, maybe, but the title is, "O Lord, Keep Us in Our Places." I will just pick up a quotes from this:

In the Victorian period, to be a servant for a wealthy family was a perfectly respectable job. Servants came from the same class as farmers. There were many farmers who would send their sons or daughters to a large house so that they would always be able to live in comfortable surroundings, with completely reliable pay.

Poor families during the nineteenth century hoped that their children would be able to receive some education and to have the opportunity to travel if employed at a great house.

One began being a servant at a very young age. Victorian charity schools aimed to prepare girls to enter service at about 12 years of age; many young boys and girls became 'pot-boys' or 'kitchen helpers' as young as six or seven.

Most likely, a servant's parents had been servants themselves in the same way that a shop-keeper's son might become a shop-keeper.

This, unlike most jobs of the time, was one that offered advancement. A young footman could conceivably grow up to become the butler. And a young housemaid could dream one day of becoming housekeeper.

The life that a servant led during the Victorian period was a very difficult one filled with endless toil from 5 a.m. until bedtime. Despite this, it tended to be easier in a larger house where there were plenty of servants to do all that needed to be done.

Pay was nothing short of meager, for all but the highest level servants. But, the job came with room and board, and many living expenses. A servant could expect practically no time off. By the end of the century, it became common to give a servant a few hours off every week, but that was not even true of every household.

Servants were expected to do their employers every whim. Sometimes this meant things as ludicrous as sewing the newspaper together in order to keep it neat.

Or, as I have heard in some places, ironing it to make sure it was "readable," and did not have any creases in it.

More often than not, however, it was the boring tedium of always being 'on call' in case the mistress wanted a cup of tea at any hour of the day or night. Servants worked horrible hours. Virtually all awoke at 5 a.m., and stayed awake until their masters had gone to bed.

Ironically, many of these same masters were among those who were horrified at the notion of women and children working fourteen hours a day in a factory, completely failing to notice that the women and children in their own households worked as many as eighteen, or twenty hours a day."

Mrs. Beeton, (I am not exactly sure who she was, but maybe a head housekeeper) published her eleven hundred and twelve page tome, 'Book of Household Management,' in 1861. In it, she outlines a complete hierarchy of the servants from butler to wet-nurse. The most general division of this hierarchy was between the 'Upper Ten' and the 'Lower

Five.' The numbers in question bear no particular significance to the actual number of staff at the house.

The Upper Ten included the Steward, the Housekeeper, the Head Housemaid, the Butler, the Wind-butler, the Under-butler, the Groom-of-chambers, the Valet, the Lady's Maid, and anyone else who the master and mistress had constant contact with. The Lower Five consisted of everyone else.

They would dine separately, socialize separately, and wear entirely different clothing; the Upper Ten generally allowed to follow fashion. It is possible that servants took their hierarchy more seriously than their masters upstairs did.

That is all I included in the quote. There was more to it talking about the division between the men-servants and maid-servants; and all the little intricate details of their life. But, they had made serving their life. It became not only a career but a skill; something that they did with great thought. They applied themselves to produce the best service, and to be the best servant that they could be.

If you are interested in seeing a movie or two on the subject there is, "The Remains of the Day," with Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson from several years ago, in which he was the Butler, and she was the chief Housekeeper. That movie goes into a lot of this social hierarchy and whatnot and all the things the servants do to keep up the house.

There is also a more recent movie called, "Gosford Park." It is actually a murder-mystery told from the standpoint of the servants. You do not see any of the upper-class or aristocracy unless one of the servants is in the room as well. So, it is all seen through their eyes. It is an education because we do not think in terms of service like they did. Certainly Americans do not.

These two films, by the way, are entirely British, so do not expect Arnold Schwarzenegger the action figure to be in there. Or for that matter, for there to be a happy ending to the story. The British seem to not like happy endings for some reason. I do not know the reason. They are just different. I guess two brothers could not be more different than Ephraim and Manasseh!

But, as we know, Christians have been called to service no matter where we are from. Whether we are American, British, Canadian, French, Australian, South African, Filipino, or Trinidadians. It does not matter who you are, if you are a Christian, you have been called to serve.

We have been called to serve both God and our fellow men.

The more difficult concept, other than the fact that we have been called to do this, is how Christians should serve. And, what services they should perform. That is the meat of the sermon today. We are going to try to go into that, how Christians should serve, and what services they should perform.

Now the word "serve" in all of its various forms—serve, served, serves, serving, servant, etc. (comes up 1445 times in the New King James). If you do a search on a computer program, you can put in only S-E-R-V plus an asterisk there, and a lot of the search programs will bring you up anything that returns beginning with those four letters. And so, I did this on my Bible program for the New King James, and it came up with 1445 hits. That is how many times a form of "serve" comes up in the Bible.

The New Testament contains only 230 of these. Far fewer than the Old Testament, which if you do the math, that is over 1200 times. Most of those, however, are talking about the servants of this or that person. So, the actual meat of service, though, is in the New Testament.

Now even doing a search like this does not catch all references or derivations of the word service, because that does not include other words that convey the same sense like, "minister, help, aid, do good, do alms, protect, defend, comfort, and worship," and others which I have not mentioned. All of them have connotations of service. So, we can see just from this that service is an extremely important concept in the Bible.

Let us begin in Galatians 5. This is the run-up to the works of the flesh, and the Fruit of the Spirit. This ought to give you some idea of the general context. Paul is explaining Christian liberty. In doing so, he gives what may be the Bible's clearest, most distinct, or succinct passage on service. Only two little verses, but it is helpful to understand:

**Galatians 5:13-14** 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. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

It is very succinct. Through love, serve one another. And this, he says, fulfills the law of love. Without question it links serving one another to the second great commandment.

We need to understand Paul's argument here. It is fundamental to our offering service for the right reason. We need to understand why this is part of our Christian liberty, and why it is so important that we do it. What Paul says here lays the foundation for why Christian service is so remarkable and different from any other kind of service. Why Christian service is not like the British serving class service; why Christian service is so different from service at your local restaurant, or military service, or any other kind of service.

This gives the unique layman's foundation for Christian service.

We have to remember that the Galatians themselves had returned to the belief (remember at the beginning of the book he says, "Why have you turned so soon from the gospel?") that one is justified by works. They had begun to do certain things. They had gone back to practicing some of the rituals of the law of Moses. Paul summarizes a great many of these under the word "circumcision." He really tees off on them, telling them basically how stupid they were to try and do this. What they were doing was that they were entangling themselves once again in a *failed* system. A system that was not going to work, because something better had replaced it.

Certainly, God gave those laws, but He had done it for a different reason than to save them. He had done it for the simple reasons of bringing them in a certain way to the point where they could choose what Christ offered to them.

But, the rituals and the ceremonies, and everything else that they were doing would not save them. It would not justify them. It would not make them right with God. But, these people had gone back to it because they felt that this outward show of following these instructions of God to the Jews and Israelites in the Old Testament made them appear righteous.

So, in a way we could say that their following of the law of Moses was entirely self-serving! They were trying to save themselves. Now, Paul argues that Christianity frees us—liberates us from these works, these particular works under the law of Moses—because they only satisfy the flesh. They did not really have a much higher purpose than to serve the fleshly needs of carnal people.

There are spiritual applications of some of these that are indeed spiritual. But to the point that they were using them, it was only for satisfying themselves—their human nature. It was not going to go any further to bring them any kind of justification, and certainly not salvation.

And so Paul is castigating them that they were doing something that was entirely vain. They were putting themselves again in bondage to something that did not work; it was worthless to them. But (and there is always a "but,") he tells us here (he argues) that Christian liberty obligates us to perform works.

This is something that many of the Protestants and their commentators fail to see, as well as the great mass of Evangelicals. They seem to believe the easy line that no works are needed.

But, we can see here that Christian liberty obligates us to perform works. Not for our own justification, but in outgoing concern for others. In other words, the works of the law are satisfying only to the self. But, love—true loving service—satisfies the giver, the served, the law of God, and God Himself.

When we employ Christian service properly, it covers every base: The self, those whom you serve, it fulfills the law of God, and therefore, it pleases God, and acts as, or becomes a type of worship of Him. That makes Him happy. That satisfies Him.

This is seen in the word "fulfilled" in verse 14—"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this"—probably the closest term we could use is "summarize." But, that is just technically correct. The law is summarized in this. But, the connotation, the implication, of the word here is accomplished; that the law is accomplished in this, that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Or we could even say that this means, "For the law is done properly in one word."

You do right, let us say, you do the law correctly if you love your neighbor as yourself. And that is what Jesus Christ came to do. He came to magnify the law, and make it honorable. He came, He said, to *fulfill* it. That is what He did. He showed us how to live God's law properly, to the full. He accomplished the law in His own life.

Now, that does not mean that it was done away, because you cannot do away with God's law. It is the way that He is. It is a codified set of rules that show His very character and how He acts.

You cannot do away with something eternal like that. You cannot do away with God's character. What we have to do is learn how to fulfill it, to live it properly, to accomplish it, to make it work in our lives. That is what Paul is telling us here.

And so he says that Christian service, therefore, becomes an outlet for God's love.

If you think about it, love does little good unless it is expressed. Have you every tried to hold in your love for somebody? I do not know why one would, but having love for somebody, and not being able to express it, is frustrating. Love will win out. Love wants to express itself. It wants to do things. It wants to make itself known. God's love is the same way in us. It does not want to be bottled up. God wants His Spirit, which is love shed abroad in our hearts, to go out through us into good works.

Remember what Jesus said there in John 7—that living waters will flow from our bellies. God's Spirit, which is God's love, flows through us and from us. It is not a force, an attitude, or a character trait that likes to be bottled up. Our service is the way that we express it—the way we let this characteristic of God, the essential character of God, out and express itself.

Now back in verse 6 of Galatians 5, I want to pick up the last phrase:

**Galatians 5:6** . . . but faith working through love.

Paul adds faith to this. It is not just love expressing itself, but faith expressing itself also. Our service is faith working through love. Therefore, service or good works is the outward expression of both faith and love.

We can only do Christian acts of service if we have faith that they are going to work, and that they are something that God wants us to do, and that they are a part of the Christian walk. Otherwise, they are not Christian works. They are not Christian service. They are just merely doing good outside of the bounds of Christianity. It is just a natural expression of good.

But, true Christian works, true Christian service springs from both the faith and the love of God. It cannot be truly done apart from them. This totally destroys the Protestant teaching that Christianity is not a religion of works.

They can try to be Christians without expressing Christianity. But, it will never produce anything that is close to true Christianity. There are always two parts in the Christian life: There is the internal, and the external. If our Christianity is totally internal, then it in itself has become selfish. Christianity always, because the character of God is this way, expresses itself in works of service in love and faith toward others. That is just the way that it is.

The New Testament uses several words for serve. But, only two of them are critical to us today.

I am actually going to give you three because I think that you need to know it, but only the two are the ones that we are going to talk about to any degree.

The first is "diakonia." This is the word we get our word "deacon" from. It comes from a Greek root meaning "to run errands." So a deacon, at its root, is a person who does errands for the church. Its basic meaning, then, is to meet the needs of others, because the person who runs errands is employed in meeting the needs of the person, or persons who sent him. We might call this "physical service," "to aid," "to attend to," "to minister," "to wait on," and of course, "to serve."

Now, if you will remember what happened in Acts 6 (verses 1 through 4), where the apostles said, "We don't have time to serve tables. We need to set apart people to do this work for us, while we minister to the Word." Those two terms, "serve tables" and "minister" are "diakonia."

So, they, the apostles, equate diakonia to serving tables, and that they need to serve God's Word. That is where their service lay. Not in the physical putting up of tables and chairs, or getting the meeting room ready, or making arrangements, but that is in most cases a deacon's role. Whereas, the apostles were the ones that had to keep their minds and noses stuck in God's Word.

The second word, "douleuo," is the verb form of the familiar word, "doulos," which means slave. Its basic underlying sense is "to subject one's will to another." That is what a slave does. He has to subject his will to his master's will. A slave has no will of his own.

It is rendered in the Bible as "to serve," "to be in bondage," or "to do service." However, as the apostles used it, service is directed primarily toward God. That is, Christians are servants or slaves in relation to God, and because He has redeemed us, it is our responsibility and our obligation to render Him service. That is how they use this word, douleuo.

Remember, we are told that we were *bought* for a price. And because we were bought—the payment was so great—we are bound now to do whatever God wants us to do. He owns us lock, stock, and barrel. We, then, must subject our will to His.

That being said—that our service is primarily toward God—it often exhibits itself in good works toward fellow man. This is the same word that we encountered there in Galatians 5:13, "through love serve one another." The underlying idea is that we are always serving God. But, here in Galatians 5:13, Paul tells us that our service toward God comes out primarily in service toward one another, and that pleases God.

The third word that I told you that I would give to you is "latreuo." It is not real important to this sermon, but essentially it means, "to worship." In its most basic sense, worship is our service toward God.

Now, this Greek word is often used to describe doing a particular ritual duty in worship. For instance, in the Old Testament, in the Septuagint, it would be used, of the priest's ministering at the Temple. They were doing their particular ritual duties in the worship of God. It is also used in terms of the singers that David organized to do their service to God in worship.

It would be used in the New Testament in terms of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father. It was used in terms of him giving service at the Temple. Latreuo means basically to worship, to render religious service.

In this case, we are not going to be using it very much. But I thought you might like to know this.

Let us go to Colossians 3. We are going to go through a series of, basically, four passages without much comment and then I will comment at the end of them.

**Colossians 3:22-24** Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. 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.

**I Thessalonians 1:9** For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

**Hebrews 9:13-14** For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

**Hebrews 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

Did you notice the theme of these four passages?

I chose them to reinforce the assertion that Christian service is directed primarily toward God. We have been called to serve Christ, or we have been called to serve God. In these verses, if we would go through them a little bit more specifically it shows us how. In this particular one in Hebrews 12:28, we serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. We can see that more in Colossians 3 as well.

This shows that our Christian service is primarily toward God. It is our first priority. Everything we do has to be directed first to please God. God is our Master. And as our Master, He has first claim on our time and energy. Everything else comes second. Our own desires, the desires of our family, the desires of friends, the desires of our employers; you name it, if it crosses somehow what God wants us to do, we must give first priority to God. And by doing so, we worship Him, and serve Him because He is our first priority.

Just as an aside, the words that are "served" in these verses, Colossians 3:24 and I Thessalonians 1:9, are "douleuo," and the ones in Hebrews are "latreuo." I mention this because I want you to see that they are different words, but they bring out the same concept. Both words, douleuo and latreuo, mean to serve. And, both can be applied to God.

Whether we are doing it as subjecting our will to God, or if we are doing it to render religious service, it is the same thing. In my case, in preaching this sermon, I am performing latreuo. And if I help a widow, I move her from one house to another, I am performing douleuo. I am subjecting my will to the widow, and doing her bidding, helping her, and serving her, therefore putting myself under her. By this same process, I worship God. They are the same concept, just different words, and slightly different aspects and approach. But they are the same in effect.

So in this sense, service and worship are virtually synonymous.

Now, doing this, whether it is douleuo or latreuo, is giving ourselves as a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service, which Paul mentions in Romans 12:1. You may want to go on over there, because we are going to be turning there next.

Our service, then, is giving up our lives in subjection to God's will. We are no longer living to accomplish our own desires, but to fulfill God's purpose in us, in the church, and ultimately in humanity. It may start small, our worship of God, but it expands out to include everything we touch, including our simple humanity, that we are a part of this whole.

The things we do to serve God will eventually work to bring about God's purpose for all mankind. That is how God works. God usually starts small with a few individuals, it goes on from there, and it grows. Eventually, what He is doing in the few of us will touch all of mankind. We have to think of it in this way so we understand just how far-reaching our service is, and can be.

We know what Romans 12:1-2 says. We have gone over those time and time again. But, let us read verses 3 through 8 because this is the very next thing that Paul gets into. He lays down the ideal here in verses 1 and 2. And then he begins to get more specific in verses 3 through 8.

**Romans 12:3-8** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 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. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

This is Paul's practical application of what he said in verses 1 and 2, particularly presenting our bodies a living sacrifice.

First he begins in verse 3 with the proper attitude of our service. He calls this, "not thinking of oneself more highly than he ought to think," but thinking soberly. So, it is humility with sobriety as the starting point. This word, sobriety, could also mean seriousness, even saneness, or objectivity; what it means as he goes on to explain here is that we have to realize that each member of the church has a different level of faith.

This is why we have to approach our service with humility and sobriety.

We have to be willing to admit that there are people with greater faith than we have. This is where the humility comes in where we are not thinking of ourselves more highly as we ought to. We approach service with the idea that these people whom we are going to serve probably have more faith than we do. And, you are willing to give them that benefit of the doubt.

But also with the realization—and this is where the sobriety comes in (the objectivity)—that there are people that have less faith than we do.

So, the basic approach to this is that we humbly consider everyone else better than ourselves. But, we know, because we are sane, we are serious, because we are functioning within reality, that there are people with less faith.

And so, we are very realistic about how we choose to do our service.

If we recognize, then, who is strong, and who is weak in the faith, being realistic about these things, we can then better evaluate who and how to serve.

Most of our congregations are fairly small. And so this task is not as hard as it could have been if the congregations were three or four hundred people in one place, as it used to be. We can then go through the people in our local churches, individually, not comparing ourselves with them, but looking at them realistically, and seeing where they could use some help; but always remembering that they probably have more faith than we do.

This gives us the proper approach to rendering help and service to them.

The next thing that he tells us is to evaluate our own gifts and strengths. That is what he says as he goes on here (verses 6-8 especially). He says that if you evaluate yourself, and you have a talent for speaking, preaching (prophesying here), then, go ahead and use it, but for the service of the church. Be sober, or realistic, or objective about our own skills, talents, and gifts.

If you are not a good speaker, maybe the best thing you could do is to find out if you are good at something else, and volunteer to serve in that manner. Therefore, the church is served, and the people are served better.

If we seem to have knack for being "Johnny on the spot," to help people through whatever it happens to be, well then, go ahead and use that talent. If it is teaching people outside the bounds of public speaking, then go ahead and do that. If people seem to light up when you come into a room, you are very encouraging and upbeat, then use that.

If you have no problem giving of your time, money, and energy, use that. If you are a good leader, use that. If you tend to be able to comfort people, you seem to have a very sympathetic, even empathetic way of appealing to people, and they are comforted in your presence, use that.

But, you have to be honest, you have to be sober, and you have to be humble about your own gifts so that you apply the gifts that God has given you. That is always in the back of your mind—you have no gift that God did not give—then you can apply it to the church in the best way possible to the people who really need it. Not only have you evaluated yourself, and seen where your strengths are, and seen the ways that you can serve, but you have also evaluated everybody else, and have seen their needs and how you can meet them.

So, I recommend doing something like this in your study time this week: Take out a piece of paper. Label the top, "Things I can do well," or "What are my strengths." You may want to start another with the label, "What are my weaknesses." Before we can help others we first have to get a handle on our own skills and gifts. Just write them down. What are the things that makes you unique, that you seem to be strong in?

I could do this myself. I have not given this much thought, and am doing this off the top of my head. But, since I was a small boy, all my non-sport strengths have been verbal. I do not quite mean just speaking, but also writing. I have always excelled in reading, writing, and editing. That is all that I have really ever wanted to do. I was writing significant (to me) things since about fifth grade. And, I already knew at that point what I wanted to do.

So, my skills tend to be written communication.

I also have skills—I do not know whether they are innate, or whether they are learned—but I have done a great deal of public speaking. I guess it may be a knack, but I am not as good at public speaking as I am at writing. Maybe it is kind of strange, but I can stand here behind the lectern, and I can speak for an hour and fifteen minutes without a problem. But, if you and I talk one-on-one I would rather listen to you. I am not a real sociable person.

That is the way I look at myself. I do not mean to be offensive to anybody. But, I have a hard time thinking of things to say. I do not know if it is that I do not know the other person well enough, or I am just a very selfish person, and all my thoughts revolve around myself. The things I am interested in are not the things you are interested in. And so I end up not saying anything at all.

Now, that sounds funny to some of you, and it is not quite as bad as this. I have learned to "mutter" a few things in social situations. But, social banter and chit-chat is not my cup of tea. So I tend to talk on a surface level with people because I do not know what to say otherwise. I could talk about the Pirates, or the Steelers, or NASCAR all you want. But, otherwise, I am not a real sociable person.

I am not the person you send out on the front lines as the welcoming committee to your front door. The best I could do is, "Hi! How are you? Welcome!" And then I would be, OK. What do I say now? The weather is nice?

I am giving you some idea of how you have to evaluate and be cruel to yourself to understand your strengths and weaknesses, and where you will fit best.

Now, I have a wife who is great socially. And if she is next to me, I let her carry all those social duties, and let her talk. You know she will talk about vitamins, or something, and children, and all kinds of other things. She is not a social butterfly, do not get that impression, she just has any easy way with people.

And so, that is great. We work well together and I can throw in my two-cents worth, or a couple of tons, whichever it happens to be to liven up the conversation. But, when she is there, I basically follow her lead because I do not feel as comfortable speaking one-on-one with people as I do standing behind a lectern. It is a weird thing. Communication is my life, but I would rather do it to great masses of people than one-on-one. I would rather listen. I do not know if you have noticed that about my father, but he is the same way. The apple does not fall very far away from the tree.

I learned how to be in social situations from him, rather than my mother (who is a lot like Beth, which makes you wonder about why I married my wife).

These are the things that you have to be brutally honest about if you really want to serve the church and the people the way God wants you to serve. He wants you to take honest stock of what you have, what He has given, and then, think—really think—about how you can apply it to other people.

I can think about my weakness of not being a totally sociable person—I am working on that—but, I feel like I am a pretty good listener.

So, how do you turn that weakness into a strength?

Well, you could be a person that people are able to talk to, and you can learn, then, over time to give the correct responses in the right manner at the right time. Now, personally this is the way that I come across. It comes from the fact that I am not naturally a vivacious, social person that I have come to think that listening is more important than talking.

I could give a few scriptures that say, "Be slow to speak, slow to wrath," and that would be patting myself on the back that I have chosen the right way. However, you still need to think in those terms, "How can I turn a weakness into a way to serve?"

So, I am very willing to listen. I do not know if I am ever going to respond in the way that you want me to, but I am more likely to say, "Well, that's going to take some thought," or "Have you ever considered this scripture?" Since I work with it all the time, this is what comes to mind. But, by using myself as an example, maybe I can help you to see ways that you can evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses, and figure out ways that you can help others.

I have been fortunate enough—I think God has led me to be able to use my strengths in the service of the church. And I think He is just as well leading you to use your strengths in service to the church. Maybe all it will take is for you to sit down and really think about your strengths and weaknesses to be able to put them into right uses. So, I encourage you all to do that at some point.

If we do this, if we are using in humility the strengths that we have to help others, this accomplishes basically two things:

The first thing it does is to provide the highest quality service to the people, because every one of the members are working from their strengths. They have also begun to apply their strengths to the people who could really use their help.

The second thing is that it keeps us from stepping on each other's toes. Why is this so? Because, God has placed these things in the Body as it pleases Him.

I am sure for the most part that He has not put within each congregation fifteen of me, and none of the others. He has put one of me here, with my strengths, and then He has put one of you, with your strengths, and if we act and serve from our strengths, we are doing what God wants us to do in encouraging the whole Body.

If we wanted to, we could go to I Corinthians 12:4-11, and I Peter 4:10-11, and Peter and Paul show us that same thing: We are to use our strengths and gifts as God has placed us in the Body for service.

Let us go back to the Gospels, in the book of Matthew. We will be staying here in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As a matter of fact, the verses we are going to go to are in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—right in that order. I did not notice that until just now.

Here in Matthew 10, Christ encapsulates for us the basic principle of Christian service. This is the basic principle of Christian service:

**Matthew 10:24-25** "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."

This is the basic principle of Christian service. We are to serve just as Jesus did. He is the Master, we are the servants, and it is enough if we are just like Him. He set us the example in His life of relentless, consuming efforts on behalf of mankind as a whole, and as individuals.

Remember my father's series on the "Four Views of Christ"? You will know that Mark's Gospel tends to emphasize this particular character trait of Jesus Christ. Remember, he used the analogy of the ox in the patient, tireless, self-sacrificing service toward others. And so, Mark's Gospel tends to focus on Jesus the servant showing that Jesus virtually wore Himself out helping people who asked Him. He did it either by preaching, by teaching, through healing, casting out demons, counseling, and correcting. He would serve by going to people's homes and being there for them during dinner, like the time He was in Jericho when He invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house, and places like that. He was always finding ways to serve other people.

That was His whole life. It consumed Him. You could go to the scripture that says, "My Father works, and I am working." It means continually.

Let us go now to Mark 10. This is what you might call the great text on servant leadership that is in vogue so much in evangelical circles. I do not particularly like catchphrases like that. I think that they oversimplify things. But, servant leadership is fine.

This is after John and James decided to be at Christ's right hand in His Kingdom.

**Mark 10:42-45** But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

A leader in the Christian church must not lord it over the people, but be the foremost servant among them.

Now, unsaid here but lurking in the background is a warning that service is not to be done to achieve a position of leadership. That is the warning here. Service is not to be done with the ulterior motive of achieving a position of leadership.

But like Christ, the proper deep attitude of service is leadership. Christ, whether He was leader or not, served. It made Him the leader. It did not matter that He had been officially recognized as the leader. He simply led by serving. It was part of His character. And then, later on the position was given to Him, as it will be with us. The position will be given because we have shown by our fruits that we are certainly a leader by serving.

Service, and thus leadership, is selfless sacrifice as He said there in verse 45, putting the needs of others before your own.

Let us move forward to Luke 17. Here, Jesus gives the formula for true Christian service.

**Luke 17:7-10** "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he

not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "

Like I said, this is the formula for true Christian service, for which we have a phrase, "Going above and beyond the call of duty"—going beyond what is commanded of us. We could even go so far as to say, "It is going above and beyond just keeping the commandments." That is one of the things that the Pharisees lacked. They were scrupulous in keeping the commandments. But, they would not lift one finger to help anybody else.

They would rob widows, they would rob their own mother and father in order to be scrupulous about keeping the commandments. That is what the passage regarding "Corban" was all about, that they would dedicate their money to the Temple, rather than looking after their father and mother in their old age.

So, just keeping the commandments is not good enough. That is just doing what we have been told to do. Jesus says that if you want to be a true Christian servant, go beyond just merely keeping the commandments.

Notice that His teaching is an answer to the disciple's asking Jesus to increase their faith (verse 5). "Increase our faith," they said, and then He launches into this thing about the servants in verses 7-10.

We can take from this that we increase our faith when we begin applying the principles of God's way of life in outgoing acts of service to God and fellow man. That is, living by faith—acting in faith—going beyond the strict letter of the law to help other people.

You might say that true Christian service is going to the next level of Christian living. Not just hide-bound keeping the law, being afraid to venture out from the letter, but fulfilling it as mentioned earlier from Galatians 5:13 by doing acts of loving service.

In Luke 4, I want you to see how Jesus sums up what His service was to be. From this we can take a few principles to use in our own service. So, if we see Jesus set out to serve, then we can see how we can set out to serve as well.

**Luke 4:16-21** So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

I have six areas that He set out to serve in.

The first one is to preach the Gospel, "Because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

This is not just preaching the Gospel, but is teaching the whole counsel of God. Not just that Jesus will return and set up His Kingdom, but also what we would call feeding the flock. But, this particular phrase emphasizes public preaching, "Preach the Gospel to the poor."

So, first of all we should look for ways to use our gifts to help the church proclaim the Good News to humanity.

The second one is, "Heal the brokenhearted." This is a service of consoling, or giving hope and encouragement to another; giving people reasons to live. That is what the Good News does. It gives us hope. And so we can go beyond that by giving people good scriptural, true reasons why we should keep on keeping on.

The third one—He says, that He is going to preach deliverance to the captives. This is telling people how to free themselves from their bondage to sin, to addictions, to false concepts, to corruption of all kinds, and destructive habits and ways of living. This is teaching God's way of life; helping people to see how they can overcome the problems that they have in their lives so that they can begin living lives of liberty—true Christian liberty.

The fourth one is recovering the sight of the blind. This is very similar to number 2, healing the brokenhearted. But, the emphasis here is on actively helping others to learn the truth so that they can see what is really going on from God's perspective. Open their eyes to see what God is doing. Then, help them get with the program. In this way they will have their eyes opened, and their hearts will begin to be healed.

The fifth one is setting at liberty those who are oppressed. This point is similar to number 3, which was to preach deliverance to the captives. But again, the emphasis is on active help; actually physically helping people. Not just teaching freedom, but making the effort to set them free.

You will see many of these first have a teaching aspect, then a helping aspect.

The sixth one is preaching, "The acceptable year of the Lord." This one is similar to number 1—to preach the gospel. But this one emphasizes feeding the flock. The other one emphasizes preaching the gospel, this one emphasizes salvation; to proclaim that salvation is open to whomever God chooses to call. This brings us back to preaching the gospel. But, because salvation is in there, it means teaching all the details that will help bring people to salvation. Not just to justification, but all the way to the end.

So, Jesus felt that His service were in these six points: preaching the Gospel, healing the brokenhearted, preaching deliverance to the captives, giving recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, and preaching the acceptable year of the Lord; six categories of help to people.

All of Christian service fits under these broad categories. But they all revolve around teaching, encouraging, and physically helping others know and to live God's way of life.

**John 12:23-26** But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into

the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 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.

So Jesus gives us the essence of Christian service. Sacrifice. Giving up our lives to follow the example of Jesus Christ and to help those who need it. It is this selfless sacrificial effort that God honors, and will honor with eternal life, and glory in His Kingdom.