

Talks – Serving – myfishbites.com

Introduction

An old Bible teacher (who has now died) called Derek Prince has a book called 'The way up is down.' In this book, he looks at being a servant. I want to take a look at serving through God's Word with a nod to Derek's book. This hopes to offer some practical insights and teaching about 'serving' and what it means for us today!

Serving... Eughhhh...

Sometimes we don't like to think about doing things for others – we're more interested in getting stuff from others! Around us in the world, people are full of what's called 'individualism' where people are just out to please themselves and 'stuff everyone else...'

The Christian life is the complete opposite and we'll find that in serving, we get happier, we are more fulfilled and we get to help others too!

Army cadets – serving

On an Army Cadets weekend, an officer gave me all the bad jobs to do – clean out the mess tins, clean his boots, clean the washrooms etc.. I was well annoyed and challenged it forcefully but politely – no let up though. But I did all that he asked and I did it well. By the end of the week, I had really earned his respect.

What is service?

Let's be clear. Service is required in the Kingdom of God, whether you are in 'secular' or 'Christian' employment. In fact not serving other people (being selfish) is one of the key reasons why society is in a mess. However, the church (especially) must realise that serving is different from being abused, or taken for granted. So let's hit the **first challenge** – don't let this be said of your church. Or of you personally !

On Sundays or throughout the week, many of us go to 'services'. By their very name they should tell us something about what they are to be – places of service. To God and to others. But too often it's not like that. So that our **second challenge** today is to make sure that the services you are involved in / lead / attend – are places where you serve God and the people around you in and out of the church.

The 'Godhead' (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)

We know from the Bible that there is an order of service in heaven: God the Father → Jesus → the Holy Spirit. So as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, we need to see God's will done here on earth as in heaven. What applies to God in the heavenly places should happen on the earthly places through God's people!

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him

and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

So we find that Jesus is the servant of God. We know that God chose him, delights in him, put his Spirit in him and use(s) him to bring justice to the nations. Jesus is the perfect example.

Another challenge – as we read through all the Bible verses in this talk, reflect to see if your life shows the same kinds of good characteristics. Don't worry if they don't – they will do. Just ask God to help you!

John 14.16-17 – And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.

John 16.7, 13-15 – But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you... But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

In these verses, we can see that the Holy Spirit serves Jesus. So there is a Godly order in the Godhead – as you'd expect! The same must be true in our Christian lives and in our churches, done with humility and Godliness in the right way.

Serving God at work

I once worked at a Cash and Carry place called Bookers. I had finished Uni but just wanted some work so I went there, stacking shelves, loading and scanning trollies for people. My line manager was the kind of guy who'll be somewhere like Bookers for life (no disrespect to that or him). Again, he seemed to ask me to do more than the others, but I did it, often through gritted teeth. But I really earned his respect and he told me that when I left. He also said, 'you hardly ever get anything wrong, unlike the others.'

The Old Testament examples of Abraham – and Caleb:

We find that on many, many occasions, God describes Moses as 'his servant' and other writers, Bible characters, describe Moses as 'Moses, the servant of the Lord.' If we too want to walk with our God, we must serve him, be the Lord's servant. We will see later that it is Jesus who is our real example of the Lord's servant.

Numbers 12.7-8 – But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

We also find that Caleb had a ‘different spirit’ – partly because of his faith. So God describes Caleb as ‘my servant.’ A high honour. So we can see that those who God honours, he often calls his servants. What about you?

Numbers 14.24 – But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

Likewise, we find that the Lord describes David as his servant:

1 Chronicles 17.4 – “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in.

The Example of Jesus – Mark 10. 35-45:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. **Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.**”

I have highlighted the key part of the verse because Jesus was teaching his disciples a key point. In the Christian life, there are 2 levels of service that Jesus mentions:

1. Whoever wants to become great must become a servant. This is the first level of service.
2. Whoever wants to be first, must be the slave of all. This is a deeper level of service – it's about casting off selfishness and self, in order to serve others fully and completely. I would say someone like Mother Theresa lived this kind of life.

Stewarding and washing the dishes!

Another time at Spring Harvest (A UK Christian festival) I was a steward in the 11-14s venue. I enjoyed my time there. But I often had to do some of the nasty cleaning jobs – washing their cups, lunch, breakfast stuff. I did it, but wasn't very happy and would have rather done something else. One about Day 4, I asked the leader why I was doing all the stuff – wasn't there someone else. His response was interesting. 'There are others, but no-one can do it as well as you do it.' And he meant it and again, I felt I earned his respect for it.

Jesus is our Example

1. Jesus is our example and often referred to himself as the Son of Man – a clear indication to who he was and his service.
2. Jesus did not come to be served – but TO serve. So should we. How can we serve? We follow Jesus' example, we read his Word and we learn. We serve God, serve our family, serve others, even our enemies.
3. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many. Because of this, we should follow his example, preach his message, live his principles. If Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, it means you and we – so we owe him – as we are unworthy. It also means he has entrusted us with a great responsibility in reaching others – there are people out there that Jesus has paid his precious blood to change. We should live in this awesome reality.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2.3-9 – Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..

So, we find that our attitude should be the same as Christ. He was humble, didn't use or abuse his position, but instead made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant. Wow. So Jesus made himself nothing. Very different to people in the church today, who want to make themselves something. Listen, we humble ourselves before God and he will lift us up with his mighty hand.

So, we find that because Jesus loved us so much, he gave up heaven, humbled himself, and took on the nature of a servant. How are we to help others? Through humbling ourselves and serving them, just as Jesus did. In fact, our acts of service show how much Jesus is at working our lives.

The way up is down. Although the Bible says that Jesus humbled himself, even to death and therefore God exalted him to the highest place, there is a principle at work for us. The principle, as we've already mentioned, is that serving, obedience, humility, brings great reward in the Kingdom of God, even if the world does not value or see it.

The Apostle Paul

Of course, Paul was a servant too, following in the steps of Jesus. He shows us some ways in which we can serve others.

1 Corinthians 9:19 – Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

So we can serve others as a way of winning them to the Gospel. This isn't manipulation. It's a lifestyle, a witness, a power through serving that speaks into the lives of others – alongside gaining respect so you are able to share the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:27 – No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

This is about another kind of 'slavery' – but one that we must learn from in order to enable our Christian witness, our love for others – to reach new depths. Here, Paul is talking about the 'old self' – the 'before-we-accepted-Jesus' parts of our bodies and minds that are still earthly and selfish. He's talking about renewing our minds (Romans 12) and exercising control over our bodies / tongue – in every kind of way – so as not to disqualify ourselves for the prize.

Incidentally, honouring God with our bodies and minds also builds up the church – gives a strong and Godly witness to the world about what the real church of Jesus is like – and will help win over sceptical minds.

Consequences of being a servant / slave to others

One of the results of a life of service is simply greater happiness. Those who serve others, love others, put others first (with the right kinds of motivation and limits) experience real content in life. Try it and see. It may mean putting yourself out, but it will be worth it.

1 Corinthians 7:22-23 – For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

What is the thing the US government keeps telling us that the world wants and needs? What do most people want? Freedom. But this doesn't come through earthly methods like war and conquering others. No, the Bible tells us that the price of freedom is being Christ's slave – yet at the same time, when we accept and serve Jesus, we become truly free. Although the passage above is set in a different context, we can draw out Scriptural principles such as this.

Our Response

It is unfair to let the Word of God go out and not give people a chance to respond to it. You may need to do this in the way most appropriate to your group, but give people a chance to feed back, to confess sin and selfishness. You may want to get people to say a prayer after you asking God to change them to be more like him and to serve others.