

### Walking with God through Serving

David Faust, former president of Cincinnati Christian University, tells the following story. In August of 2009 Dan Cathy, the CEO of Chick-fil-A came in to speak to the student body about leadership. He had a lot of good things to say about integrating faith and work, how to build a successful business based on Christian principles. He also had a lot to say about servant leadership, and the willingness to serve and the need to be a servant.

Dan Cathy's speech was held at a local park complete with a picnic. After the picnic was over and everyone was leaving, some of the faculty were picking up the mess. President Faust looks over and there's Dan Cathy stooping down picking up trash with everyone else. Here is this CEO of a multi-billion dollar corporation stooping down to pick up lettuce and carrots. Dan Cathy not only talked about serving, but he did it.

David says, "I caught a glimpse of what truly makes him great – not his power, but his willingness to serve."

What the university president saw in the corporate executive in that moment was a little bit of Jesus. For in Mark 10:42-45 Jesus says,

*You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>43</sup> But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others...*

Jesus, the Son of God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith, and Author of our Salvation did not come be served, but to serve. And he invites us to join him in this endeavor. Jesus is saying to you and to me this morning, "Join me in serving others. Be my partner in putting others first. Put yourself second. Who would ever answer a call like that?"

The Pony Express has become a fixture in the folklore of the old west. It carried mail through an organized relay of horseback riders. Your letter could make it from here in Missouri to Sacramento, California, in an unheard of 10 days, for only \$2.50 an ounce.

Being a rider for the Pony Express was tough. You were expected to ride 75 to 100 miles per day changing horses every 15 to 25 miles. To make room for the maximum amount of mail, you only carried a few provisions- a kit of flour, cornmeal, and bacon, a first-aid pack of turpentine, borax and cream of tartar. To allow for increased speed in case of Indian attacks, riders always rode in shirtsleeves, even in bitter cold winter weather.

Who would sign up for a job like that? An 1860 San Francisco newspaper carried this ad. *“Wanted: young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk daily. Orphans preferred.”* Those were just the honest facts about what it took to ride for the Pony Express. That’s a dirty job I’m not even sure Mike Rowe would sign up for. Even with such a brutal job description the Pony Express never lacked for riders. There were many who were willing to answer the call to this life of adventurous service.

Jesus also calls us to a life of adventure in serving with Him. The risks are many. Jesus promises that people will mock you, and persecute you, and lie about you. The cost is great. In Mark 8:35 He calls us to give up our life for his sake and for the sake of the good news. But the rewards, oh the rewards, are out of this world. Jesus says that in spite of the persecution, even because of it, you will be blessed. You will find fulfillment and true happiness. Jesus says that when we lose our lives for His sake, we will find true life.

This morning you are faced with a simple call, an invitation- to leave behind our culture of comfort and convenience, and join with Jesus in serving others. Down through the centuries, those that answered this call before us have come to know serving as one of the basic spiritual disciplines.

Our current series is *Walking with God* and we’ve been talking about spiritual habits for ordinary people. These are habits of the heart...and life which make us more like Jesus. Over the centuries of church these spiritual practices have come to be known as spiritual disciplines— essential habits for walking with God. And if you want to walk with Jesus, you need to serve with Jesus.

It’s a spiritual discipline, not only because it requires discipline to do it. We tend to view discipline as something we accomplish through sheer force of will, self-control, and self-restraint to make ourselves do those things that we ought. But when we talk about spiritual disciplines, we mean something much more than self-discipline. These are spiritual disciplines, because through them God disciplines us. Through them He trains us. These are tools that the Holy Spirit uses to shape our lives. Through God’s word, the Holy Spirit molds our mind to think His thoughts. Through prayer, He chisels our will according to His purpose. Through serving others He sculpts our heart to beat with the passion of our Savior. This is why Paul writes to the young minister, Timothy, *“For physical training is of some*

*value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*" The disciplines are the guardrails that line the road to a full life, both in our earthly lives, as well as eternal.

Through the disciplines we train ourselves for Godliness, but the Holy Spirit is our personal trainer the whole way. And serving is an essential part of God's spiritual workout. As we grow spiritually, we will learn to approach serving on three levels. Each level takes us to a deeper experience of God, and takes us closer to the heart of Jesus.

### **I. Obedience**

At the most basic level, we serve out of obedience. We do it because God commands it. We do it because we are supposed to. On this level, we are motivated by fear and respect. This is a healthy fear. It's a holy fear.

This is a parent telling their children before they head out for the day, "Your room better be clean by the time I get home." They clean their room because they know that their parents will be disappointed and hurt if they don't. They clean their room because they know they will lose screen time if they don't. They clean their room because of what will happen if they don't. A healthy fear can motivate a person to do what they ought to do. There's nothing wrong with this motivation. It's a part of growing up, spiritually and physically. Sometimes a sense of obedience is the only thing that moves us into gear.

There is no doubt that the Bible commands us to serve. In John 13:12-14 we read, "*When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."*"

Paul writes to the Philippians, "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*" And the Apostle Peter tells us in his first letter, "*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.*"

In obedience, we see that God's will commands us to serve. We serve because we ought to. Serving was never an optional part of the Christian life. It isn't reserved for the select few. It isn't only for those that have been to Bible college. It isn't only for the ordained. It isn't only for those in leadership positions. It's for all followers of Christ. It is a command for us to obey.

### **II. Thankfulness**

There is nothing wrong with obedience, but there is a deeper level, a deeper motivation for serving than obedience. And that is thankfulness. As we grow in our understanding of all that God has done for us, we can't help but want to return the favor somehow. In obedience, we see that God's will commands it. In thankfulness, we learn that God's goodness inspires it. We don't do it because we OUGHT to. We do it because we WANT to. We are moved by a sense of gratitude.

The prophet Samuel used this motivation for the nation of Israel, "*But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you* (1 Sam. 12:24)." This is the child cleaning his room, because when mom or dad got home, they brought him an unexpected surprise. The delighted child goes and cleans their room because they want to.

When we understand how much Jesus lowered himself to serve us, we realize, no matter who we serve, how we serve, or where we serve, that we will never lower ourselves as much as Jesus.

In Philippians 2, Paul calls us to do nothing out of selfish ambition, but to value others above ourselves. He then offers up Jesus as our model in verses 5-8:

*5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
7 rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!*

Jesus lived as one of us and He died in our place, and Paul's point is this: There is nothing that you could ever do for another person on this planet that comes close to that.

Do you remember what it is like not to know Jesus, to be without God? Do you remember what it is like to be guilty before God and unforgiven? Do you remember what it is like to be lost in your own shame and failure without hope or help? Do you remember what it was like to be meandering through life without purpose or meaning, or even worse to have poured your whole life into a meaning and purpose to only find out it was the wrong one? Do you remember what it was like to be lost in ignorance and darkness? Do you remember what it was like to see Jesus for the first time with the eyes of faith and understand, truly, who He is? Do you remember what it is like to first grasp the offer of forgiveness and to know that your slate was wiped clean? Do you remember the waters of baptism and the physical reassurance that every mistake, every failure was washed clean, to know that the old you was buried and gone, and a new you had risen to walk in the newness of life? Do you remember when you first

contemplated the wonders of heaven- no tears, eternal joy, reigning with Christ, sharing in his full inheritance? Do you remember?

When the fire of service begins to dim, and the embers in your heart start to flicker and fade, just remember what He did for you, and it will fan the flame. How could we not be thankful? How could we not serve?

Donald Whitney writes in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*,  
*[Jesus] has never done anything greater for anyone, nor could HE do anything greater for you, than bring you to Himself. Suppose He put ten million dollars into your bank account every morning for the rest of your life, but He didn't save you? Suppose He gave you the most beautiful body and face of anyone who ever lived, a body that never aged for a thousand years, but then at death He shut you out of Heaven into hell for eternity?*

He could give you the wisdom of Solomon, the kingdom of David, the high calling of Abraham, but none of those things would compare to what He has already done for you. How can we not be thankful? We cannot help but be moved in gratitude.

### III. Love

As deeply moving as thankfulness is, there is a still deeper level to serving. This is serving at its most pure and precious. We love like Jesus. Jesus' love transforms us into servants. In obedience, we serve because we OUGHT to. In thankfulness, we serve because we WANT to. In love, we serve because we can't help it. We do it without thinking about it. It's just a natural expression of the love we share with our Savior.

The heart of service is the heart. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:13, "*Serve one another in love.*" There is no fuel for service that burns longer or brighter than love. We will do all sorts of things for love, that we will not do for money. You could not pay my wife to rub my nasty feet, but she does it because she loves me.

When we learn to serve in love, it is no longer service, but simply an expression of love. A couple in love does not think of the things they do for each other as an act of service. They can't help it. They can't not do it. Love compels them. Love does not measure the cost, but only asks how?

Even the most menial tasks, when they are compelled by love, are acts of joy. They are no longer tedious, boring annoyances. They are the overflow of divine pleasure. They are occasions of delight. Service in love is something we get to do, never something we have to do.

This is why Psalm 100:2 invites us, "*Serve the LORD with gladness.*" What a life-changing experience it is to realize that those are Jesus' leaves we are raking. Those are Jesus' walls we are painting. That is Jesus we are helping with food and clothing. Those kids you help. You're doing it for

Him. Those folks you visit at the nursing home. That's Jesus you're spending time with. Whatever we do even for the least of people, Jesus says, is like we are doing it for Him.

But it's even more than that. Serving in love isn't just that we're doing things for Jesus and we love Him. In love, serving is an opportunity to be with Him. Serving is a divine, human partnership where we get to work side by side with Jesus.

Do you want to see Jesus? Do you want to know God? Then, serve others. You cannot be looking down on others, and at the same time looking up to God. The only way we can see others and God at the same time, is to humble ourselves, lower ourselves and serve them. If you want to look Jesus full in the face, you have to get down on your knees and get your hands dirty, because that's where Jesus is. Jesus is in the gutters and the alleys and the pits of life. He's on the side of the road with the flat tire. He's with single mom with the crying baby. He's with the divorcee who has no family. He's with the widow who's lost her lifetime love. He's with the unemployed guy that been looking for work for a year. He's with the alcoholic who can't kick the bottle. That's where Jesus is. If you want to find Him, you're going to have to go there. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

At this level, it's not about obedience, or thankfulness. It's purely about love. It's about being in a relationship with our God. It's about being in love with our Savior, and delighting ourselves in the things that delight Him.

The church cannot be the church without serving. We couldn't be a church without servants. I think of people like Josh and Sara. Between the two of them they do so much around here without any fuss or fanfare.

Ladies who prepare meals on Wednesday – Lisa and Brenda, and ladies who prepare food after a death in the family or when someone returns home from the hospital.

Building guys Gene & Kenny who do stuff around the building. Repaired faucet upstairs.

Decorating church mouse Amanda who decorated.

I think of our Worship team

Sunday School teachers – Carmen, Sarah, Tracie, Jeff,

I think of our youth leaders. Where would our students be without Terry, Natalie, Melissa, and Alyssa.

Where would our kids be without those who serve CHAOS kids on Wednesday night. Tim Hankins, Justin Perkins, Sarah Perkins

Sunday mornings could not function without our Nursery & Junior Church volunteers – Crystal Hilton, Drew Diehl, Shannon Perkins, Sara, Lisa, Justin & Sara Perkins, Teresa & Allison Raymond, Kathy & Emily Nelson, Brenda Nease, Carol Cruise, Michelle Mackey, Lisa Baker, Carmen Diehl

Many of us could not function on Sunday morning without Rick Bowman who picks up donuts.

Let's do this. If You help with CHAOS kids on Wednesday nights, stand up. If you help Terry and work with our teens and Student ministry, stand up. If you teach a Sunday School class, stand up. If you serve on our worship ministry, whether you sing or play or serve up in the sound booth, stand up. If you're an elder stand up. If you are a deacon, stand up. If you help prepare food for church events or for funeral dinners or for those who have spent time in the hospital, stand up. If you serve as a Stephen Minister, stand up.

Are you getting the picture? Thank God for these people. That's how we're a church. But Church, this is only the half of it. Service isn't only what we do in church, at church, for church people. Service is also what we do out there, for others, on our own time. If you do it with the right heart, with the right focus, for the right reasons, almost anything can be service. When we leave here, we flood Marshfield with ministers.

We have some like Ben who Coach little league and provide those kids a Christian witness and example. Pat serves on the school board. Others of you like Kathy Nelson volunteer in our schools. I think of Rick Fletcher and Hobo Jeter and those who serve as Fire fighters. I think of Crystal Hilton and Mark Peterman who serve through the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. I think of Paul Sheppard who helps the senior citizens of Marshfield.

If you're active in a community service organization, please stand up. If you volunteer as a firefighter, you coach a little league team, you help lead a boy scout troop or a girl scout troop, if you volunteer at one of our schools or serve in any community service organization, please stand up. Some of you serve in Christian missions and ministries outside of the church, what are often called para-church ministries. So if you've volunteered for Choices Pregnancy Center, Freeway ministries, if you serve at the food bank, or if you serve at Men's Encounter or Ashes to Beauty or other such ministries, please stand up. That's all ministry. That's serving others, and when you serve others, you serve Jesus and you serve with Jesus.

Here is a vision we need to have. If every one of us who was able could have one ministry in the church and one way in which we served outside the church, we would have no problem finding volunteers. We would have more people than we would have places to put them. Every need would be met. We'd have to start new ministries to fully utilize the gifts and talents we had. We would have no

shortage of outreach. The whole town would know who Son-Rise is and who Jesus is because we'd be a hundred and fifty bright shining lights out shining throughout our community. We'd be salt seasoning our world with the God flavors of life everywhere we went. We'd have plenty of people coming in here because of everything we were doing out there.

If we want to lift Jesus up, we've got to get down on our hands and knees. Leonard Bernstein, the great American composer and conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, was once asked to name the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation, he replied: "The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm – that's a problem; and if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony."

You're the orchestra, what part will you play?