



## Core Seminar How to Grow Class 9: Serving

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### Welcome

This week, we want to think about how we can cultivate the spiritual discipline of serving in our lives.

### Introduction

To start us off, it is helpful to first consider what Christian service is. A definition I find useful is this: *Christian service is the **sincere worship** of God with our **whole lives**.* When we considered the all-of-life worship of a believer, we learned that worship encompasses the dedication of our entire lives to God's service. Like the other disciplines, service is part of our whole-life worship of the God who created us and redeemed us through Jesus Christ.

The service we are called to is obedience motivated by faith in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. Such service includes praising God with our words (Hebrews 13:15), gospel ministry (Romans 15:16), financial giving (Romans 15:27), and serving one another (Philippians 4:18).

You could be leading a Bible study, witnessing to your co-workers, or striving to be a godly husband, wife, father or mother. But the different forms of service all have a common goal: ***the glory of God***.

We see this in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

#### **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

**11** To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, **12** *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

Paul prayed these things so that Christ would be glorified by their service. (verse 12)

Understanding the goal of Christian service is important. After all, serving is hard work. It can also go unappreciated and unnoticed by those around us. Laziness and pride often hinder our service. Without discipline, we will only serve occasionally, when it's convenient or opportune, or when it benefits us. A desire to glorify God, however, inspires fervent service to God.

Paul in Romans 12:11 exhorts Christians to, "*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in the spirit, serve the Lord.*"

Zeal is the opposite of sloth. The word "zeal" in our Bible is derived from the Hebrew and Greek words for "jealous" or "jealousy". To be zealous for God is to be jealous for His glory, such that we vigorously labor to glorify Him in all that we do.

### **I. Every Christian Is Expected to Serve**

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<sup>1</sup> My emphasis.

The chief end of a Christian is to glorify God. Therefore, every Christian is expected to serve. When God calls His elect to Himself, He calls no one to idleness. We are saved in order to glorify God, and we glorify God through serving Him.

### A. We are servants of Christ

As Christians, we are a **redeemed people**. Freed from our bondage to sin, we now serve a **new Master**. Jesus gave His own life in order to redeem us and our obligation now is to **serve Him**.

#### Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sang a new song, saying,  
“Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open the seals,  
for you were slain, and by your *blood you ransomed people for God*  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Romans 6:22

But now that *you have been set free from sin* and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

As Christians, we belong to Christ. This means that both the direction and purpose of our lives have radically changed. We no longer live for ourselves because we are no longer masters of our own lives. Instead, our obligation now is to live for Christ who has bought us with his own blood.

#### 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a

19b You are not your own; 20a you were *bought* with a price.<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament, there are many examples of how the disciples of Christ understood this. Paul (Titus 1:1), James (James 1:1), and Jude (Jude 1) all saw themselves as servants, or slaves, of God.

Christ paid an exceedingly high price to ransom us from sin. He gave His very life to save us from our sin. Isn't it only right that we offer our entire lives for His service? Should we not strive to be conformed to Christ in this?

#### Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>5</sup>

Our service to God should be a priority for us. Service is costly. God asks for our life. He has a right to, because we belong to Him.

### B. We are called to serve

#### Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>2</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> My emphasis.

**8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 8 and 9 are very clear: Salvation is entirely by God's grace, and not by our own works. As poor, needy sinners, our only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ. He alone is our Savior and we can do nothing to earn our salvation.

It is only faith in Christ – and Christ alone – that saves. But true saving faith is never alone. It will always produce the fruit of obedient service. This is what Paul means in verse 10. God has given us new life in Christ in order that we might “do good works”. We are saved for a purpose – **to serve God and glorify Him**.

#### Hebrews 9:14

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works *to serve the living God!*<sup>7</sup>

Romans 12:1 highlights the radical demands of Christian service.

#### Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual worship* [service].<sup>8</sup>

*In view of the mercies we have received from God, our only right response is to offer our entire lives to the Lord.* Here are some questions to consider: Do we hold anything back from the service of God? How do we use our time, energy, money, opportunities, relationships, abilities and talents? May the Lord help us to offer ourselves completely as living sacrifices for His glory!

*Serving Christ involves serving the church.* We cannot claim to serve Christ if we are indifferent to the welfare of His body. This challenges the way we think about the church. Do we join a church because of the good that we can gain from it, or do we become members so that we can serve other Christians and be a blessing to them?

One of the most pressing needs for the church today is to recover the concept of the working church, where every member is actively serving. This is what it means to be a priesthood of believers – all of us are to contribute to the good of the body, in whatever way the Lord has enabled us. This is how healthy church growth comes about.

#### Ephesians 4:11-16

**11** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **14** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **15** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held

<sup>6</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> My emphasis.

together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.<sup>9</sup>

The leaders are not the only ones responsible for growing the church. In fact, Paul here places that duty squarely on the congregation. The duty of the elders is to equip God's people for service, so that the **church members themselves** can build up the body of Christ (v11 and 12).

In light of this, we should ask ourselves: Do we simply enjoy good teaching for its own sake, or are we seeking to equip ourselves for ministry? Are we actively using what we have learnt to serve others? Knowledge, unless used to bless others, often leads to pride.

We **all** have a part to play in building up the church. None of us are exempt from this responsibility. Verse 16 encourages us all to serve in whatever way we can. A body grows in a healthy way when its various parts carry out their different functions in unity. This illustration is very instructive: No part of the body can say that it is too small or insignificant – **each** part does its work. So it is with the church and its members. There is healthy growth when **all** of us work together for the good of the body.

## QUESTIONS ~ WHAT OBSTACLES KEEP US FROM SERVING?

### II. Motivations for Serving

Such obstacles can make us less fervent in serving God. *A good way to rekindle our passion for serving God is to **meditate on the biblical motivations** for doing so. This is also a helpful way of **checking our own motives** for serving.*

#### A. Motivated by Obedience

##### Deuteronomy 13:4

It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and *obey him; serve him* and hold fast to him.<sup>10</sup>

We serve God because He commands it and we want to obey Him. No Christian is meant to sit on the sidelines and watch others do the work of the kingdom!

#### B. Motivated by Gratitude

##### 1 Samuel 12:24

But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; *consider what great things he has done for you.*<sup>11</sup>

It is no burden to serve God when we remember what He has done for us. Two verses before, Samuel reminds the Israelites that "the LORD was pleased to make you his own". So it is with all of us who are God's people.

<sup>9</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> My emphasis.

We were dead in sins, without Christ and without hope. We rightly deserved God's judgment. But God, in His grace towards us, sent His Son as a sacrifice for our sins in order that we might be forgiven. He called us to Himself by His Spirit, giving us faith that we might believe in Christ. And He did all this not because we deserved it, but because it pleased the Lord to make us His people. From start to finish, we are debtors to God's grace.

When our hearts grow cold towards serving God, we ought to consider what great things the Lord has done for us in Christ. May our gratitude to God inspire us to serve Him fervently!

*We serve God because we are forgiven, not in order to be forgiven.* Christians aren't prisoners who should serve God grudgingly because of guilt. The opposite is true: We can serve willingly because Christ's death and resurrection has freed us from guilt! Consider the example of Isaiah and notice his response once God had forgiven him.

**Isaiah 6:5-8**

**5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

**6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

**8** And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Isaiah was eager to serve the Lord. Why? Not because he felt guilty, but because God had taken his guilt away. Has He taken your guilt away? If so, then serve Him because of it!

**C. Motivated by Gladness**

Meditating upon what God has accomplished through Christ should fill us not only with gratitude, but also with joy. We rejoice as we remember the work of Christ, and we rejoice as we look forward to His return, when we shall be glorified in Him. This ought to motivate us to serve the Lord. Our service to God should be characterized by joy, not with murmuring and complaining.

**Psalm 100:2**

Serve the LORD with *gladness*: come into his presence with singing.<sup>12</sup>

Do we count it a privilege to serve God? Then let us serve Him with gladness. Not only do we rejoice in what God has done for us, we also rejoice as we see His work in causing other Christians to grow through our efforts. The spiritual fruit that God produces in the lives of other Christians brings joy to us.<sup>13</sup>

Joy also comes as we labor together with other Christians for the sake of the gospel. Such fellowship is especially sweet and it encourages us in our service for God. We see this in Philippians 1:3-5.

**Philippians 1:3-5**

**3** I thank my God every time I remember you. **4** In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray *with joy* **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now[.]<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 16:19 (cf. Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19).

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis.

#### D. Motivated by Humility

There is a sinful tendency in us that says, “If I have to serve, I want some recognition for it.” Pride and self-centeredness hinder sincere Christian service. Through the power of the Spirit, we must strive to put these sinful desires to death.

At the same time, we must model our service after Jesus' example. He is the perfect example of what it means to serve with humility (cf. Mark 10:35-45). In John 13, Jesus washed His disciples' feet, setting us an example to follow. And it was the same humility that led Jesus to offer Himself willingly as a sacrifice for sin for all those who would trust in Him.

#### Philippians 2:3-8

**3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>15</sup>

If Jesus, the Creator and Ruler of all things, willingly humbled Himself to serve His people, should not we—as those who follow Him—do likewise?

#### E. Motivated by Love

Love is at the heart of Christian service. Without love, any form of service would be hypocritical and dreary. Love motivates and encourages us to serve God fervently.

**Firstly**, it is God's love for us in Christ that spurs us on to serve Him. This must be the starting point. We are able to love God and to love our fellow Christians only because God has first loved us.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

**14** *For the love of Christ controls us*, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; **15** and he died for all, that *those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him* who for their sake died and was raised.<sup>16</sup>

Understanding how he was loved by God in Christ motivated Paul to give himself entirely to the Lord's work. Paul realized that because Christ had died for him, he could no longer live for himself but he was to live for his Savior. The unchanging love of Christ for us ought to stir us up to serve. And just as His love does not wane, so our motivation for service should also be constant.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> “When I Survey the Wonderous Cross”, *The Baptist Hymnal*, #144.

**Secondly**, it is our love for God that encourages us to serve Him. After His resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Three times Peter replied “yes”, and three times Jesus exhorted him to feed His sheep. Do we claim to love our Lord? Then let us serve Him cheerfully and diligently.

**Thirdly**, our love for other Christians ought to motivate us to serve them.

**Galatians 5:13**

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another*.<sup>18</sup>

Our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ ought to be active. It is by serving them that we show our love for them. By doing so, we commend the gospel to outsiders; for it is by loving one another that we show ourselves to be Christ’s disciples.

**F. Motivated by Reward**

We do not earn our salvation with good works. But there is a sense in which our reward in heaven is determined by our faithfulness in serving God in this life.

Jesus exhorts us to labor for things of eternal value.

**Matthew 6:19-21**

**19** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The certainty of our bodily resurrection should also motivate us to serve God. We have a sure hope in Christ that assures us of future glory. This ought to encourage us, as it encouraged Paul.

**1 Corinthians 15:58**

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

**G. Motivated by a Desire for Godliness**

Serving is part of obedience to God. To serve faithfully is to grow in our sanctification. Serving is a spiritual discipline that we cultivate for the purpose of godliness.

**QUESTIONS**

**III. Every Christian is Gifted To Serve**

As Christians, we have all **received the Holy Spirit**. He sovereignly equips **each one of us** with spiritual gifts so that we are **able** to serve God.

**1 Corinthians 12:4, 11**

**4** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... **11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> My emphasis.

There are many different types of gifts, but they all have one purpose: service for the glory of God.

**1 Peter 4:10-11**

**10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

**11** whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In addition to studying Scripture, the best way to discover and confirm our spiritual gifts is by serving. Some Christians talk about taking a spiritual gifts inventory to discover how they are to serve. But I think a more helpful way to go about thinking about our Christian service is to consider the needs of others. So the question to ask is not so much "What are my spiritual gifts?" but rather "What are the needs of God's people, and how can I serve and love them by meeting these needs?"

It may also be God's intention to take us out of our comfort zones. He may be calling us to serve in new and unfamiliar ways, so that we depend more on Him and less on ourselves. Just as He gives us new opportunities for service, He also gives us fresh grace that enables us to serve Him in ways that might be unfamiliar to us.

**[Personal example: Praise Factory teaching.]**

#### **IV. Serving Requires Discipline**

*Disciplining ourselves for service means that we have to **deliberately set aside** time, energy and resources for the Lord's work.* For example, we might have to cut down on the time we spend on leisure, or we might have to take steps to ensure that our jobs do not leave us too tired or busy to serve God. We will think about this in more detail next week when we consider the spiritual discipline of stewardship.

Some say that we should pace ourselves so that we don't "burn out" while serving God. But we often use this as an excuse to avoid the hard work of service. Let's listen to what Paul says:

**Colossians 1:29**

For this I *toil, struggling with all his energy* that he powerfully works within me.<sup>20</sup>

The word "labor" here means to work to the point of exhaustion and weariness. The Greek word translated "struggling" is where we get the word "agonizing". The words that Paul uses here show that he did not hold anything back in serving God.

Paul was not worried about being burnt out, because he knew that his strength came from God. Note how he says "His energy". Like Paul, we ought to serve God fervently, trusting that God will give us grace to do so.<sup>21</sup>

#### **V. Moving Towards Godliness**

*Each one of us is expected to serve and gifted to serve. We must all ask ourselves, "Am I willing to serve?"*

#### **QUESTIONS ~ WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN SERVE?**

Some suggestions:

- 1) Look out for volunteer opportunities in the church announcements

<sup>20</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> Helpful quote: "I am weary in the work, but not of it." – George Whitefield



- 2) Seek out the deacons and offer to serve (Areas: Audio duplication, bookstall, childcare, children's ministry, hospitality, library, member care, ordinances, sound, ushers, website, weddings)
- 3) Meet up with other Christians to encourage them
- 4) Offer hospitality
- 5) Help out in child care
- 6) Teach Praise Factory
- 7) Pray fervently for others
- 8) Provide transport to older or disabled members
- 9) Encourage missionaries through letters or emails
- 10) Offer to baby-sit for married couples in order to free their time for service
- 11) Greet visitors
- 12) Disciple other Christians
- 13) Lead Bible studies with juvenile offenders
- 14) Share the gospel both individually as well as in corporation with other Christians
- 15) Get involved with the college ministry
- 16) Get involved with the youth ministry
- 17) Prepare meals for college lunch
- 18) Get involved with the Angel Tree ministry
- 19) Volunteer with Nine Marks
- 20) Write to missionaries overseas to encourage them

### **Go, Labor on: Spend, and Be Spent**

Go, labor on, spend, and be spent,  
 Thy joy to do the Father's will;  
 It is the way the Master went,  
 Should not the servant tread it still?

Go, labor on: 'tis not for nought;  
 Thy earthly loss is heavenly gain;  
 Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
 The Master praises; what are men?

Go, labor on: your hands are weak,  
 Your knees are faith, your soul cast down;  
 Yet falter not: the prize you seek  
 Is near – a kingdom and a crown.

Go, labor on while it is day:  
 The world's dark night is hastening on;  
 Speed, speed thy work; cast sloth away;  
 It is not thus that souls are won.

Toil on, faint not, keep watch, and pray;  
 Be wise the erring soul to sin;  
 Go forth into the world's highway,  
 Compel the wanderer to come in.

Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice;

For toil comes rest, for exile home;  
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,  
The midnight cry, 'Behold, I come!'

*Horatius Bonar, 1808-89<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> *Words:* Horatius Bonar, *Songs for the Wilderness*, 1843. *Music:* PENTECOST, William Boyd, 1864; first published in *Thirty-two Hymn Tunes Composed by Members of the University of Oxford*, 1868. Alternate tunes: ERNAN, Lowell Mason, 1850; ILLINOIS, Jonath E. Spillman (1812-1896), arranged by Thomas Hastings (1784-1872).