



Full-service Christians in a Self-serve World

Are you following Jesus' paradoxical plan for leaders?

Pastor Eddie Idefonso



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SERVING IN THE CHURCH

I have spent much of my life working with Christian educators. In addition to local church ministry, I have taught and administered in Christian higher education. While some people feel academics live in obscure ivory towers, I've found that serving is the key to leadership in this area, too.

One friend of mine chairs a department in a graduate school. In addition to his earned doctorate, he has many other credentials and his name is recognized worldwide. He loves his discipline and thrives on the challenge of working with eager graduate students. But if you want to see him really excited, ask him about the boys' Sunday school class he teaches. He is more enthusiastic about one preteen boy who makes a commitment to Christ than about the accolades of those impressed with his great knowledge.

Several years ago a group of Christian educators in Romania asked me to conduct a series of seminars. I noted that whether I met with academics, or church leaders, the different people who introduced me invariably included the fact that I taught a chapel class at our small Christian school.

People are moderately interested in credentials. They are polite when you tell them where you earned your doctorate. Some even stifle boredom enough to ask the topic of your dissertation. But the bottom line is, "**Can you serve?**" And people know that you serve when teaching a Sunday school class is high on your priority list. (You don't teach boys for glory and prestige.)

Professors and executives who cook hamburgers for the high school youth group serve God while they serve the teens. Women who share their love in a noisy infant nursery, although they prefer participating in the adult service, serve by emulating Christ's attitude, "**Let the little children come unto me.**" Corporate leaders working in children's church do not stoop beneath their dignity, but minister as servants.

Private intercessory prayer asking God to bless another's efforts demonstrates a servant's heart. Washing church linens, maintaining attendance records, counting the offering, setting up chairs, and countless other jobs comprise the indispensable "**behind the scenes**" servant corps.

SERVING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

When the expert in Pharisaic law asked Jesus, "**Who is my neighbor?**" ([Luke 10:25-37](#)), he seemed more interested in debate than insight. But

Jesus answered his query with a parable about the Good Samaritan. The essential message of this parable is that we can become the neighbor of anyone we serve.

The Samaritan went out of his way, spent his money, risked his life, and committed to future liability—all for a Jew who might rebuff him in disdain as soon as he was well enough to begin hating again! We demonstrate obedience to God's Law when we love those who have needs—our neighbors. We demonstrate our love for them by serving them.

A professor I knew helped to supplement his salary by painting houses during the summer. His next-door neighbor was impressed with this and decided to paint his own house. But it was a new experience for the neighbor, and progress was painfully slow.

One Saturday, when the neighbor was out of town, my friend called his teenaged son aside and suggested that they do some painting for the neighbor. Naturally the son asked what they would charge for the painting, and the young man was incredulous when his father said there would be no charge. They would do it as neighbors.

That Saturday the father-and-son team was able to paint one whole side of the house—more than the neighbor would have accomplished in a week. When he arrived home he was overwhelmed by this expression of love by an acquaintance.

To talk about loving your neighbor is easy. But when you spend a day in service, there can be no mistaking the message. And an unforeseen benefit came from the son's response. At the day's end,

when the neighbor had expressed his gratitude, the son came to his father. *"That was really neat,"* he said. *"When can we do it again?"* Not only had the father demonstrated neighborly love by serving, but his son caught the vision for reaching out to others.

Let your imagination soar in thinking of creative ways to welcome new people into your neighborhood. Go out of your way to show tenderness and compassion in times of family illness or death. Be willing to plan, host, or clean up the residue from entertaining family and friends at holidays, graduations, or special celebrations so that others can enjoy the blessings of those occasions. Be willing to invite others into a house that is less than perfect, and in so doing, serve by creating a home known for love and hospitality.

OUR PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE

We encourage Christians to learn how to share their faith and then challenge them with the importance of discipling others after salvation.

But it is possible to do these good things with improper motives. A public lifestyle of teaching, preaching, writing, and leading others can turn into an ego trip.

On the other hand, carrying suitcases, painting houses, and teaching Sunday school is grunt work. It isn't glamorous and there may be no public acclaim. But if we are concerned about power, position, and the perks that come to leaders, we are no different from the non-Christians who seek such things. We live as lords of the Gentiles.

When His disciples tried the power play, Jesus reminded them that

they were to operate by a set of guidelines different from those of the lords of the Gentiles. Whether we serve as leaders in key positions or as subordinates with little acclaim, we all are called to serve. As serious disciples of Jesus, we must take to heart His instructions: **"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave"** (Matthew 20:26-27).



W.L.A. Living Word Christian Center

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Living Word Christian Academy

K-12
(310) 665-0137

Email: Admin@wlalwcc.org
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West Los Angeles
Living Word Christian Center
THE LIVING WORD
6520 Arizona Avenue
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