



# Loving By Serving

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**"Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant," said Jesus, the greatest of servants. How can you express Christ's love through service?**

**THE LATE DAWSON TROTMAN**, founder of [The Navigators](#), was visiting Taiwan on one of his overseas trips. During the visit he hiked with a Taiwanese pastor back into one of the mountain villages to meet with some of the national Christians. The roads and trails were wet, and their shoes became very muddy. Later, someone asked this Taiwanese pastor what he remembered most about Dawson Trotman. Without hesitation the man replied, **"He cleaned my shoes."**



How surprised this humble national pastor must have been to arise the next morning and to realize that the Christian leader from America had arisen before him and cleaned the mud from his shoes. Such a spirit of servanthood marked Dawson Trotman throughout his Christian life. He died as he lived, actually giving his life to rescue someone else from drowning.

### LOVE, FELLOWSHIP, AND SHARING

One of the plainest expressions of love in Scripture is fellowship—*sharing* with

others. One of the most valuable things we can share is **ourselves: our time, our talents, our energies** in serving others in the Body of Christ. Dawson Trotman was a master at spiritual fellowship, but he also knew how to share himself in serving others.

The greatest example and teacher of servanthood was of course the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said of Him that He took **"the very nature of a servant"** ([Phil. 2:7](#)), and Jesus said of Himself that **"the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"** ([Matthew 20:28](#)).

Although Jesus' entire life was one of service, the most notable example of His servanthood was that of washing His disciples' feet on the evening of His betrayal, recorded for us in [John 13:1–17](#). The instance was notable both because of the setting and because of the mundaneness of His service.

Jesus of course knew that it was the night of His betrayal and that the very next morning He would suffer on a cross for the sins of the world. He would, from our viewpoint, have had every reason to be preoccupied with His imminent sufferings. Yet Jesus took time to tend to a duty—that of washing the feet of guests—that was usually left to the lowest servant in a man's household. He did this under full awareness of His own Divine dignity. John says of Him, **"Jesus knew that the**

**Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him" (John 13:3-5)**

It was not in spite of His greatness but because of His greatness that Jesus served His disciples on that evening. Through His own attitude toward servanthood He taught us that true greatness in the Kingdom of God consists not in position or authority but in serving one another.

If we are to master the scriptural principles of true biblical fellowship, we must master this one: *true greatness in the Kingdom of heaven consists in serving one another.* **Jesus said, ". . . whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).**

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power. Jesus recognized that He was the sovereign God, that He was both Creator and sustainer of the universe. His incarnation and humiliation did not alter the fact that He was the eternal God the Son. And in full knowledge of who He was and the authority that was His, He arose from the table and began to wash the feet of the disciples. In the mind of Jesus, acts of mundane service were not inconsistent with authority and greatness but rather part of it.

#### **WHAT IS GREATNESS?**

Jesus' concept of greatness—and obviously His is the correct one—is so contrary to the world's sense of

values that even we Christians have difficulty grasping it. Even the disciples vied among themselves for position rather than for the privilege of serving one another. The mother of James and John asked Jesus that her two sons might sit, one at His right hand and one at His left, in His Kingdom. And on that memorable evening of the Last Supper, the disciples were disputing among themselves who was greatest. Their action may seem crass to us today, but essentially we are no different. Our actions may be more subtle and refined, but our attitude too often is one of striving for position rather than the privilege of serving one another.

Competition has no place in the fellowship of believers. Rather we are to honor one another above ourselves. Serving one another within the Body is a very practical and concrete way to honor one another. By serving I simply mean *doing helpful deeds for one another.* Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Dawson Trotman cleaned a national pastor's shoes. Paul, shipwrecked on the island of Malta, gathered a pile of brushwood to put on the fire built for his fellow passengers. Each of these acts was incredibly simple and mundane in and of itself. But this is what servanthood within the fellowship of believers is all about: being alert to the little things that need to be done, and doing them.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT**

One of the beauties of servanthood is that **it requires no special talent or special gifts.** Of course, we are to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another, and if God has given us certain natural abilities, we also want to be good stewards of

those abilities to serve others in the Body. But it requires no spiritual gift or talent to wash feet, clean shoes, or gather firewood. All that is required is a servant's attitude.

A well-known Bible teacher once spoke to a men's group at a church in the Washington, D.C., area. Afterward he noticed a man who stayed behind to remove and stack the chairs. Upon inquiring he learned that the man stacking the chairs was a busy United States Senator. It did not take any talent or ability usually associated with being a Senator to stack chairs. But it did take the attitude of a servant.

#### **THE GREATER SERVES THE LESSER**

No one ever gets to a place within society as a whole or the Body of Christ in particular where he or she is too important to serve others in the ordinary tasks of life. In fact, *one of the chief characteristics of a servant is that he serves downward, that is, to those who by the world's standards are beneath him in position or station in life.* It is relatively easy to serve those above us. Even the world expects this. But Jesus served downward. Quite apart from His deity, He was, on a strictly human plane, the leader of that band of twelve apostles. He could have asked one of the disciples to wash all their feet but He chose to do it Himself.

Jesus recognized that in the world, the lesser serves the greater. At one time He said, **"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).** But though this may be true in the world, in the Body of Christ it is to be different.

Again Jesus said, **"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"** (John 13:15).

Solomon's son, King Rehoboam, did not learn the lesson of serving downward. Shortly after ascending the throne of Israel he was approached by some of the people, asking that the heavy yoke of taxation and forced labor be lightened. Upon consulting the elders who had advised his father, Rehoboam was told, **"If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants"** (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam, however, did not listen; he did not learn to serve downward. As a result he lost ten of the twelve tribes from his kingdom and created an irreparable separation within the nation of God's people.

Recently I learned of the owner of a large and successful car dealership who has learned to serve downward. When asked on a radio interview what his number one priority was in running his business, he said it was to serve his employees. What a surprising answer! We would not have been surprised at an answer such as, **"To serve my customers."** Everyone would say that. After all, that is the way to maximize profits and, besides, it sounds very noble—or pious if one happens to be a Christian. But this man runs his business to serve his employees. He believes his first priority is to provide for his employees a decent and fair place in which to work and earn their livelihood. He has learned to serve downward.

As I have studied the subject of servanthood in the Bible I am struck by a number of instances where the servant was in a position, from the

world's point of view, above those he served. Paul, for example, said, **"You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions"** (Acts 20:34). We would expect Paul's companions—actually those he was training in the ministry—to care for his needs. But Paul was a servant. He supplied their needs.

### SEEING NEEDS

Serving others usually requires no special talent or ability. It does take a servant attitude to want to serve others and an observant eye to see what needs to be done. If we have the servant attitude, we can develop an observant eye. The reason most of us do not see the opportunities to serve is that we are continually thinking about ourselves instead of others. We have not learned that we are to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others (**Phil 2:4**).

Of course, God must give us a servant attitude. We cannot change our hearts. But we can do those things which God ordinarily uses to change us. He uses the Scripture, prayer, and obedience. So we must fill our minds with the Scriptures that teach servanthood, many of them cited in this article. We must pray earnestly for God to give us the heart of a servant, and then we must obey. That is, we must respond to every opportunity to serve which He places before us. We cannot pick and choose our occasions of serving others if we want God to give us a servant's heart. ***He changes us in the midst of obedience.***

**Continued in next edition....**



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