



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?

Continued from last edition...



SERVING FAITHFULLY

As important as it is to serve downward, however, we must not think of that as the only opportunity to serve one another. Most of us find ourselves in positions, even in the Body of Christ, where we are under the authority or supervision of another. The Sunday school teacher reports to his or her superintendent, the missionary to his field director, the choir member is under the authority of the choir director at least for a limited time. Some of these situations are voluntary while others, as in the case of the missionary, are vocational assignments. In either case, however, the common denominator is carrying out the instructions or directions of someone over us.

As we serve those whom God has placed over us in the Body of Christ, the most important character trait is that of faithfulness or trustworthiness. **Can the**

person over us count on us to do the job which we have been given to do? Or will we through a lack of commitment to the task fail to fulfill our responsibility?

Few things are more distressing to one in a position of responsibility for the work of others than to not be able to count on someone to do his job. As Solomon observed in such a picturesque fashion, **"Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble"** ([Proverbs 25:19](#)). My observation over years of serving in both a Christian organization and a local church is that the lack of a serious commitment to faithfulness in assigned or agreed on tasks is a major problem among Christians. We somehow feel that since we are serving in a voluntary capacity, commitment to faithfulness is not important. But God is the One who requires that we be faithful.

Writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, Paul said, **"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful"** ([1 Cor. 4:2](#)), and Jesus said, **"And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"** ([Luke 16:12](#)). Whether our responsibilities to serve have been given to us directly from God, or through someone over us in our church or Christian organization does not matter. In either case God requires that we be faithful in carrying out our assigned or accepted responsibilities.

CHALLENGES OF A SERVANT

It is not easy to be a servant to others in the Body of Christ, regardless whether we are serving upward or downward or simply serving our neighbor or friend. As someone once observed, the true test of whether we are servants is that we don't mind being treated like servants!

Jesus describes the challenges facing those who have set themselves to be servants:

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "**Come along now and sit down to eat**"? Would he not rather say, "**Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink**"? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "**We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.**" (Luke 17:7-10)

Such an attitude toward a servant may sound heartless and perhaps even cruel to us today, but apparently it was a typical attitude in the days of Jesus. Unfortunately some of this attitude exists within the Body of Christ today—not deliberately, perhaps, but nevertheless just as real and challenging to those who would be servants.

Observe the *inconsiderateness* of the master in Luke 17:7-8. The servant has worked all day and is obviously tired and hungry. Yet before he can rest and eat, he must prepare and serve the master's meal. A lack of consideration toward those serving is too often evident within the Body. Many Christians are still self-

centered. They are thoughtless and impatient. They make demands or create extra work for others. They don't clean up after themselves when they have a class party in the church social room. They fail to plan ahead and then they need something done "**right now.**"

Mothers, even in Christian homes, are especially susceptible to inconsiderateness. The athletic uniform, dropped in the bedroom three days ago, suddenly needs to be washed immediately. Dad is late for dinner and doesn't call. Toys, games, and various articles of clothing are scattered around the house for Mom to pick up. Never mind how it should be. This is too often the way it is. Mom is a servant and the rest of the family are often inconsiderate.

We tend to resent these inconsiderate actions of others, but if we want to be true servants we must learn to bear with them. Quite apart from what a child or husband or Sunday school class needs to learn about being considerate, if we are to be servants within the Body, we must learn to accept the inconsiderateness of others.

Then observe the *ingratitude* of the master Jesus described. "**Would he thank that servant because he did what he was told to do?**" Suppose the athletic uniform is washed on time, the dinner is kept hot, waiting for Dad's late arrival. All the miscellaneous items dropped around the house are picked up and put in their proper place. Does Mom get thanked? Too often not. After all, that's what moms are supposed to do.

How about the Sunday school teacher who shows up with a well-prepared lesson Sunday after Sunday? Does anyone ever think to thank her for her faithful service? Or consider the person who works many

hours behind the scenes to handle the administrative and logistical details for a weekend retreat or conference. How seldom is that person's labor adequately acknowledged! *Yes, if we are to accept the challenge of being servants, we must be prepared to accept ingratitude; to accept being taken for granted by thoughtless members of the Body of Christ.* But Jesus does not stop with our acceptance of inconsiderateness and ingratitude. He presses home the role of a servant even more. When we have done our job as a servant and have borne up under inconsiderateness and ingratitude we are not to congratulate ourselves for our heroic role. Rather we are to humbly say, "*We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.*"

If we aspire to be servants we must accept the role of a servant. This is the toughest of all the demands of servanthood. We must accept the fact that God, in calling us to be servants, calls us to accept inconsiderateness and ingratitude as a normal part of our lives. When we have endured the inconsiderateness and overlooked the ingratitude we are simply to say, "*I have only done my duty; I have only done what God has called me to do.*"

Quite obviously I have painted a rather dark picture of the Body of Christ in its treatment of servants. Happily, considerateness and gratitude are shown much of the time. The fact is, all of us are constantly changing roles from serving to being served. When we are being served, we need to be sensitive to the demands we make and careful to express gratitude when someone else serves us. But when we are serving, we need to accept our role and serve as unto the



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Lord, whether or not considerateness and gratitude are shown.

THE REWARD OF SERVANTHOOD

One of the most intriguing verses in all the Bible to me is **Luke 12:37**. In that passage Jesus says, "**It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.**"

The context of this verse is the return of the Son of God for His own (see **Luke 12:40**). Jesus appears to be telling us that in some way He will serve His faithful servants when He comes. As New Testament commentator William Hendricksen said, "*What is promised here, therefore, is that our Lord, at His second coming, will, in a manner consonant with His glory and majesty, 'wait on' His faithful servants.*"

It is obvious then that the servant spirit of Jesus did not exist only during His human life on earth. At His return He will serve us. The infinitely Greater One will serve the lesser ones. Servanthood is part of the eternal character of God. The reward of servanthood is to be like our master for all of eternity.

