

# "Serve from Strength"

Allan Pole on Sunday morning September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019



Theme: Serving out of God's strength brings God's results.

Text: John 13:1-17

Here's a thought: Pete Cantrell concluded, "The greatest freedom is having nothing to prove."

We join Jesus and the 12 apostles in John 13:1-17:

1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 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. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. NIV

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each wrote a Gospel account. Sometimes they wrote similar descriptions of the same events and sometimes they included different details. John wrote of this evening that Jesus was betrayed in John 13 and Luke wrote of this same evening in Luke 22, but with different details. Luke includes this summary of a conversation the apostles had in Luke 22:24, “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” NIV

This evening the apostles were oblivious to what was about to happen while Jesus prophesied that one of them – Judas Iscariot – was about to betray Him (see John 13:21-30). Peter boldly declared that he would go to prison and to death for Jesus while the Lord prophesied that even before the next morning he would deny three times that he even knew Jesus (see John 13:37-38).

There were 13 men in that room on the night that Jesus was betrayed. 12 of the men were thinking about themselves. 12 were going through a mental checklist of why they were the greatest and one of the 12 might have been thinking about how he would spend the amount he would be paid for his treachery. The 30 pieces of silver that Judas was about to receive was the amount of money needed to buy a common slave (from [www.whyaster.com/story/judas.shtml](http://www.whyaster.com/story/judas.shtml)).

While these 12 were thinking about themselves, Jesus was thinking about how much He loved His friends, how the Father had put all things under His power, that He had come from God and that He was returning to God. Thus, John writes in John 13:1b, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”

We can:

### **Serve out of Weakness**



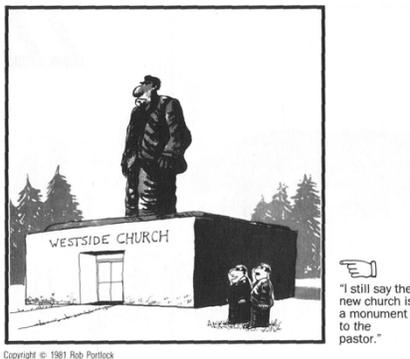
When we serve to be recognized we serve out of weakness. You might say we have Attention Deficit Disorder. There is a deficit of attention and self-worth that we try to fill by doing acts of service to get people to thank us, to admire us or just to think we are decent human beings.

Someone has concluded:

In every day and decade, we need to be reminded we're more than enough. We're worthy. We're sometimes fooled by spending our time, energy, and intention looking for worth instead of operating from a place of worth.

When we serve to feel better about ourselves these good deeds are not done with the recipient in mind, they are done with *us* in mind. We might call someone because we are feeling lonely, down or bored. This is better than moping around and feeling sorry for ourselves. However, don't mistake this for loving and serving others. Be honest with the Lord, with yourself and with the people in your life. Confessing this will bring cleansing. Flushing out the deafening calls in your head to focus solely on your own desires and agendas will enable you to hear the calls of God and other people to look beyond yourself.

Pastors are not immune from this trap. We can do things that look "spiritual" but are really all about us ...



When we refuse to serve because we receive nothing in return – even a “thank you” – the motive for our service is revealed. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul talks about eternal rewards and losses. Even after we come to know and receive Christ as our Lord and Saviour, Paul says, we can build on this foundation using materials that will be burned up or that will last. It appears that serving out of love – or other motives – makes all the difference when the Lord gives out or withholds rewards when we appear before Him one day.

I admit I have a hard time wrapping my brain around the Apostle Paul's strong words in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. NIV

Paul, do you mean to say that you can be filled with faith, power and generosity and even die as a martyr, but if you do not have love you *are* nothing and *gain* nothing? This takes what the world calls religion to an entirely new level. This takes it to a relationship with the One who is love.

Before he got to know Jesus, John and his brother James were known for their fiery tempers. When He appointed the 12 apostles Jesus called these two "Sons of Thunder". As he walked with Jesus, however, John began to change. Four times in his Gospel Account John refers to himself as "the one Jesus loved" (13:23, 20:2, 21:7 and 21:20).

Valerie Sliker writes:

"The one Jesus loved." Can you imagine saying that? Whenever I've read that, I've always shook my head a little, snickered, & imagined John as a pompous man, a man the others may have wanted to slap silly or sneak off without him or shove him back to the end of the line.

I now see it in a different way. Maybe John was saying that for himself, not for others to hear. Maybe he, himself, needed reminding. Maybe he battled insecurity and wondered how Jesus could possibly love him. Maybe he would start to follow Jesus and then lag behind a bit, feeling not quite good enough, not quite holy enough, not quite clean enough to get too close.

Now, yes, this I could imagine. Feeling silly, in the privacy of my own room, I tried it out. I said my name, followed by "the disciple Jesus loved." Empowering. Uplifting. Motivational. Humbling.

It's true. You are the one Jesus loves! You just might be the one who needs the most persuading, too. It is my prayer today that you grab hold of this thought, say it aloud a few times, & let it impact your life.

This close relationship with Jesus transformed him from the inside out. Later in life John wrote so extensively about love that Bible scholars call him the apostle of love.

He summarizes his message well in 1 John 4:7-16:

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God

lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. NIV

Would you say your name, followed by "the disciple Jesus loves"?

When you are with others do you think more about *their* needs or *your* needs? Do you serve others to get something in return?

We can:

**Serve out of Weakness**

or

**Serve out of Strength**



How do we get to this point of serving so selflessly? Look at John 13:8b, “Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’”

We all entered this world thinking about ourselves. Who amongst us popped out saying, “Oh Mom, you must be in such pain! You poor thing! I am sorry to have caused you so much hardship.” Who amongst us apologized to our dad for causing him to miss work that day or to the doctor and nurses for causing them so much work? No, we entered this world crying over how we were forced to leave a warm, comfortable world with food and drink on demand – a world that was all about us.

Yes, with the help of our parents, teachers and friends we were trained to be considerate of others, but at the core of our beings we remained self-centered. It is difficult enough to wash the feet of someone we like. It is more difficult to wash the feet of someone we don’t like. It is incredibly more difficult to wash the feet of someone who is about to betray us to our enemies!

You have probably heard the Serenity Prayer. How about the *Senility* Prayer? Grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

The principle behind this gesture by Jesus in John 13 is more profound than

most of us realize. Where the soil is dry and dusty and sandals are worn, frequent washing of the feet becomes not only a luxury, but it is a necessity for comfort and health. It is as much a part of hospitality, under these circumstances, for a host to see that his guests' feet are washed, as it is to provide them with food, or to furnish them a place of rest. This work was the duty of a servant and it is this fact that gives force to the beautiful symbolic action of our Lord. The Master of all became a servant to all!

If we have allowed Jesus Christ to wash away the dirtiness of our sin we are clean before Him. Do you recognize your dirtiness and have you asked Him to come and wash you?

Once you have received His cleansing, you have Jesus Christ living in you. He now wants to "wash the feet" of others through you. You don't have to prove your importance to the God of the universe! You are free to humble yourself before others and to serve them with no ambition for greatness.

Pete Cantrell concluded, "The greatest freedom is having nothing to prove."

I am learning that a strong marriage begins with a husband and wife serving each other. We all come from backgrounds and families that are imperfect and broken. Some are obviously so while you have to look more closely at others to see the flaws and cracks. Yet all of us are called to love, not to *like* people. Jesus calls us to *love* our enemies, to love those who oppose us and even those who irritate us. How do we get from where we are now to where Jesus calls us to be?

It begins with a relationship with the One who *is* love. Unless we start here, we will tend to perpetuate the dysfunctional patterns that we picked up in our childhood. We might have the willpower to change these habits ourselves, but the very core of who we are will remain untouched. A relationship with the One who is love invites Him in to every nook and cranny within our souls, allowing Him to transform us not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

The place to start loving and serving out of strength is our family. We can be as sweet as sugar to our neighbour across the fence but if our spouses and children inside the walls of our homes don't benefit from the love of God in us, we are living as hypocrites. From there, God's love within us wants to reach out and serve others.

John 3:16 is perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. NIV

Note what this verse does *not* say. It does not say, "For God was so lonely that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but keep him company for eternity." God did not serve from weakness but from

strength. His love comes from the *overflow* of what is in His heart. There is no end to His love. His love is the perfect renewable resource for us to enjoy and to share with others.

Let me summarize it this way:

THE SOURCE → CHANGED HEART → SERVICE FROM → GOD'S RESULTS  
OF LOVE STRENGTH

Do you serve others because the love of God lives within your heart?

We can:

**Serve out of Weakness**

or

**Serve out of Strength**

Serving out of God's strength brings God's results.

