

## LOVE BY SERVING

Bill Wilson pastors an inner-city church in New York City. His mission field is a very violent place. He himself has been stabbed twice as he ministered to the people of the community surrounding the church. Once a Puerto Rican woman became involved in the church and was led to Christ. After her conversion she came to Pastor Wilson and said in Spanish, "I want to do something to help with the church's ministry." He asked her what her talents were and she could think of nothing -- she couldn't even speak English -- but she did love children. So, he put her on one of the church's buses that went into neighborhoods and transported kids to church. Every week she performed her duties. She would find the worst-looking kid on the bus, put him on her lap and whisper over and over the only words she had learned in English: "I love you. Jesus loves you."

After several months, she became attached to one little boy in particular. The boy didn't speak. He came to Sunday School every week with his sister and sat on the woman's lap, but he never made a sound. Each week she would tell him all the way to Sunday School and all the way home, "I love you and Jesus loves you."

One day, to her amazement, the little boy turned around and stammered, "I---I---I love you too." Then he put his arms around her and gave her a big hug and whispered in her ear "and I love Jesus too!". That was 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon. Four hours later he was found dead. His own mother in a drug induced rage had beaten him to death and thrown his body in the trash. "I love you and Jesus loves you." Those were some of the last words this little boy heard in his short life -- from the lips of a Puerto Rican woman who could barely speak English. This woman gave her one talent to God and because of that a little boy who perhaps had never really heard the word "love" in his own home, experienced and responded to the love of Christ.

We are continuing our series I Love My Church. Today I want to talk about the fact that one of the ways we demonstrate love for one another is by serving one another.

1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

This single verse reminds us of some important truths. First, it reminds us that all of us are gifted. You may think you have nothing to offer, but the truth is that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ then God has supernaturally gifted you to serve. Secondly, it reminds us that our gifts are not given to us for our own benefit. God gave you gifts and talents and abilities and experiences for the benefit of other people, to be used to serve others. Jesus has called us to serve one another.

Matt 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

To be a follower of Jesus means that we seek to serve like He did. All of us should have a heart of service. Your ability determines your area of service, but your attitude determines the maturity and effectiveness of that ministry. Today I want us to look at 3 essential characteristics of a servant attitude:

## 1. Serving Means Being AVAILABLE -

Serving like Jesus means that you make yourself available for service. One day Jesus was walking down the road to Jericho and some blind men start yelling at him.

Matt 20:30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

It says here that Jesus STOPPED. If you want to be used by God you must be willing to be available. In life there are many opportunities that will yell out at us while we are passing by. You must be willing to be interrupted. Most of Jesus' ministry and most of Jesus' miracles were interruptions. All the people he healed – the blind man, the lame man, the paralyzed man, the dead child – all were interruptions. His first miracle was an interruption at a wedding. It says here that 'Jesus stopped' and allowed Himself to be interrupted.

Prov 3: 27 Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow"-- when you now have it with you.

The Bible says we are not to wait until tomorrow if you can serve someone now. Servant-hearted people don't procrastinate. They're spontaneous and they're sensitive to the needs around them.

John Wesley's motto was - Do all the good you can by all the means you can by all the ways you can in all the places you can and at all the times you can to all the people you can as long as you can.

You must be available. You must be willing to step out of your comfort zone and ask "God what do You want me to do?" Hurting people are all around us. So, what keeps us from being available? Many people say they want to be used by God but the truth is they are just not available. And what is it that keeps us from being available? The biggest problem is busyness. We are so busy doing other things that we do not have time to serve.

You have to make time in your schedule to serve. At fancy hotels they have these people called the CONCIERGE. They are paid to do whatever you ask them to do. They're paid to be servants. If you need something done then they do it for you. Imagine going to someone like that saying "I'm really sorry to bother you but ..." They are paid to serve. That is what they do. Real servants do not mind being interrupted. If we are going to be like Jesus we must be in the business of serving. It needs to be a priority in our lives. For that to happen we need to make room for it.

Another thing that keeps us from serving is perfectionism. That means people don't serve because they are afraid that they don't have what it takes or are afraid to make mistakes. If you are waiting for everything to be perfect or in place before you serve than you will never serve.

Ecccl 11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

In the message it reads "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done." Real servants do the best they can with what they have for Jesus Christ today. They don't wait. I believe in excellence which means offering God the very best that you have but that doesn't mean perfection. None of us are perfect. We all have strengths and weaknesses.

In ministry I believe in the “GOOD ENOUGH” principle. That means it doesn’t have to be perfect for God to bless it. This is why attitude is so important. Ability can be developed but attitude is hard to come by. I would much rather have 1 person who is willing but not yet able over 10 people who are able but not willing. Don’t wait for conditions to be perfect before you serve. Offer what you have and God will bless it. Serving means being available, but also;

## 2. Serving Means Being GRATEFUL -

Psalm 100:2 Serve the Lord with gladness.

Do you serve the Lord with gladness or out of a spirit of compulsion and dread? Serving like Jesus means being grateful for every opportunity to serve. Jesus had an attitude of gratefulness in everything that He did. Likewise, we need to have an attitude of gratefulness when we serve.

Colossians 3:15-17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This attitude of gratitude was evident in the life of Paul. He often wrote in his letters that he was thankful to God for the fruit of his ministry. His ministry flowed out of what God had done in his life.

Service to God should be a delight and not a duty. We serve not out of obligation but with a sense of the great opportunity that has been given us. We serve Him with gratefulness because everything we have and are has been given us through Jesus Christ. He saved us! It is out of that deep sense of gratefulness and love that we serve Him.

I have never known a man who received Christ and ever regretted it – Billy Graham

One of the things that gets in the way of gratitude is pride. Pride is an enemy of gratitude. Jesus said:

Matt 6:1 Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Self-promotion and servanthood don’t mix, but it’s easy to get them mixed up. Often service to God can become self-serving. Maybe we do it so that others will be impressed with us. Maybe we do it so we feel God will be impressed with us. E.g. Painting on the Doulos, outreach in Tanzania.

## 3. Serving Means Being FAITHFUL -

To serve like Jesus you must be available and grateful but you also must be faithful. That means you don’t give up. You don’t quit in the middle of your assignment.

John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

I want to be able to say that when I get to heaven, don’t you? I completed the work that God gave me to do. Jesus was faithful in fulfilling His service. He didn’t give up. He was persistent.

If you're going to be like Jesus, it means you're going to serve for as long as it takes as long as you're alive. You may retire from your job someday, but you never retire from serving. So what motivates us to keep on going? How do we stay faithful? Remember that what you are doing is making an eternal difference in the world.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Staying faithful means learning the difference between significance and prominence. They are not the same thing. On my body, my nose is quite prominent. But I could lose my nose and still live the rest of my life, because while it's prominent, it's not significant. On the other hand, if I lost my liver or my heart, I'm dead. Though it's not prominent (you don't see it) it is very significant. Many feel that the most important ministries are those with a lot of visibility. That is not true. Often the stuff that happens behind the scenes is more important.

1 Cor 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,<sup>23</sup> and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,<sup>24</sup> while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

Paul says the parts of your body that you don't see are more important than the parts you do see! The same is true in the Body of Christ. The fact is that, with our limited perspective, we can't see how our small acts have big consequences, but they do!

Years ago two teenage boys tried to come into a church service one night but it was packed out and they couldn't find seats. They turned around and decided to leave. One usher said, "Come on, guys, I'll find you a seat." He personally escorted them and found them two seats. That night both of those boys accepted Christ and became Christians. One of them was Billy Graham who led millions and tens of millions of people to Christ.

Real servants do every task with equal dedication because they know it all matters. Whether seen by all or no one it is important. Don't mistake anonymous with insignificant. Just because it's not known doesn't mean it's unnecessary. Real servants do every task as if it matters.

Maybe you are thinking, "there are lots of people here, this church doesn't need my help." Are you kidding? There are always more needs to be met than people willing to say, "I was shaped to serve Christ." You have something very valuable to offer here. Maybe that is a spiritual gift or talent or interest or hobby. God has brought you here for a reason.

You can do two things with your life. You can waste it, or you can invest it. The best use of life is to invest it in that which is going to outlast it. It's going to pay dividends over the long haul. I don't know if you've realized this or not, but not every investment here on earth pays off.

Back in the 90s I bought some shares of JDS Uniphase – worth about \$1000 worth. Today it is worthless. One of the other stocks that a lot of people were buying at the time was Nortel. If you had bought \$1,000 worth of stock in Nortel in 2000, it's now worthless. However, if you bought \$1,000 worth of Coke - not the stock – the cans of pop and then you drank it, you turned in all the cans for the value of the aluminum, you'd have \$214.

There is a word that we use a lot in the church these days that is not in the Bible. It is the word VOLUNTEER. It means a person who voluntarily offers themselves for a service or undertaking. They do so without being forced or paid to do it. I am thankful to all the people who volunteer to serve in this church. Please understand what I am about to say. Volunteering is good, but it is not biblical.

To have the heart and mind of Christ is to be a servant. If Jesus is your Lord, then you are His servant, His slave. The word in the Greek is DOULOS. I know a little bit about this having spent 2 years on a ship called the Doulos. When we lived on the ship I did not simply do whatever I wanted to. On a cruise ship you have 2 groups of people, the paying customers and the hired staff. The paying customers get to decide what they do and don't do. The staff do not, they do their job. They do what is expected of them. On the Doulos, we were all staff. We all had jobs to do. As we moved from port to port, I did not 'volunteer' to do my job, it was expected of me.

As Christians, we all have a job to do, we all have been gifted and have a part to play. If Jesus is Lord then serving Him is not optional. It is not just something that you decide to do if you have the time and if you have nothing better going on. Slaves do not get to decide. They do what they are told to do. So let me ask you a simple question. Are you doing your job, or are you just enjoying the cruise? Is Jesus really the functional Lord of your life? Not just a figurehead or belief system you practice on Sundays. Is Jesus daily calling the shots? Who is your master? When people look at you, do they see a person following their own dreams or do they see someone following Jesus? What is the priority of your life? How are you serving?

Make the investment to serve. One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to say to you, "What did you do with what I gave you, the talents, the abilities, the background, the experiences, the freedom, the education, the family experiences? How will you respond?"

Is God going to be able to say "well done" to you? Have you spent your life serving Him. One day Napoleon pointed at a map of China and he said, "There lies a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up it will shake the world." As I look out on this congregation I think of the church around the world. The church is a sleeping giant. If everybody would wake up and serve the world would be shaken.

You were put here on earth to practice serving. God has given you everything you need. It is up to you to use it. You CAN make a difference!

I will never forget a story Tony Campolo once told. He was a councilor at a camp for Junior High boys. At that camp there was a boy named Billy who had Cerebral Palsy. Because of that he had slurred speech and walked with great difficulty in a jerking motion. The other kids (being Junior High boys) soon began to make fun of Billy. They teased him day and night. When Billy walked by they would follow behind him imitating and over exaggerating his movements. They would imitate his voice "How you doing B-B-B-B-B-Billy". But the worst part was that one morning they all volunteered him to speak at chapel. It took Billy several minutes to get down to the front. The sound of children laughing was heard all around. Finally Billy was able to get out the words, "Jesus I-I-I-I-I-I-loves me, and I love Jesus." The room grew completely silent and then the sound of boys crying could be heard as one by one hearts were convicted. Revival broke out at that camp. Tony Campolo says that to this day whenever he travels he comes across pastors and church leaders who say "remember that Junior High camp. I was there the morning that Billy spoke." God can use anyone who is available, grateful and faithful.