

SERVICE

Introduction: Serving God as a disciple of Christ is the fourth area of attention in Spiritual Formation. It is treated last not because it is least important but because it is best understood against the backdrop of what we have discussed up to this point. Receiving God's grace, walking through true repentance, and entering authentic community each prepare us to serve from a posture that will bear fruit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit to the church had a number of dramatic implications. The work that God had begun in Jesus was now going to continue through those who were sharing his Spirit. When Luke begins the book of Acts he refers to his gospel as a record of what Jesus "began to teach and do." This implies that there is yet work to be done and that Jesus is alive and working through each member of his church in that his Spirit is given to each believer. The Holy Spirit is clearing the bench. There are no spectators on God's roster. Everyone has a role in service.

Romans 12:1-8

"¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, {let each exercise them accordingly}: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Christian service is not only defined by what is done but also by why and how it is done. Rom.12:1-8 defines a logical order in the service of a disciples of Christ.

1. Christian service begins with a spirit of thankfulness that is grounded in the radical grace of God.
2. Christian service involves the laying aside of self-interest in building self-image and ego.
3. Christian service is expressed through the proper use of one's spiritual gifts.
4. Christian service is offered in a posture of humility, not demanding one's rights.

Questions for discussion: How do you react when you: 1. Don't get a chance to use your gifts the way you would like. 2. Don't get credit for good work you have done. How much of your sense of self-worth is tied to what you do? What does your reaction tell you about your inner posture in light of Rom.12:1-8?

Philippians 2:5-11

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the

likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The incarnation provides a radical perspective and powerful challenge to all who would follow Christ. Disciples of Christ are to embrace the cross not only as they seek to be liberated from shame and guilt but also as they prepare to enter the world as servants. There are three observations that must be made as we read this text.

2. Disciples are challenged to live life from the inside out. It is not enough to obey outwardly. We are called to an attitude adjustment.
3. Disciples are called to set aside their potential for self-advancement in this life as they make themselves available for service.
4. Disciples are to respond to the call for obedience to the point of death, the ultimate sacrifice of self.
5. Disciples are to postpone the recognition of their service.

Questions for discussion: Which of the points mentioned above is most challenging to you? With which of the points do you feel most confident. What advice would you offer to others so as to help them learn from your area of confidence?