



Light from the Word

Serving Those Closest to Us

*“By love serve one another.”*¹

Our church’s fourth mission pillar, to offer humble deeds of service, is well grounded in Scripture. In addition to the theme verse above, we read, *“as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*² Further, our Lord and Master Himself said, *“I am among you as he that serveth”*³. He demonstrated a life of service to those around Him. In fact, He who was and is God, did not worry about making a reputation for Himself, but rather came to earth as a man and became a servant.⁴

We serve in the great and marvelous context and reality of our eternal salvation purchased through Christ’s shed blood on the Cross. The receipt of this undeserved gift humbles God’s children and helps us see our complete lack of worthiness or claim before God and to rejoice in His forgiveness, mercy, and grace as the undeserved gifts of love which they truly are. With that recognition, even the “chiefest” among us *“shall be servant of all.”*⁵ In the light of God’s gift and in the shadow of the Cross, the Christian realizes that the greatest, most tireless and selfless acts are *“reasonable service”*⁶ in the Lord’s Vineyard. And at the conclusion of such service is prompted to conclude, *“we have done that which was our duty to do.”*⁷

When Jesus charged His disciples to proclaim the gospel message, He gave them a clear vision to follow: *“ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*⁸ This outwardly expanding geographical reference can help us frame the context in which we are called to serve. We might conclude that service begins at home—wherever that is and in our present capacity—and expands outwardly, as far as God may lead.

Beginning at home, those who are married are called to love and serve each other in mutual

submission.⁹ Opportunities abound to be of service to each other in our marriages. A husband who works to provide for his wife is serving the Lord in so doing. A wife may keep the home with diligence and find countless ways to serve in that place. Life’s circumstances can bring the need to care for one’s spouse in times of great need such as chronic illness or disability. Singles, whether in an immediate family or within their immediate communities, can likewise offer humble deeds of service that witness of Christ’s love and grace. While the more obvious and seemingly significant areas of service are important, we should not miss the daily opportunities for small acts of service. Helping with the dishes, taking out the garbage, running an errand, or other acts of service are all *“cups of cold water”*¹⁰ which can bring joy and ease life’s challenges.

As the circle expands, most of us find ourselves in some form of family relationships. When parents are raising small children, there is much service required—the needs seem unending as diapers are changed, mouths are fed, noses are wiped and much more. These little ones are unable or unaware of the need to offer thanks, but God is glorified by all service which is done *“heartily, as to the Lord.”*¹¹ The needs change as the children grow and become more independent of their parents, but the Lord provides new and different ways in which service can be given. Likewise, siblings have opportunities as children and then later as adults to love and support one another as life progresses through its inevitable stages.

At some point, the balance begins to tip a bit and grown children may find themselves in a place to serve their parents. This really begins in the home as responsibilities increase and a heart of willing service is cultivated and nurtured. As parents grow feeble and infirmed, many have found a blessing through helping in ways which seem to mirror the care for a

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small child—though difficult, this can be a wonderful time of serving those who did so much for us. To sit at the side of a dying parent—perhaps providing the smallest act to ease some physical pain or to whisper encouraging words of hope from God’s Word—is to be close to Heaven and to feel the Savior’s love in a special and unique way. All of this is being done in His Name and for His Glory.

Finally, and still within the realm of those closest to us, we have our precious church family and brotherhood. God has granted many ways in which we can by love serve each other. There are those among us who have lost their spouses. Some are without parents or without secure family situations. We are taught that

visiting these—which might include a variety of ways to love and serve them—is “*pure religion and undefiled.*”¹²

In the church, each takes his turn with life’s joys and hardships. We are called to “*rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*”¹³ Our church has a rich history and pattern of fulfilling this verse as we live in close fellowship with each other and can act on our awareness of these needs. Yet we live in an age of increasing material wealth and self-sufficient lifestyles which can create the perception that needs are not present or have already been met. May we resist the tendency toward independence which can at once rob us of the blessing of serving and being served in the Lord’s name.

We know how easy it can be to step past a need which is right at our doorstep—in our

marriages, our families, and our church—on our way to serving in what may be perceived as bigger and more important ways. Let us remember the Acts 1:8 model of evangelism and service which makes it clear that such service stands on the foundation of first serving the needs of those closest to us, being a witness for Christ where we are at the present time and trusting Him to guide and prepare us for the future.

(Footnotes)

¹ Gal. 5:13

² Gal. 6:10

³ Luke 22:27

⁴ Phil. 2:7

⁵ Mark 10:44

⁶ Rom. 12:1

⁷ Luke 17:10

⁸ Acts 1:8

⁹ Eph. 5:21-33

¹⁰ Matt. 10:42

¹¹ Col. 3:23

¹² James 1:27

¹³ Rom. 12:15

*“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.
To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.
To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.
To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.
To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:
The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:
The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Ps. 136:1-10
“O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Ps. 136:26*