

Moments *for* You

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Theme: Serving



SERVING GOD

The Bible makes it clear that when a person is in a real relationship with God, they will serve God (see Luke 4:8). It's always been God's intention to make us like His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:29). When we look at Jesus' life, there's no denying that He was a servant. Jesus' entire life was centered on serving God—by teaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23). He came not “to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). Then, on the night of His arrest, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, instructing them to serve one another: “I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (see John 13:12–17).

The Bible offers several motivations for our service. We want to serve God because we are “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28), because our service supplies the needs of the Lord's people (2 Corinthians 9:12), because our service proves our faith and causes others to praise God (2 Corinthians 9:13), and because God sees and rewards our labor of love (Hebrews 6:10). Each of these is a good reason to serve God.

Genuine service cannot be separated from love. We can go through the motions of serving God, but if our hearts are not in it, we're missing the point. First Corinthians 13 makes it clear that, unless our service is rooted in love, it's meaningless. Serving God out of a sense of obligation or duty, apart from love for God, is not what He desires. Serving God should be our natural response to Him who loved us first (1 John 4:9–11).

We can give away only what we've first received. The reason we can love and serve God is that He first loved and served us through Jesus Christ. The more we are aware of and experience God's love in our own lives, the more prone we are to respond in love by serving Him. If you want to serve God better, the key is to get to know Him! Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal more of God to you (John 16:13). When we truly know God, our natural response is a desire to love and serve Him in return. —GotQuestions.org

REAL GREATNESS

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Matthew 20:17–28 is an interesting section that is tied together by one theme: Jesus Christ preparing to suffer and lay down His life at Jerusalem. This was what occupied the mind and attention of Jesus Christ at this point. But it is interesting to note the attention of the disciples was occupied with something totally different. They were preoccupied with matters relating to their own importance and greatness.

The world measures greatness in terms of power and authority. But Jesus said, “It shall not be so among you” (v. 26). We must operate on a different system than the world, and when we forget this, we begin to operate in the church as the world operates. This creates great problems and destroys any effectiveness in our service for Jesus Christ.

True greatness and honor, in the kingdom that Christ will establish, is determined not by power and influence, but by your service to others.

That is what brings true honor before God. The concern of my life must be, “How can I invest it in serving you?”

The great example is in v. 28: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” That is a tremendous statement! The One who alone is worthy that all might bow and serve and honor Him, came not that men might serve Him but that He might serve them.

The word ransom was used of paying the penalty necessary to release a slave. You and I are the slaves of sin, and the penalty for sin is death. What do I need above all else? I need One who can release me from my bondage by paying the price demanded by a holy and righteous God. Jesus Christ came and did just that. “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus paid the penalty for sinful, fallen humanity so that we might be brought to God.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:18-19, “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” Our redemption was not purchased by heritage, by possessions, or by religious associations, but with the blood of Christ. The penalty for sin is death, and the payment of the price was accomplished by Christ. I am cleansed and forgiven by believing in Him and relying upon the fact that He died for me and that He was raised because He had paid the penalty.

Following the example of Jesus Christ does not save you. Having the penalty for your sin paid by Christ saves you. That occurs when you believe in Him. When you believe in Jesus Christ you are “justified by faith”

(Romans 5:1). But once we become sons of God through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26), then we are to follow the example of Christ. As He gave of Himself completely for others, so we are to give of ourselves in unselfish service for others.

I wonder, is that how we really live? Am I so absorbed in loving you that it does not matter how inconvenient it is? Am I being used of God in your life for the accomplishing of His purposes? Stop and think, Lord, how can you use me in someone else’s life? How can I make myself more available to them? If that absorbs each of us, the church will be changed, and we will be living out the beauty of His character, and His life will be seen in us.

—Gil Rugh, condensed

SERVING FROM LOVE

In Romans 7:1–6, the marriage relationship is used to illustrate the power of Jesus Christ to change the human heart. “A married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage ... you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another” (vv. 2–4). Let me give you two statements that go to the heart of this application:

- We died to the law
- We are now married to Christ

The point of this passage is not just that we traded husbands—the law for Christ. Its real point is that we have traded a bad marriage for a good one. When we were under the law, we were in a relationship that could never satisfy. It’s like being married to the most demanding husband in the world. Nothing you do pleases him.

Nothing is ever good enough. Nothing is ever clean enough. You work to fix a nice meal—and because

it's not perfect, he doesn't like it. He's on your case day and night. He wakes up every morning with a list of things you need to do today. And no matter how hard you work, you can never finish the list to his satisfaction. He's picky, he's demanding, he's a perfectionist, he's critical, and to top it all off, he's right all the time.

That's what it was like living under the law. You know the law is good. It's "right all the time." You do your best to live up to the Ten Commandments, but "nobody's perfect." However, perfection is what the law demands. God doesn't grade on a curve. It's not good enough to keep most of the commandments most of the time. That will only condemn you. It can never save you. You end up beaten down, discouraged, frustrated, feeling like a failure all the time. You can never be good enough no matter how much you try.

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

Verse 6 declares that now we "are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code." The "old way" was the way of the law—"Do, do, do. Work harder, keep on trying, push harder." You were bound to fail. The law guaranteed it.

What's the "new way?" It's the way of the Spirit. It's an inner change wrought in your heart by the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 tells us "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The new way is love. We serve God now out of love and gratitude, not out of fear or guilt.

If you're still trying to please God enough so that He'll forgive your sins, it's not working, is it? You're frustrated, aren't you? God seems

far away, doesn't He? I've got good news. If you are ready to die to the law, you can have a new relationship with Jesus. You've got to give up any hope of ever pleasing God on your own merits. That means turning away from your dream of being good enough to go to heaven. If you are willing to die to those fantasies, you can be quite literally born again into a brand-new life.

—Ray Pritchard, adapted

BE A GOOD STEWARD

Matthew 25:14-30 contains the parable of the talents. In this story, a man is about to go on a long journey to a faraway country. Before he leaves, he calls three of his servants and gives them each a certain number of "talents" (varying amounts of money). While the master was away, the servants were responsible for these investments. One servant received five talents, which he used to gain five more. Another received two, and also doubled his total by gaining two more. The third servant received only one talent. Rather than trading like the other two, he buried the money to keep it safe. When the master returned from his journey, he praised the two servants who had used his investment wisely, and condemned the one who did not.

While the word is never used, this parable depicts three *stewards*. A steward is someone who is responsible for something which belongs to someone else.

GIFTS FROM GOD

Christians understand that every good thing is a gift from God (James 1:17), and He has given us many good things. He provides for our basic needs (Matthew 6:25-34) and blesses us with relationships (Proverbs 27:9; Psalm 128:3). In Colossians 1:15-20

Paul explains who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. Here we read that all Christians have been created by Him (v. 16), are sustained by Him (v. 17), and have been saved by Him (v. 20). None of these have been earned; they all have been given out of God's gracious love.

In God's infinite grace, He has also given each believer spiritual gifts. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). These gifts are given so that we might serve. Not all Christians have the same gifting (Romans 12:6-8), but we all have been given the ideal gifts so that we may best serve one another and our God.

TRUE STEWARDSHIP

In the parable, the talents represent all that God has given to us. A good steward is one who understands that all they have is a gift from God. It is someone who knows that God has given them life and saved them from their rebellion against Him. As a result, they put aside their desires in order to serve Him.

Beware of taking God's gifts and burying them in the ground. When we seek to use His gifts for His glory, we can longingly anticipate the day when He returns and we will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

— Erik Rasmussen

MOTIVATED TO SERVE

"Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

We started hiking with our children when they were very young. Of course when they're toddlers, you have to carry them a lot. But as they

grew older and got too heavy to carry, they had to walk by themselves. If they were motivated, they could literally run on a trail where Marla and I were struggling just to walk. But if they were not motivated, they acted like they could not walk a step farther.

And so it was always a challenge to figure out how to motivate the kids to climb a mountain. I remember when our second daughter was about seven and we were climbing Mt. Lassen in Northern California, which is over 10,400 feet high. It requires gaining almost 2,000 feet of elevation in about two and a half miles. I told her that I would beat her to the top. That was all the motivation she needed. She took off going faster than I could ever go. She beat us all to the summit. The issue was not muscle strength; the issue was motivation.

I tell that story because in Romans 12:11, Paul says that we are to "not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." He's talking about people who are motivated to "run up the mountain," passionate in their service for the Lord. So I must ask myself, "Does that describe me?" Am I fervent in spirit in my service for the Lord? Or, like the church in Laodicea, whom the Lord threatened to spew out of His mouth, could I be lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16)? Could I be lazy in serving the Lord? Could I be indifferent to the cause of the Lord and Master who bought me with His blood?

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "I used to be diligent and fervent in serving the Lord, but I burned out. Other Christians criticized me. No one seemed to appreciate all of the long, hard hours I spent working behind the scenes. I don't feel like going through that again." If you feel like that, you need to refocus so that you

get the proper motivation to serve. Paul has set forth the motivation that you need in Romans 12:1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, *by the mercies of God*, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” The supreme motivation to sacrificial, transformed service is “the mercies of God,” which Paul lays out in Romans chapters 1 through 11.

**1. THE MERCIES OF GOD CALL OUT:
“DO NOT BE SLOTHFUL”**

“Slothful” is translated from a Greek word that means “lazy.” Jesus used the word to describe the lazy servant who didn’t bother to invest his master’s money, but just buried it in the ground (Matthew 25:26). God has given you spiritual gifts to be used in serving Him (Romans 12:3–8) and when you use those gifts to serve His kingdom purposes, He energizes you with His power. As Paul explains, “For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29). Of course, we all need to evaluate how much we are able to commit to. We will not be effective if we take on so much that we neglect our own souls (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 4:16). But when you do what God has gifted you to do in the power that He supplies, it energizes you. You may be tired, but you’ll also be deeply satisfied.

**2. THE MERCIES OF GOD CALL OUT:
“BE FERVENT IN SPIRIT”**

The word translated “fervent” literally means, “to boil.” So Paul is describing a holy zeal or passion for God and His kingdom purposes. Paul isn’t describing someone who needs to be arm-twisted into “volunteering” for some ministry until finally he feels guilty and can’t figure a way out.

Paul is shouting, “Jesus Christ and the gospel should make your

spirit boil! The good news that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners should excite you! The glorious fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord should stir your heart! Let the many mercies of God fuel the fires of passion for Christ and His kingdom! Don’t be lukewarm about such wonderful truths. Be fervent in spirit as you serve the Lord.”

**3. THE MERCIES OF GOD CALL OUT:
“SERVE THE LORD”**

All Christians are to be serving the Lord in some capacity. We saw this in Romans 12:4–8, where Paul develops the analogy of the Church as the body of Christ. Every part of the body is valuable and useful to the overall functioning of the body. If you’re not serving, you need to ask the Lord how He wants you to serve and begin doing it.

We must remember that we are not serving ourselves. It’s easy for Christians to fall into a mindset where it becomes “my ministry.” It brings me fulfillment and significance. I love the praise that people give me when I serve them. While there is great joy in serving the Lord and there is a legitimate sense of fulfillment when God uses you to serve others, we need to beware of serving ourselves rather than serving the Lord.

We are also not primarily serving others. True, there is a sense in which through love we serve one another (Galatians 5:13). We are to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). We are to lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). But we serve the Lord, not people. In Galatians 1:10, Paul writes, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” We need to

aim at pleasing God, who examines our hearts. We need to be faithful to His truth, even if people despise us for it. We only serve people secondarily. It is the Lord Christ whom we serve.

He is the Lord of glory, who gave up the splendor of heaven to endure the abuse of sinners in order to bring us to glory. It's a great privilege to serve this gracious, loving Lord! It's not a burdensome duty, but a joy to serve the King of kings, who sacrificed Himself to rescue me.

—Steven J. Cole, condensed

SERVE? WHY ME?

“We are looking for volunteers for the _____ ministry.”

If you've been to church for more than three weeks you've likely encountered some sort of announcement asking for help from the church to serve. We understand why: churches have a number of ministries that require volunteers to coordinate service together.

When asked to serve, we may tend to think, “*Why should I?*” And as we begin to process the question, we remind ourselves that we are already quite busy. Everyone's busy—or at least we think we are. It's so easy to dismiss needs like this.

I think the line of thinking that says, “*Why should I?*” is unhelpful. It starts with us at the center rather than the needs of others in our church family. There may be legitimate reasons why we can't serve, but I fear that we often quickly settle for convenient excuses that secure our comfort rather than our sacrifice.

REFRAMING THE QUESTION

What if we reframed the question? What if the request for help and service began not with us but the need? What if we said, “This is a need in my church. *Why not me?*”

It helps me to remember that part of what demonstrates our new life in Christ is the good works we do when we serve God. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10).

Imagine if the needs in the church were gobbled up like free tickets to see the local team? Here in Boston, few would give up the chance to watch the Red Sox or the Patriots. We love to enter into the joy of participating in the event. We may not think of mowing the lawn, cleaning bathrooms, or serving in the children's ministry this way, but it is. We enter into the joy of the event, and reflect God's character in the service of Christ and His church.

May we gobble up these opportunities to serve because they are occasions to boast in Christ. Instead of thinking, “*Why me?*” ask, “*Why not me?*” May we be more inclined to joyfully serve Jesus and His people.

—Erik Raymond, condensed

SERVING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Opportunities to serve Christ are not limited to what takes place among gatherings of Christians. God calls us to serve Him in many ways. As Colossians 3:17 teaches, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

In fact, in Mark 9:41 Jesus taught, “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” No act of service is too small. The woman who anointed Jesus with oil was ridiculed by others. Jesus said to leave her alone: “she has done what she could” (Mark 14:8).

God offers many examples of service beyond the local congregation. Of great importance is missionary activity that takes the gospel message to those who have yet to hear (Acts 13:1-5; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Further, many forms of humanitarian service can offer tremendous help to others while opening opportunities to share faith: “I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:35–36). James 1:27 teaches, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”

A final example can be seen in the account of the Good Samaritan. The man who stopped to help was considered the one who was a neighbor to the man in need. Jesus said, “You go, and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). The application is that believers are to find those in need and make an effort to serve based on those needs.

Many roles exist for Christians to serve beyond the church’s internal ministries. Be watching and praying, because God often places needs right in front of us where we can use our gifts, abilities, and resources to help those in need. —compellingtruth.org

GOD IS WATCHING

While we may sometimes fail to see any immediate results from serving the Lord, Malachi 3:16–18 is a remarkable passage that tells us God is watching and is documenting the faithful deeds of His children: “The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name.”

The king often had scribes record the deeds of his subjects so that he could remember and properly reward his subjects’ good deeds (Esther 6:1–11). There’s no hint that God will destroy any or all of the books and scrolls presently in Heaven. It’s likely that these records of the faithful works of God’s people on Earth will be periodically read throughout the ages.

The books contain detailed historical records of all of our lives on this Earth. Each of us is part of these records. Obscure events, and words heard by only a handful of people, will be known. Your acts of faithfulness and kindness that no one else knows are well-known by God. He is documenting them in His books. He will reward you for them in Heaven.

How many times have we done small acts of kindness on Earth without realizing the effects? How many times have we shared Christ with people we thought didn’t take it to heart but who years later came to Jesus partly because of the seeds we planted? How many times have we spoken up for unborn children and seen no result, but as a result someone chose not to have an abortion and saved a child’s life? How many dishes have been washed and diapers changed and crying children sung to in the middle of the night, when we couldn’t see the impact of the love we showed? And how many times have we seen no response, but God was still pleased by our efforts?

God is watching. He is keeping track. In Heaven, He’ll reward us for our acts of faithfulness to Him, right down to every cup of cold water we’ve given to the needy in His name (Mark 9:41). And He’s making a permanent record in Heaven’s books.

—Randy Alcorn, condensed