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MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH:

Service

The believer's example of service:

Service is a very important aspect of the body of Christ and of the individual believer's personal faith. It is a demonstration of his faith, just as the manifestation of love and the fruit of the Spirit are. James is poignant about the necessity of a person manifesting his faith through his works when he wrote: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" (Jam. 2:14). The answer obviously is "No!" Therefore as a believer serves, he is manifesting his faith in a practical manner in which God meant it to be expressed.



The ultimate example of a servant for the believer is Jesus Christ. Jesus stated: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The giving of His life was the greatest act of service He could perform, and it is His desire that His disciples follow His example. This was evidenced that on the very night before He was taken to be tried and crucified, He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:1-5) as an example of serving others. He told them: "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:15).

It was never Jesus' desire that believers exalt themselves, looking to others to serve them; not even Jesus, who was worthy to be served, had this attitude in Himself (Luke 22:27; Php. 2:3-8). The Gentiles, on the other hand, were known for lording it over others. The disciples of Jesus desired to do this as well, but He spoke against such behavior (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus made it clear that those who desire to be first in this life will be last in the next, and those who are willing to be last in this life will be first in the next (Mat. 19:30; 20:16; Mark 9:35).

The body of Christ was designed for service:

The fact that the body of Christ was designed for service is quite evident in 1 Corinthians 12. When speaking about spiritual gifts, Paul states:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (vss. 4-7).

Spiritual gifts which are described as “the manifestation of the Spirit” are given to each believer. Why? For the “common good” of the body of Christ. For this reason the Holy Spirit gives a “variety of gifts” so that there will be a “variety of ministries” which will yield a “variety of effects.” It is for this reason that each believer is to use his or her spiritual gift in service. It is essential that believers understand that each part of the body is important. They are important. Their spiritual gift is important.

“For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a *part* of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a *part* of the body. And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a *part* of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a *part* of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?” (vss. 14-17).

One part of the body is not more important than another, even though the amount of responsibilities it has may differ, for one cannot function to its fullest extent without the other members. Paul said in verses 24 and 25: “But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.” It is therefore vital that each member understands that the gift he possesses is necessary for the body of Christ to function. The members need to covet and use the spiritual gift given them by the Holy Spirit (vs. 11), as well as their position in the body of Christ which was given to them by God. Paul wrote in verses 18-19:

“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?”

Believers also need to understand that within the body of Christ there is to be unity, as Paul further stated:

“But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (vss. 20-21).

As stated earlier, each part of the body is necessary to the functioning of the body. Each part of the body must appreciate and respect the other members. They are never to look down upon the weaker members for each one is important (vss. 22-25). So when considering the importance of service in the body of Christ, please remember that the body was designed to work together. It was designed as a diversified yet unified unit. When working together by the grace of God it can accomplish much because of this fact. However when it or parts of it are not functioning properly within a local church, Christ’s grace is not flowing and much precious time is wasted and results are not realized. This is why the role of the pastor and evangelist is so important in the equipping ministry of the local church -- to make sure that the body is being equipped so that it will function effectively. (See chapter, “The Pastor and Evangelist’s Equipping Ministry.”)

Equipping the church for service:

Equipping the body of Christ for service is the task of the pastor and evangelist (Eph. 4:12). This is their function. Therefore it is very important that they model service to those they are equipping (1 Pet. 5:3; 2 Thes. 3:7-9). Their example will speak louder than their words (cf. Jam. 2:14-26; 1 John 3:18). They should not expect the people of their church to serve them because of their special position within the body of Christ. Instead, they were placed in their position to serve the body (cf. 2 Cor. 4:5). As Jesus stated, "...but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant" (Luke 22:26). Becoming a church leader is to become not only the least, but a servant as well. If a church leader does not have this attitude, he needs to be careful, for the Scriptures state: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam. 4:6).

It is important that a servant keeps in mind who he is and Whom he serves. Doing this will help him keep in perspective and in practice the proper attitude of a servant. It is God the Father and Christ Jesus His Son whom he serves (Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:24); therefore he is to work out his salvation with fear and trembling (Php. 2:12), without grumbling and complaining, appearing as a light in the world (Php. 2:14-16). It is God who created him and determined in eternity past the good works which he should do (Eph. 2:10). These good works are to be the fruit of his salvation, and the reason that God is at work in him (Php. 2:13). Nothing is to come between him and his service for his Master Jesus because he can only serve one master (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). He should not have divided loyalties. If he does willingly serve Christ and others in love (Gal. 5:13), then he will be honored by the Father for his faithful service (John 12:26).

Reasons why service is important:

Service is very important to the body of Christ for at least three major reasons: 1) it brings glory to God, 2) it builds up the body of Christ, and 3) it is a platform for and a means of evangelism.

First and foremost, a believer's service brings glory to God if it is done for Him (1 Cor. 10:31). This is a result of service, because when a servant manifests good works in his life, he resembles a light which is set on a hill in the darkness for all to see. His acts of service to others, which are ultimately done for God (cf. Mat. 25:45), give glory to Him (Mat. 5:14-16).

The second major reason service is important in the body of Christ is the impact it has on the body of Christ. Service builds up the body through love (Eph. 4:16) because love unifies the body (Col. 2:2; 3:14). This results in believers building each other up and being built up in their faith as the body of Christ is joined together in service. This occurs because as believers serve, various needs in the body are being met (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7, 24-27; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 9:12; Gal. 6:2). This has the effect of strengthening those who are the recipients of the service as well as those who are performing it. Service also encourages those who benefit from it, which according to Hebrews 3:13, helps keep believers from becoming hardened by sin. This is true because acts of service are a manifestation of love, and love penetrates hearts.

The third reason given is that as believers show love through their acts of service, this shows others that they are Christ's disciples (John 13:34-35). This results in a platform for and as a means of evangelism. This is true because serving one another can be a humbling task, as when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples (Mat. 13:5-17). It is through one's acts of service that a message is proclaimed to those who observe, a message of the person's love for those whom he is serving. As people see this humble act of love displayed, they will know that this person is a disciple of Christ. As was stated earlier, they are like a light set on a hill which shines forth the light of Christ (Mat. 5:14-16). In relation to this, believers need to remember that they are to serve in such a way that they are not practicing their righteousness before men to be noticed by them (Mat. 5:1). When they serve Christ with a proper motivation, and people observe them, this could be a platform for those observing to hear the gospel and believe. One needs to remember that as he takes the gospel to others, he is serving through this act. It is through acts of service that the gospel is advanced (Php. 2:22,30). Without the effort of believers, the gospel would not be spread (cf. Rom. 10:14-15). Taking the gospel to those where they live, or even to the end of the earth, is a service to the recipients of the message as well as to the Lord.

Service is crucial to the growth of a believer's faith. Without such opportunities, he will never become all that he can be in Christ. Instead he may become inwardly focused and selfish, no longer concerned about others and their needs, but only his own.

5. What are some specific things that your church leaders can do to encourage the people of your church to become servants?

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6. What are some specific acts of service that the members of your church can do to serve the surrounding community?

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7. List some areas of service within your church in which you need someone to serve. Then under each area list people who you believe are gifted and able to work in each of these positions. If the positions are leadership positions, make sure that the people you consider are spiritually qualified.

Area of service: _____

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Area of service: _____

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Area of service: _____

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8. What are some ways you can encourage the people whom you listed above to consider serving in these areas?

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