

Participating in the Journey
Servanthood and Stewardship
Lesson 6

One of the realities of Christian existence is that we now belong to Another: “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). All that we are and all that we have now belong to God. Of course, everything that we are and have—our personality, intellect, gifts, abilities, opportunities, possessions—has been given to us by God anyway (1 Cor. 4:7)! Conversion simply gives the believer the opportunity to offer all of this back to God for His glory and for our eternal good.

A common metaphor in Jesus’ parables is that of the servant—we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are “Well done, good and *faithful servant*” (Matt. 25:21). Such is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion—it is a way of life. The Christian journey is not one of observation, but *participation*. In this lesson we will explore two of the primary ways we are called to participate in this journey: through servanthood and stewardship (the faithful use of our resources) within the context of the local church.

“Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, our talents, and our energies in serving one another in the Body of Christ.”¹ *Jerry Bridges*

1) Servanthood

a) The Christian’s Call to Serve

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the express purposes of our salvation is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve God:

“... *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*” (Heb. 9:14)

Serving is therefore a God-given expectation of every Christian; as person has said, “We are saved to serve.” But it is much more than merely a duty;

¹ Jerry Bridges, *Fundamental Disciplines*, Part 3

what higher privilege is there than to give one's life in glad service to our gracious, sovereign God who saved us?

Since our service for God is closely connected to our salvation by God, we begin our exploration of servanthood with the greatest servant of all: Jesus Christ.

(1) Servanthood is modeled by Jesus' example.

(a) Although Jesus was worthy of the worship and service of all creatures, he humbled himself as a servant, and modeled a lifestyle of servanthood for all who would follow him.

(b) *Philippians 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

(c) *Mark 10:43-45: "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

(2) Servanthood is mandated by Jesus' call.

(a) While we can do nothing to earn our salvation, our salvation nevertheless ushers us into a life of following our Master, relinquishing our prerogatives and rights. A critical aspect of following Christ is following his example of servanthood.

(b) *John 13:14-17: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."*

(3) Servanthood is motivated by Jesus' sacrifice.

(a) At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross and the resurrection. Because we have been forgiven, we are set free to find joy in knowing and serving God. Because the Spirit indwells us, we find we have fresh affections for God and a new desire to glorify God. We do not serve God in order to be forgiven or to gain God's favor, but because we have been forgiven and have received God's favor as a gift. Gratitude and joy provide the fuel for the believer's service to God and others.

(b) *2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."*

(c) "We should serve God not just because it is a duty, because serving Him is much more than that. We should serve God because it glorifies God. He is worthy of everything we can do for Him and His church. Wouldn't you agree?"² -
Donald Whitney

b) The Requirements of Christian Service

The grace of God accomplished through the cross of Christ and secured by the resurrection of Christ provide the primary basis for our service to God. When this is the case, our servanthood will be characterized by certain qualities that both provide godly motivation for service and assure that our service is glorifying and pleasing to God.

i) *Christian service is God-centered.* When we serve other people, whether they be fellow Christians in the local church or non-believers in our lives, we are actually rendering service to God Himself. This reality helps to purify our motives for serving, helping us to put to death the isolation that comes from selfishness and the craving for others' approval that comes from pride.

Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

² Donald Whitney, *Congregational Spiritual Disciplines*

- ii) *Christian service is others-focused.* When serving is motivated by grace, it will not be self-serving, but rather characterized by an authentic desire to glorify God and to meet the needs of others. Few things so distort our service than selfishness, but grace-motivated service actively places the desires of God and the needs of others above one's own.

Galatians 5:13: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

- iii) *Christian service is characterized by humility.* True servanthood adopts a posture that others are more important than self. A servant doesn't demand recognition or dictate how he is to serve, but rather takes simple delight in being used by God to meet the needs of others.

Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

- iv) *Christian service is empowered by the Spirit of God.* The believer not only labors for God, but by the power God provides. Dependence upon God for motivation, strength, and effectiveness in serving assures that God receives the glory for our service. God gives each believer spiritual gifts that motivate and empower our service for His glory and others' good.

1 Peter 4:10-11 "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

2) Giving Expression to Servanthood at Christ Our Redeemer Church

- a) **An important aspect of membership at Christ Our Redeemer Church is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others.**

Involvement in service typically takes one of two forms:

- (1) Spontaneous ministry opportunities: We all have numerous opportunities provided to us by God to serve Him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and our cultivation of a servant's heart. It is essential that we respond to these unique opportunities as the Lord provides them.

(2) Structured ministries of the church: These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as home groups, music ministry, and the nursery ministry. These ministries provide concrete service opportunities and meet specific needs, as well as providing a source of relationship building and ongoing accountability.

b) Serving in the church provides wonderful opportunities to serve alongside others to accomplish specific objectives, meet identified needs in the church, and use your gifts for the glory of God.

c) Suggestions for getting started:

Consider which ministry(s) would be best suited to the person whom God has made you:

- i) What do I have a passion for?
- ii) What spiritual gifts and talents has God given me?
- iii) Where do others see God's grace in my life?
- iv) How much time do I have available to serve?
- v) Where in my schedule can I make room for opportunities to serve?

Begin as soon as possible! Opportunities abound for you to serve. Your home group is a good place to start; feel free to surprise and delight your home group leader by asking to be "put to work." There are other (and numerous) immediate needs, such as nursery and the greeting team. It is usually wise to get involved soon and start small. And don't worry too much about your function: adopt the heart of a servant and seek to serve a ministry in a way which best serves it. We are all in the process of learning how we can best serve God and His church, so we might bear fruit for His glory.

3) Stewardship

Stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. An important part of following Christ is the use of our material resources for God's purposes and to meet the needs of others. In fact, Scripture is clear that an authentic relationship with Christ *will find expression* in the faithful use of our resources for His purposes. For the remainder of this lesson, we will examine a second important means of participation in the Christian journey: the use of our money and possessions for the glory of God, the work of His church, and the well-being of others.

“Christian stewardship is the management of life and all its resources for the glory of God.”³

Murray J. Harris

- a) **The reality of stewardship.** The faithful use of our resources begins with a stark realization: God owns everything! All that we have comes from Him, and therefore we don't really own anything; we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—over things that belong to God.

*Psalm 50:10-12: “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for **the world and its fullness are mine.**”*

- b) **The significance of stewardship.** The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over money—all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God—by such things we confess that God is the source of our life, not our possessions.

Luke 16:11-13: “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Matthew 6:19-21: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- c) **The substance of stewardship.** In addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of His kingdom through the local church.

Throughout salvation history, God has called His people to support His work through giving.

³ Murray J. Harris

- i) In the Old Testament, God's people were to give a tithe, or the first tenth, of their income to God. This practice predated the giving of the Law (Gen. 14:20; Gen. 28:22), and was later formalized in the Law of Moses for the maintenance of the temple and provision for the priests and Levites who served there (Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 14:22-24).
- ii) In the New Testament, giving to support the work of the church remains an expectation of believers.

(1) Giving to support the needs of individuals:

Acts 4:34-35: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

(2) Giving to support the church's leaders so they can devote their time and energies to serving the church:

1 Corinthians 9:13-14: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

(3) Giving to support the extension of the gospel:

Philippians 4:15-16: "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again."

- iii) The practice of faithful giving illustrates important guidelines and provides a helpful starting point for regular giving to the church.

(1) The financial support of the New Testament church is likened to the support of the temple in the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the

same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” (cf. Matt. 10:10)

- (2) Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and training.

1 Timothy 5:17-18: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

Galatians 6:6: “One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.”

- (3) We are to give regularly, systematically, and joyfully out of the incredible grace God has shown us. This demonstrates a commitment to God and a trust that He will provide for all our needs (see Ex. 23:19).

1 Corinthians 16:2: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper.”

- (4) In the New Testament, obedience to God's law is intensified due to the transforming work of the Spirit in light of Christ's work on the cross (for example, hatred is likened to murder—Matt. 5:21-22; lust is likened to adultery—Matt. 5:27-28). In the same way, our giving is not merely to be thought of as “paying our dues,” but should flow from the giving of our entire selves to God. In light of this, faithful giving is a reminder of God's ownership of us, and is a reflection of our trust and hope in God.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5: “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

- iv) Offerings over and above our regular giving provide for special needs, specific ministries, care for the deserving poor, and the expansion of the gospel.

Acts 4:34-35: “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the

proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Philippians 4:15-16: "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again."

d) **The heart of stewardship.** What we actually do with our money reveals where our heart truly is (Matt. 6:21). But in addition to the command to give, Scripture also addresses our motives and attitudes towards giving. Here is just a sampling:

i) Giving is to be generous, not stingy.

2 Corinthians 9:6: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

ii) Giving is to be enthusiastic and joyful, not grudging.

*2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, **not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**"*

iii) Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard.

*2 Corinthians 9:7: "**Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**" (cf. Acts 11:29)*

iv) Giving is to be discreet, not showy.

Matthew 6:1-4: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

v) Giving is to be with faith, not anxiety.

Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

4) The Privilege of Participation

- i) One of the great tragedies in much of western Christianity is the misconception that "church" is an ornate building or a service to be attended, rather than the community of God's people, saved by His grace. By definition, then, to be a member of the church is to be a participant in the life of God, with the people of God, made possible by the grace of God. Viewed in this light, our participation in the life of the church is not an option, or the prerogative of a privileged few, but the call and responsibility of every person redeemed through the work of Christ on the cross. Having been purchased by God, we have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and have to Him for His glory.
- ii) Ultimately, the giving of ourselves through servanthood and stewardship is not merely a duty—as if we somehow could "repay" God through our giving or service. On the contrary, before we can give, we must possess, and before we can possess, we must receive. Therefore, all of our serving and giving is simply offering back to God what we have been so graciously given. Our time, talents, and resources are all gifts from God, and it is a consummate privilege to offer these gifts in service of God's glory and purposes. What a gracious invitation God has given us to "participate in the journey" of the Christian life! Who could imagine a more noble, meaningful, and fulfilling existence?

5) Conclusion of the six session class

- a) Where to go from here?
 - i) Contact the pastor for a membership interview!
 - ii) Make sure you have read over all the appendices in the back of the notebook!
 - iii) Make sure you have read through the two books,
 - (1) Living the Cross-Centered Life, by C.J. Mahaney
 - (2) Stop Dating the Church, by Josh Harris
 - iv) If you are not attending one already, ask about a care group to begin attending.
 - v) Ask about a ministry opportunity in which to begin serving.
 - vi) Come to membership interview prepared to tell your testimony!

