

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Feb. 29: Serve God for his glory, not for earthly gain_22304

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Serve God for his glory, not for earthly gain

Matthew 20:20-28; Romans 12:9-13

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This lesson completes the series related to establishing spiritual disciplines. Like many other human experiences, these are not one-time accomplishments. All of these disciplines can be either destroyed or greatly weakened by wrong motives. At no point in our lives is the presence of the Holy Spirit more desperately needed to keep us focused than in these areas of ministry. These five emphases form the pilings upon which we can most effectively establish a spiritual foundation for living.

The danger of desiring privilege, status and power (Matthew 20:20-24)

As the end of Christ's earthly ministry drew near, he spoke more often

concerning his approaching death. None of his disciples wanted to hear this. Their dream was to see Jesus assert his divine power and authority and establish his kingdom on earth immediately.



They had observed his miracles and his overwhelming influence over the people. In fact, they were so convinced this would happen that James and John had begun to seek aggressively the top places of power in Christ's kingdom. These ambitious young men sought to strengthen their case by having their mother make the appeal.

To sit on either side of Jesus in his kingdom suggested proximity to him. Thus they would share more in his power and prestige than the other disciples. They believed such a kingdom had to be close at hand, and certainly without the need of a cross!

Jesus' answer indicated the brothers had asked for this favor in ignorance, which often is the basis on which power, leadership and glory are sought. James and John had no idea what they were requesting. They had quickly responded to Jesus' question by saying, with no hesitation, that they could "drink the cup" with Jesus. They had no understanding of the sufferings that lay ahead for Jesus, nor were they willing to appropriate his humility and attitude of servanthood to themselves.

Jesus told them plainly that it was not his prerogative to make these assignments, which had already been decided by the Father. The other disciples were offended because of what James and John had done—not so much out of humility as because of jealousy.

The joy of servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28)

Jesus immediately addressed this issue with his disciples. He wanted them to understand that greatness is determined by service. Anyone who wants to be great must become a servant.

Then he made his statement even stronger by using another word for servant that meant “slave.” The attitude of genuine humility permeated everything Jesus had to say about service. In the pagan world, humility was not regarded as a virtue but as a vice. The very idea of a slave being given a position of leadership or authority! Consequently, Jesus' ethics having to do with leadership and power within the community of his followers were totally revolutionary.

Jesus concluded this tense confrontation between the disciples with a clear statement about himself. Surely his words must have shamed and humiliated these spiritually immature disciples. Jesus was the supreme example of how to serve others.

When Jesus said that he came to give his life a “ransom” for many, he used a word that most commonly described the purchase price for freeing slaves. Jesus had one goal when he came to earth. He came to serve others and not to be served. His greatest service, of course, was the gift of his sinless life for the sins of a hopelessly lost world.

A description of true Christian conduct (Romans 12:9-13)

A superficial love expressed in words more than in action is not genuine love. Everything a Christian does—for the Lord or for others—must be bathed in love. If we are not able to love our brother or sister, then it is highly doubtful our love for God is genuine (1 John 4:19-21). Interestingly, Paul combines “hatred” and “love” in one statement: “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” In this sense, hatred follows love legitimately, for true love

hates evil.

To love one another in “brotherly love” points to the family of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. No body of believers can be effective in serving God and others unless those who make up that body “are one in the bond of love.” In this oneness, there is spiritual strength to overcome the opposition of the forces of evil. Paul dealt with both vertical and horizontal relationships in this passage. Our love toward God is vertical, of course. But for that love to be genuine and constant, it must be expressed in a horizontal love toward our fellow believers.

The word translated “hospitality” literally means “love for strangers.” The kind of hospitality practiced by the early Christians often meant the host did without in order to meet the needs of the guest. The discipline of service often includes both inconvenience and sacrifice.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ How can one have ambition and still reflect Christian servanthood? In what ways is serving God a costly endeavor?

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