

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for January 16: A lifestyle of service

January 5, 2011

Okay, how embarrassing. You try to have a little one-on-one private conversation with Jesus, and the next thing you know, you and your brother are being made into object lessons; and not necessarily in a good way.

That's exactly what happened to James and John when they had a conversation with Jesus about having places of honor in the new kingdom. And of course when their friends heard about them going behind their backs, they were mad. Who wouldn't be? Of course, it would be funny to know if any of them were angry because they hadn't thought of doing it first.

Jesus had to know this very attitude was in all of them because he addresses them all. "If you want to be great, serve others." Not exactly what you'd expect as a battle cry, but it's exactly what Jesus expected—and expects—his followers to do.

Many of us have no problem with serving. However, many times serving is done on our terms. We can become a bit of a control freak in this whole servanthood thing. "Sure, I'll serve. I'm available for an hour on Saturday and an hour on Wednesday from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. I'll do anything as long as I don't have to talk with people I don't know or who make me uncomfortable, like the homeless, or people who smell really bad. Other than that, I'm good to go."

Sound familiar? Sure, maybe the details are a bit off, but the attitude is certainly there in most all of us. And aren't we blown away by those who

can jump in there in the midst of all the world's junk and just love on people? We are called to and bound by God's love for us through Jesus to serve people on his terms, not ours.

Let that soak in for a moment. He decides when and how we serve. Want a gauge on this? When an opportunity comes up to serve—and it will—what's your initial reaction? Is it "I should do that" followed by all the reasons why you "can't"? What about the response of "Yes, I'll do that but let me take care of this other thing first," only to realize that "thing" was taken care of and you still didn't serve? (Please don't think that I have mastered all of this; this is very much stinging me.)

Jesus' response to some who said this very thing was, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). I'm thankful he didn't say they would never be fit or they were hopeless, aren't you?

Serving is a learned behavior; we have to change our mindsets from what the world is telling us to what Jesus is calling us to. It's in verse 43, "Not so with you." It's another clear time when Jesus is trying to show his disciples (his followers, Christians) that there is to be a clear distinction between what the world does and what Christ's followers do. "Not so with you." It's a revolutionary statement. One that has the potential to change you and everyone around you.

The life of a Christian is one of worship and service. These are things everyone already is doing. Everyone on the planet is worshipping something or someone and serving something and someone. Being a Christian brings focus into our lives. The call of Christ is a call to expend yourself serving others to God's glory. Look how many times Paul says very clearly that he is a "slave" or a "servant" and he's thrilled with it! Remember, it's about changing your mindset from the world's view to God's. Serving, from God's perspective, is freeing. How backward does that sound? And yet, you and I

know it's true.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is quite revealing; the servants are given talents to manage for the master while he is away. A talent would be roughly the equivalent of more than \$1000. When he returns he wants to see what's been done with what he entrusted. The first two servants are found to have multiplied what they were given, but the third servant has quite a different story. In verse 24, the servant says, "I knew you ...," and then in verse 25, he says, "I was afraid." Do you see it? The servant didn't know the master at all!

God has given you "stuff" and resources because he has found you worthy and trustworthy to handle his things. Keep in mind, it's all his and we are simply managers who are taking care of the master's things until he returns.

Make no mistake about it, he is returning. As Christians we are to live our lives in such a way that we are excited about the Master returning, ready to share with him what we've done in his name and for his cause. And at this time we, just like everyone else, will be called to give an account for how we have handled the Master's resources.

Again, be encouraged, God believes in you. Do you believe in him? Do you trust him enough to follow him outside your comfort zone? To say "no" to some things so that you can say "yes" to what he has for you? That's how one truly becomes great.