

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for July 31: Personal service

July 19, 2011

“Love God, and love others.” This phrase is an excellent way to sum up the teachings of Christ and, in turn, the requirements of a Christian. At least that is how Jesus summarized it in Matthew 22:37-40. As Christians, we are to love God, and love others.

Have you ever received a gift that was nice and pleasing to look at but served no purpose other than to sit on a shelf? I don't know about you, but while I appreciate gifts like this, I would much rather receive a gift that does something or that I can use.

Christians too often treat Christ's gift of salvation and the gospel like a beautiful gift to admire and think about from time to time. Yet, this great gift of life and hope was not created to sit on a shelf between two pieces of leather or to make a beautiful wall decoration; this gift was created to change the world. Once we have accepted this gift of salvation, we must decide what we are going to do with it. Are we going to keep it to ourselves, or are we going to use it to change the world? I would argue it is not a hard choice. Let's change the world with the salvation we have been counted worthy to receive.

In Galatians 5:13, Paul stated: “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” Paul tells us Christ's salvation should create in us a heart of service, not one of selfish indulgence.

It is easy to forget about and take for granted the grace and mercy that has

been bestowed on us by Christ. It is in these times when we forget, which is the majority of the time, that we end up making selfish decisions that only benefit us and do not reflect the love we have been shown. As Christians, Christ's love compels us to serve others so they may know him.

When I receive a really great gift, I am eager to show it to others and tell others about it. Why should our salvation, the most amazing gift we ever will receive, be any different? By serving others, we show them and teach them about Christ and how he can change their lives.

There is an incredible power that equips us to serve others. That power is the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16 that when we "live by the Spirit," we will not serve our selfish desires, because the Spirit is "contrary to the sinful nature."

So, how do we live by the Spirit? By reading God's word and spending time in prayer each day, we will continually be filled with the Spirit and remain ready for service. Service is a powerful way to show people who Christ is because Christ lived a life of service; this is the main way he showed his love to humanity in his time on earth.

We can find strength and encouragement in knowing that Christ served and has equipped us to serve by giving us the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." When we live by the Spirit, we can learn to cultivate these fruits in our lives and can be powerful witnesses for Christ and his kingdom.

When we decide to serve others in the name of Christ, we are in store for great blessings. Paul tells us in Galatians 6:9-10: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people." Paul tells us we will be blessed in serving others.

We may not see the results of our service immediately—we may never see them—but we are promised we will be rewarded for our service. It is vital that we realize the motivation is not to bring attention to ourselves. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus reminds us that our shining as lights is so others may see God more clearly.

Just as we get frustrated in our daily lives and careers, we can become discouraged or frustrated as we serve the Lord and see few immediate results. However when we study God's word and spend time in prayer with him daily, we will receive encouragement and strength to resist the urge to give up on serving others. We can be assured that even when it seems that no one appreciates our work, God knows our good deeds and will reward us for them. Perhaps even more important is that will have served to show God to those who might not see him otherwise.

Questions for discussion

- Do you have a servant's heart? If so, how do you serve others? If not, how can you cultivate a cheerful servant's attitude in your life?
- What are some ways (big or small) that you can be a servant to your friends, family or community today? This week? This month? This year?
- When you do feel discouraged about loving others and serving them, where can you go for encouragement, strength or ideas for service?