



Lesson 6

Participating in the Journey Servanthood and Stewardship

One of the realities of Christian existence is that we now belong to Another (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.

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.” —Jerry Bridges

I. Servanthood

A common metaphor in Jesus’ parables is that of the servant—we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but as God defines greatness which is to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Such is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion—it is a way of life, it is who we are.

Serving is therefore a God-given expectation of every Christian. But it is much more than merely a duty; what higher privilege is there than to give one’s life in glad service to our gracious, sovereign God who saved us?

1. The model of servanthood.

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.

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."

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. The call to servanthood.

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.

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. The motivation of servanthood.

At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross. Because we stand 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.

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."

2 Timothy 2:4 "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."

"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?" —Donald Whitney

4. The freedom of servanthood.

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:

Hebrews 9:14 "...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."

Luke 1:74-75 "that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all of our days"

5. The qualities of servanthood.

The grace of God expressed through the cross of Christ provides 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.

- Servanthood is God-centered. When we serve other people, whether they are 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."

- Servanthood 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."

- Servanthood is rooted in 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."

- Servanthood 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."

6. The opportunities of servanthood.

An important aspect of membership at Sovereign Grace is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others. Involvement in service can be through structured formats or through needs that God reveals to you.

Spontaneous opportunities. As we live life together God opens our eyes to needs and ways 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.

Structured church ministries. These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as Care Groups, Ministry teams, Sunday Service Teams, and our Children's Ministry. These ministries provide organized and strategic service opportunities to meet specific needs. They are an enriching context for relationship building and ongoing accountability. You can find out more about these opportunities through our website, during Service Team Fairs, by speaking to a Ministry Team Leader or a member of the Pastoral Team.

II. 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."
—Murray J. Harris

1. 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."

I Chronicles 29:10-12 "Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, o Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours in the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand is to make great and to give strength to all."

2. The call of stewardship.

Scripture uses the term "steward" to describe our role in finances and possessions. The primary requirement of a steward is that he be found faithful.

I Corinthians 4:2 "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy."

Luke 16:10 "One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

3. The test 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."

4. The resources of stewardship.

God is faithful to provide us with the financial resources for our physical needs (bread for food) as well as the needs of the church and the spreading of the gospel (seed to sow).

I Corinthians 9:10 "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

5. Examples of stewardship.

Throughout salvation history God's work was supported financially by God's people. Giving is typically called a tithe, the first tenth of their income, but the generosity of God's people resulting in many offerings or finances above the tithe. We see giving examples in the book of Genesis before the law of Moses, in the law of Moses, in the New Testament, and throughout church history.

The Old Testament

Pre-Law tithe: The practice of the tithe predated the giving of the Law.

Genesis 14:20 "...and Abraham gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of everything"

Genesis 28:22 "...and all that you gave me (Jacob) I will give a full tenth to you."

In the Law of Moses: The Law included three tithes:

- First was received for the maintenance of the temple and the provision of the priests and Levites who served there. (Num 18:24; Lev 27:30-32; Deut 14:22-24)
- Second tithe supported the cost of an annual festival in Jerusalem. (Deuteronomy 14:22-24)
- Third tithe was received every three years to support the poor and needy. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29 & 26:12)

The New Testament

- Jesus commended the Pharisees for faithfulness in giving. (Matthew 23:23)
- When Jesus addressed the law he never lowered the bar, always raising it. (Matthew 5:27-28)
- New Testament giving always exceeded the tithe. (Mark 12:41-44; Acts 4:34-35; 2 Cor 8:1-5)
- Giving was to support those in ministry. (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Special offerings were received to meet unique needs. (Phil 4:15-16; Acts 4:34, 11:27-30)

6. Guidelines for stewardship.

The Bible provides helpful guidance on giving to the local church.

- Giving should be a reflection of Christ's gift to you.

2 Corinthians 8:7-9 "But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace (giving) also. I say this not as a command, but prove by earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

- Giving should flow from commitment to Christ.

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, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."

- Giving should be regular and systematic.

1 Corinthians 16:2 "On the first day of the every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there may be no collecting when I come."

- Giving should be our "firstfruits"--our first and our best.

Proverbs 3:9 "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce."

"There is a timeless truth behind the concept of giving God our firstfruits. Whether or not the tithe is still the minimal measure of those firstfruits, I ask myself, Does God expect His New Covenant children to give less or more? Jesus raised the spiritual bar, He never lowered it." —Randy Alcorn

- Giving should begin with your local church where you are feed and served.

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.""

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."

- Giving should help supply those in need.

2 Corinthians 8:14 "Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness"

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."

7. The heart of stewardship.

God looks at the heart and what we do with our money and possessions is always a reflection of our hearts. Grace is given to help address our motives and attitudes towards giving and the scriptures help bring that grace to encourage us in this endeavor.

- 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."

2 Timothy 6:18-19 "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

- Giving is to be enthusiastic, 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."

- 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."

- Giving is to be discreet, not showy.

Matthew 6:3-4 "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."

- 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."

III. The Privilege of Participation

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. God has given us both time and money as resources to invest into his kingdom. Having been purchased by God, we as stewards of these resources have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and have to Him for His glory.