

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (16)

A Serving Community

A. Introduction

1. The local church is a community of God's people.

2. What kind of community should we be?

When people look at this local church what should they see?

3. Some of the ways of describing the kind of community we should be include: worshipping, praying, learning, evangelistic and mission-minded.

We are also to be a serving community.

A community of people who put all their energy into doing what pleases God.

B. The History of Service

1. Mankind was created to serve God.

God created people to serve and worship Him in the Garden of Eden.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."
(Genesis 2:15)

2. Adam and Eve failed to serve God.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they served and worshipped themselves instead of God.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen." (Romans 1:25)

3. The Israelites were rescued from slavery to serve God.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." (Exodus 19:4-5)

Their service was dangerous.

Their service was burdensome.

Their service was imperfect.

4. Jesus came and served God in our place.

Jesus always worshipped and served God.

He died to pay the punishment of death we deserve for our failure to serve God.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

5. We have been rescued to serve God.

"to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him in all our days." (Luke 1:74-75)

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14)

6. The Spirit gives us gifts and empowers us to serve God.

Every believer has been given a spiritual gift to use to serve God with.

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11)

We should serve through God's strength.

"If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 4:11)

7. One day we will perfectly serve God.

"Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them." (Revelation 7:13-15)

C. Why do we serve?

1. For God's glory.

All that we do is to point people back to God who is glorious.

"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:11)

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

2. Out of gratitude for God's grace.

We don't serve to earn God's favour or salvation.

It is the way we show our amazement that Christ would die to save us.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1)

3. Because we belong to Christ.

You were a slave to sin, but you are now a slave to God.

You have a wonderful master who speaks wonderful words you are now free to obey.

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." (Romans 6:22)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

4. To show that we are followers of Jesus.

"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love." (2 John 4-6)

5. For sake of the church.

To strengthen the church so that it becomes more mature.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

Our service plays a part in the church becoming more Christlike in her appearance.

D. How do we serve?

1. With effort.

Three of the terms that are used for service in the New Testament imply hard work.

Labour: toil that results in you becoming weak and weakened.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Contending: struggling in partnership with others; working hard together.

"Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke-fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:3)

Fighting: being prepared to commit your last ounce of strength to gain the victory.

"To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." (Colossians 1:29)

"Fight the good fight of faith." (1 Timothy 6:12)

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

2. With joy.

Joy in serving God.

Joy in serving others.

3. With humility.

Following Jesus' example.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:14-15)

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

4. With perseverance.

Serving is tiring work, but God gives us the strength to keep going.

"And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right." (2 Thessalonians 3:13)

E. Where do we serve?

1. Church and community.

The local church is the primary context for service.

Scripture contains more than fifty commands about relating to one another.

But it also takes place in the community as we love our neighbour and tell them the gospel.

2. Structured and spontaneous.

The local church provides structures to allow for our service to be done in "decency and order".

But that doesn't stop spontaneous service which can happen anytime, for anyone, with plenty of flexibility.

3. Believers and unbelievers.

Ed Clowney: *"The church is called to serve God in three ways: to serve him directly in worship; to serve the saints in nurture; and to serve the world in witness."*

F. Conclusion

1. Who are you serving?

"No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

2. How are you serving?

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

Serving in the church is not just the privilege of the few – it is the call of every Christian's life.