

Addicted To Servanthood by Jeff Strite

Romans 12:1-12:8

I read about a woman who telephoned a friend and asked how she was feeling.

"Terrible," came the reply "my head's splitting and my back and legs are killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are simply driving me crazy."

The caller said, "Listen, go and lie down, I'll come over right away and cook lunch for you, clean up the house, and take care of the children while you get some rest. And then I'll fix dinner for Sam when he gets home from work."

"Sam?" the complaining housewife gasped. "My husband's not Sam."

"Oh dear me, I must have dialed the wrong number." exclaimed the first woman

There was a long pause. "Does that mean you're not coming over?"

This morning we're going to be focusing on what Romans calls the "gift of serving."

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is... SERVING, let him serve" Romans 12:6-7

Those with the gift of serving are the ones who would COME OVER. They are the ones who would be there for you in just about every situation.

Now the word for "serving here is "diakonia" and it's closely related to the word "diakonos" which is the word for "Deacon."

The purpose of Deacons was (and still is) to be the official SERVANTS for the church

In Acts 6, there were certain widows who were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. This was a day long before Social Security and Government safety nets, and the early church took their responsibility to these needy women very seriously. But apparently, the widows that weren't from Judea were being left out of the distribution of food.

The Apostles realized if they focused on this need personally, it would take away from their main ministry which was to teach and preach about Jesus, so they asked the people to choose 7 men who would be Godly and filled with the Spirit that they could trust with this responsibility.

These 7 men became the first Deacons, and their job was to serve the needs of widows to make sure they were taken care of properly.

These deacons were the designated to SERVE the church.

But that doesn't mean they necessarily have the gift of serving.

They were simply trustworthy and Godly men who SERVED people in church.

In this congregation here, we have several deacons as well. They do things like...

- Take care of the building and grounds for us.
- Take communion to the sick and shut-ins
- Oversee the Food Pantry ministry
- And so on...

In too many churches Deacons do little more than sit on church boards and vote on things. Oh yes, and they pass out the communion and offering plates. That's a fairly pathetic use of people who should be serving rather than just standing around.

I praise God that in this congregation, there is no board. Deacons Deac (they do works of service) and Elders Eld (they oversee the congregation). The Deacons don't just stand around and do busy work. They work for Christ and for this congregation. They take their responsibilities seriously.

Like I said, Deacons don't have to have the "gift of serving" to do these tasks. They're just trustworthy and Godly men that we know we can count on.

In fact, you don't have to have the gift of serving to SERVE others! God is very clear on the fact that He expects ALL of us to SERVE all the others.

Ephesians 5:21 says we ALL should "...be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."
Galatians 5:13 declares "...through love serve one another."
1 Peter 4:10 tells us we should be "serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

ILLUS: There's the cute story of a Sunday School class where the teacher was trying to teach her children the benefits of being unselfish. She concluded by saying "The reason you are in this world, children, is to serve others." After a moment's silence, a little girl piped up: "Well, then, what are the OTHERS here for?"

The point is: You and the others are ALL here to serve each another.

At one point in His ministry, Jesus called His disciples together and He said to them, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28

Jesus set us the example of what serving was all about. He came to serve us. And He served us ultimately by giving His life on the cross so we could be forgiven.

The Apostle John picked up on this theme in I John 3:16-19 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

And then John explains what he means by us "laying down our lives for our brothers: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him,

how can the love of God be in him?

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence."

Now, why would Jesus HAVE TO tell His disciples to serve others?

And why would the John HAVE TO tell the people at the church he was writing to serve others?

Well... because for most of us, serving doesn't come naturally.

We have to be taught and reminded and prodded once in a while into being servants of others.

ILLUS: And part of that comes from the fact that – when we 1st become Christians - we are waited on and coddled a little bit, like little kids. And little children are like that. They need to be fed and pampered and changed and focused on... but once they grow up they've got to change. They've got to take on responsibilities.

There are too many churches that are filled with babies who want to be taken care of. But grown up Christians realize they have to act like adults. They have to become servants of others.

But the folks who have the gift of serving - they come by it naturally.

They enjoy it.

They're passionate about it.

Seeing someone in need (for them) is like a person saying "sickum" to a dog.

They just see the need and jump right on it.

I read the most intriguing verse this past week. It's in the KJV and it says this:

"...you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." 1 Corinthians 16:15 KJV

They were ADDICTED to serving the saints.

Now we all ought to serve one another! But apparently some of us are better at it than others. Some Christians are literally addicted to serving because they have "gift of serving".

You can usually see a person like this at church.

They're the ones who are always in the kitchen getting food ready for others

They're the ones who come up with ministry ideas.

Here it's the servers who came up with the idea of a Food Pantry

Another family came up with the idea of a quarterly clothing giveaway.

Doug came up with the idea of the TOUCH letters (blank sheets on the back table that have sticky notes on them describing a person who is sick or in the nursing home, or who has a special event in their lives... and people write encouraging thoughts on these sheets. The sheets are then mailed to the people they are meant to go to).

There are a few examples of these kinds of folks in Scripture

- Tabitha

Acts 9:36 says "In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor."

We're told in Acts 9 that she died... and the entire church went into mourning for her. It was like a huge hole had suddenly appeared in the fabric of their church family. They were devastated.

Then they heard that Peter was in the neighborhood and they sent for him. When Peter showed up "All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them." Acts 9:39

Now, why did they send for Peter?

The Bible doesn't say... but the implication is one of two things:

Either they wanted him to honor this great servant, or they wanted him to try and raise her from the dead.

Whichever one they wanted.... God gave them both:

Acts 9:40-42 "...he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord."

Everybody in Joppa KNEW who Tabitha was.

Everybody knew she'd died.

And when God granted that she rise from the dead, it shook that whole community and lives were changed. God honored Tabitha by allowing her death and resurrection to bring people to salvation.

That's how important a servant heart is to God.

God wants to honor the servants in His church in very special ways.

- Then there's the story a young man named Timothy.

We know of Timothy because of the two letters that Paul wrote to him, but we don't often realize what kind of servant this young man was. When Paul wrote to the Philippians he told them he was sending Timothy to them because "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Philippians 2:20

Timothy was a natural when it came to caring for people and their situations.

And Timothy was Paul's "go to" guy.

Paul wrote that Timothy "...as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel." Philippians 2:22

Timothy was a preacher in his own right... but when Paul needed encouragement or help Timothy was like a son, serving Paul when he needed it most.

In II Timothy 4:9-10 Paul appealed to Timothy and said: "Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia."

Everyone else may desert him, but Timothy was the kind of man who would be there for Paul when he needed someone to lean on.

ILLUS: Years ago I worked beside my brother when he was putting up a garage door opener for our folks. Jack knew exactly what he was doing. But I didn't. I hadn't a clue how to install something like this... so I began to feel useless.

But then I realized there was something I COULD do for Jack. He had to climb down off the ladder to get tools and parts for the opener, and so I began to anticipate what he'd need next. If I knew he'd need a screwdriver or a hammer, I made sure I was right there with that tool when he needed it.

I can picture Timothy being like that for Paul. When Paul needed something, I can imagine Timothy doing everything in his power to make sure that that need was supplied.

Now, like I said last week in my sermon, many scholars refer to the spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12 as being "motivational" gifts. These gifts from the Spirit MOTIVATE people to do various kinds of ministry.

Someone has put together a list of characteristics they think a person with this gift would have. These are the opinions of that commentator, but they seem fairly on target: (<http://www.mulock.org/media/Gifts%202012.pdf>, p. 13)

1. Those with the gift of serving see and meet the practical needs of others
2. They find ways to free others up to achieve their goals
3. They tend to disregard their own weariness – and tend to use...
... their own money/resources and strength to meet other's needs
4. They have a difficulty in saying "no" – they feel an obligation to meet needs
5. They are alert to the likes and dislikes of others – they seem to have an amazing ability to remember special days like birthdays and anniversaries as well as the favorite activities and foods so they can make occasions special
6. They tend to need approval for giving – appreciation is important to them
7. They like short range projects – they seem drawn to immediate needs of others
8. They put extra touches on the jobs they do – they like going the 2nd mile and putting personal touches in the way they help others.
9. They like to meet needs quickly – they tend to avoid red tape and committees

But people with the gift of serving also have some weaknesses they need to watch out for...

1. They tend to offer help that's not wanted. Can be seen as pushy and intrusive.
2. They can let "little" things become too important. They'll neglect their own homes and

families, in order to do service to others

3. They can end up working beyond their physical limits... exhaust themselves. And can end up with physical problems because of the conflicts their service can create.

4. They can neglect God-given priorities. Because they can end up in positions of responsibility they can end up doing work that they could share with others/delegation

5. They can react to overlooked needs. If others don't see the needs that are obvious to them, they can become offended by that. And if others don't follow up on their suggestions of what needs should be met, they can become resentful.

6. They can resent not being appreciated. They may forget their gift is from God and they are working for His approval – not man's.

7. They can end up working people around their schedule. Because they don't tend to delegate jobs to others... they can end up developing their own time schedule and forcing others to accommodate that schedule.

8. They can get frustrated with time limits.

9. Interfering with God's discipline. At times, the needs in another person's life can be caused by God's attempt to discipline them and bring them out of sin. Servants tend to want to solve everybody's problems... even those under judgment (Prodigal Son)

The point is... those who have this gift of Servanthood can be an inspiration to the rest of us. They instinctively do what all the rest of us need to LEARN to do, and they can be examples to the rest of us of how we should be servants of others.

The problem for servants is that they tend to want to do this all by themselves. They often don't want to share the opportunities because they LIKE doing this stuff, and as a result people who could benefit from learning to be better servants get blocked.

ILLUS: Preachers run into this kind of mindset all the time. In the first church I served I did everything... and I loved it. It was fun. I gave the communion meditations, sang in the choir, led the singing on Sunday morning, ran the youth group... and on, and on, and on. It was fun. But I robbed others of the opportunity to serve God in those many and various ministries.

That can be the problem for those with the gift of serving.

The best servants not only understand HOW to serve... they look for ways to involve others.

And the best servants follow the example of Jesus.

He laid down His life for us.

And the best servants lay down their lives for others.

CLOSE: I want to close with this story about a man named Bob Pierce. Bob had advanced leukemia. But he went to visit a friend in Indonesia before he died.

As he and his friend were walking through a small village they came upon a young girl lying on a bamboo mat next to a river. She was dying of cancer. And she only had a short time to live.

Bob was upset. He said, "Why isn't she in a clinic? Why isn't someone taking care of her?"

But his friend explained that she was from the jungle, and she wished to spend her last days next to the river, where it was cool and familiar.

As Bob gazed at her, he felt such compassion that he got down on his knees in the mud, took her hand, and began stroking it. Although she didn't understand him, he prayed for her.

Afterward she looked up and said something. "What did she say?" Bob asked his friend.

His friend replied, "She said, 'If I could only sleep again, if I could only sleep again.'"

Bob began to weep. Then he reached into his pocket and took out his own sleeping pills, the ones his doctor had given him because the pain from his leukemia was too great for him to sleep at night.

He handed the bottle to his friend.

"You make sure this young lady gets a good night's sleep, as long as these pills last."

Bob was ten days away from where he could get his prescription refilled. That meant ten painful and restless nights. But he considered it worth the price to serve Christ by laying down that part of his life for this young woman.