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### BEING GOD'S SERVANT

*If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me. Where I am, there My servant also will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:26)*

#### BACK ON TRACK

Once at a large convention, a man approached me, grasped my hand, and said, "I used to be a pastor." He went on to explain that in his first church some ungodly leaders bitterly opposed him and determined to run him out of the church. They hurt him and his wife deeply by their actions and their lies. The pastor eventually resigned in anger, vowing he would never serve in the ministry again. He took a job with a friend in a new company as its executive vice president.

The business became extremely successful, and the former pastor enjoyed financial prosperity like he had never imagined. Then one day, the church he attended began a study of *Experiencing God*. Those taking the course learned that God is at work to redeem a lost world and that He invites people to join Him in His work. The former pastor was struck deeply as he remembered the time God had invited him to join His work in the church. The man realized he had forsaken his divine calling by leaving the ministry. He resigned

his lucrative position in the company and accepted the pastorate of a small church. "I'm a pastor again," he told me with tears in his eyes. This dear brother had lost sight of the fact that he was a servant and that his Lord had a right to assign him to any task He chose. After he regained a clear view of God, it put his bitter feelings in their proper perspective. Once again, he was fulfilled and content as a pastor.

The point is not that every businessperson should resign to enter the ministry, but that to participate in God's work you must be a servant. Many Scripture passages describe Jesus as God's servant. He came to earth to accomplish God's will in redeeming humanity. Paul described Jesus' humble attitude and commended it to us in this way:

Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5–8)

We are to develop the servant attitude of Christ that requires humility and obedience. In His instructions to His disciples about servanthood, Jesus described His own role of service: "Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27–28).

Jesus also explained our relationship to Him, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). When you respond to God's invitation to salvation, you join Him in His mission of world redemption. The salvation God offers comes with a corresponding summons to be on mission with Him. In this new relationship you move into a servant role with God as your Lord and Master.

The common understanding of a servant is someone who approaches the master and says, "Master, what do you want me to do?" The master tells him, and the servant goes off and does it. But that is not the biblical picture of a servant of God. Being God's servant is quite different from working for a human master. While

an ordinary servant labors for his master, God works *through* His servants.

The biblical portrayal of God's servant is more like a potter and clay. God described the relationship with His people this way:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down at once to the potter's house; there I will reveal My words to you." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, working away at the wheel. But the jar that he was making from the clay became flawed in the potter's hand, so he made it into another jar, as it seemed right for him to do.

The word of the LORD came to me: "House of Israel, can I not treat you as this potter treats his clay?"—this is the LORD's declaration. "Just like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel." (Jer. 18:1–6)

To be useful, clay has to be pliable. Once it is made into a vessel, its usefulness is still subject to the discretion of the potter.

### DIVINE MASTER AND HUMAN SERVANT

This portrayal of our service to God is far different than the way people serve one another. When you offer yourself to God as His servant, He first expects to shape you into the instrument of His choosing. He will always work *in* you before He works *through* you. As you obey, He is the One who completes the work. We'll address this subject further when we look at Jesus' life in chapter 6.

As God's servants, we must do two things: (1) be moldable and (2) remain available for the Master's (Potter's) use. Then the Master will use us as He chooses. We can do nothing of kingdom value in our own power. As Jesus said, "The Son is not able to do anything on His own" (John 5:19) and "you can do nothing without Me" (John 15:5). When God works through His servant, that person can do anything God chooses to do through his or her life. The potential is unlimited. But servanthood requires obedience. Servants of God must do what they are told, and they must remember who is accomplishing the work—God.

If you have been operating from a disoriented approach to spiritual servanthood, this concept should change your perspective about

serving God. You don't receive orders, then go and carry them out to the best of your knowledge and ability. You relate to God, respond to Him, and adjust your life to Him so He will do what He wants through you.

### EXPO '86

When the World's Fair was coming to Vancouver, our affiliation of churches was convinced God wanted us to reach out to the twenty-two million people who would visit our city. Yet the combined membership of all our Vancouver churches was only about two thousand. How could such a small group impact such a mass of tourists from all over the world?

Two years before the fair, we sought the Lord's guidance and began to do what we sensed He was telling us. The total income for our association was \$9,000. The following year it grew to \$16,000. The year of the World's Fair we set a budget of \$202,000. Obviously we were attempting something only God could do. Often churches or denominations will establish a practical budget that represents what they can do. Then they might set a second "hope" or "faith" budget. The figures they really trust and use, however, are in the "real" budget—the funds they can manage themselves. The rest is more of a wish list that we do not make use of unless the funds materialize. But I suggest that is not faith at all.

As a group of churches, we knew God had definitely led us to a work that would cost \$202,000. So that became our operating budget. Our people began to pray for everything we believed God was leading us to do during the World's Fair. At the end of the year, I asked our treasurer how much money we had received. We had taken in \$264,000.

People from all over North America assisted us. And, of course, money was not the goal. It was a means to accomplish what God told us to do. During the fair we were a catalyst, seeing almost twenty thousand people accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord! Only God could have done that. He accomplished it with a small group of people who had determined to be servants and who made themselves available for their Master's use. Today our world does not need to see what we can do, but people desperately need to witness what God wants to accomplish through us.

### ELIJAH THE SERVANT

Elijah was one of the great Old Testament prophets of Israel and a servant of God (see 1 Kings 17:1) during the time when King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, through their wicked leadership, led the people of Israel away from God to worship Baal, a Canaanite fertility god. We read in 1 Kings 18:16–39 that Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a public showdown to prove definitively who was the true God. This was an extremely bold move since Elijah was outnumbered eight hundred and fifty to one.

Elijah proposed that the prophets of Baal prepare a sacrifice and ask their god to send fire to consume it. He would similarly appeal to the God of Israel for fire. Of course, Baal—who was no god—did not answer the prophets' pleas, even when they wailed and pleaded. When it was Elijah's turn, he repaired the altar of the Lord and laid out his sacrifice. God answered with fire, consuming the sacrifice—and even the stone altar—as Elijah had proposed. If God had not displayed His own work by sending fire, Elijah would have utterly failed, and that would have cost him his life. It's crucial to understand that this test was not Elijah's idea but God's.

Throughout the process, Elijah had to remain close to God and do whatever the Lord commanded. Elijah acted in obedience to God's command. He went where God told him, when God told him, and he did what God told him to do. In his prayer Elijah said, "Let it be known that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that at Your word I have done all these things" (1 Kings 18:36). Then God accomplished His purposes through Elijah who attributed the work back to God when he said, "You have turned their hearts back" (1 Kings 18:37). Elijah wanted the people to identify the Lord as the true God, and that is exactly how the people responded.

So to review: Did Elijah bring down fire from heaven, or did God do it? God did. What was Elijah's role? Obedience.

Elijah had no ability to bring fire down from the sky, but God did. Elijah did not have the strength to overcome eight hundred and fifty hostile idol worshippers, but God did. When God did something only He could do, all the people knew He was the true God. God did this mighty work, but He acted through His servant Elijah. Because Elijah made his life available for God's use, God did a powerful work that impacted the nation.

## ORDINARY PEOPLE

When you think about working with God in His mission to redeem a lost world, you may ask, "What can one ordinary person do?" One of the wonderful Scriptures that has helped me on this point describes Elijah: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit" (James 5:17-18).

This mighty man of God was an ordinary person just like you and me. But when he prayed, God responded miraculously. Elijah did not have any unusual giftedness or power. He simply humbled himself in the role of a servant. He obeyed everything God instructed him to do, and God worked through Elijah to influence an entire nation to return to God.

### Peter and John

Peter and John were two of the first disciples Jesus called to follow Him. After Jesus' resurrection, God healed a crippled beggar through Peter. Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin—the highest court in the land—to give an account of their actions. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter spoke fearlessly to the religious leaders. Notice the peoples' response: "When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and knew that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Most of the people we read about in the Scriptures were ordinary men and women. Their relationships with God and God's activity in their lives made them extraordinary. Did you notice the statement—the leaders recognized that Peter and John "had been with Jesus"? Peter and John were common fishermen, but their association with Jesus made them world changers. Anyone who enters into an intimate relationship with God can see God do exceptional things through his or her life. The outcome does not depend upon a person being unusually gifted, educated, or wealthy. The key is the indwelling presence of God doing unusual things through a willing servant.

### D. L. Moody: A Common Shoe Salesman

Dwight L. Moody was a poorly educated shoe salesman who felt the call of God to preach the gospel. While visiting the British Isles, Moody attended an all-night prayer meeting with some friends. The next morning, his friend Henry Varley said, "The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him."

Moody was deeply moved by those words. Later, he listened to the famous pastor Charles H. Spurgeon preaching in his massive church in London. Moody's biographer described how he responded:

"The world had yet to see! With and for and through and in! A man!" Varley meant any man! Varley didn't say he had to be educated, or brilliant, or anything else! Just a man! Well, by the Holy Spirit in him, he'd [Moody] be one of those men. And then suddenly, in that high gallery, he saw something he'd never realized before—it was not Mr. Spurgeon, after all, who was doing that work: it was God. And if God could use Mr. Spurgeon, why should He not use the rest of us, and why should we not all just lay ourselves at the Master's feet, and say to Him, "Send me! Use me!"

Soon afterward, God began to use Moody in powerful ways. Moody had come to realize that his effectiveness did not depend on his own eloquence, charisma, or intelligence but on his surrendered life to Christ. Moody could not make himself more talented, but he could choose to be more surrendered. As he yielded his life to God, he immediately began to experience God using him in ways he could never have imagined. Moody became one of the greatest evangelists of modern times. During much of the nineteenth century he preached in revival services across Britain and America where thousands upon thousands of people came to faith in Christ.

Could God work in extraordinary ways through your life to accomplish significant things for His kingdom? You might say, "Well, I am not D. L. Moody." You don't have to be. God wants you to be the person He created you to be and to let Him do through you whatever He chooses. When you believe that nothing consequential can happen through you, you have said more about your belief in God than you have indicated about yourself. The truth is that God can do anything He pleases through an ordinary person who is fully dedicated to Him.

### John the Baptist

It probably does not surprise you that God's standard of excellence is different from ours. The public ministry of John the Baptist lasted perhaps six months, but what was Jesus' estimate of John's life? "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John" (Luke 7:28).

Don't measure excellence by the world's standards. Many denominations are doing it. Many pastors and churches are doing it. Many business people are doing it. By the world's assessment, a person or church may look pretty good yet in God's sight be totally unacceptable (see Rev. 3:17). Similarly, a person or a congregation may be wholly yielded and pleasing to Him yet in the world's eyes appear insignificant. Could a pastor who faithfully serves God in a small rural community be pleasing to the Lord? Of course—if that is where God placed him. Could a homemaker or shoe salesman bring great glory to God through the seemingly ordinary tasks they accomplish? Yes. God will look for and reward faithfulness, whether the person has been given responsibility for little or much (see Matt. 25:14–30).

God delights in using ordinary people to accomplish His divine purposes. Paul said God deliberately seeks out the weak and the despised things because it is from them that He receives the greatest glory (see 1 Cor. 1:26–31). When God does exceptional things through unexceptional people, then others recognize that only God could have done it. If you feel weak, limited, and ordinary, take heart! You are the best material through which God can work!

### SUMMARY

The call to salvation carries with it a summons to be on mission with God as He reconciles a lost world to Himself. This calling requires you to be a servant of God. Jesus provided the best model of servanthood, which is both humble and obedient. As a servant you must be moldable and remain available for the Master's use. Even though you may consider yourself ordinary, God will prepare you. Then He will do His work through you, revealing Himself to a watching world.

### EXPERIENCING GOD TODAY

Consider what kind of servant you are for God. Today, make a special effort to serve your Lord in anything He prompts you to do.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you prefer to see yourself as a servant or as a manager? What kind of servant are you for God?
2. Do you ever feel as if you are too ordinary or that you have failed too many times to be of use to God? If so, what does the Bible say about that?
3. Have you set conditions for how or where or when you will serve God? How do you think God views your conditional obedience?
4. How have you been experiencing God working powerfully through your life in ways only He can?
5. Do you need to make a fresh surrender of your life to Christ and His service? If so, take the next few moments and offer yourself to God in a sincere, wholehearted act of submission to Him.