

- I heard someone say once that there is no truly good deed. No one ever really serves selflessly. They said that even when we serve others, it is to make ourselves feel good or look good to others.
 - Let me begin by saying there is so much serving in this church. So many give of their time and money and energy for the benefit of others. I am so privileged to be a part of it.
 - But here is a problem that we face. We don't mind serving, but we don't always want to BE a servant.
 - When serving is something we DO, there is always the temptation to stop serving when life is busy or difficult, to serve others on our own terms, to serve when it works for us, to get a high, when it fits our schedule, when it makes us look good.
 - When a servant is who we ARE, it changes things, because **LIVING AS A SERVANT IS GOD'S PATH TO SIGNIFICANCE.**
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- I want to take you to an imaginary conversation. A conversation I picture happening before the world was ever created.
 - Jesus: I was thinking we could create something new. It is going to be awesome. A massive universe with galaxies, black holes . . . it'll be huge. The centerpiece is this one solar system and this one planet. There we will pour out our creativity and make all kinds of stuff. Mountains, valleys, oceans with animals, fish, birds etc. The crowning achievement will be this new species called man. We'll make them like us. They will be able to think and we will actually be able to have a relationship with them. They will be who we can pour out our love on.
 - God: In order for that to work, you are going to have to give them the ability to choose relationship with us.
 - Jesus: I know.
 - God: You know what's going to happen, right?
 - Jesus: Of course I do, I'm God. They are going to mess it up. They are going to choose themselves over us.
 - God: It's serious. They will be in rebellion. Their sin will go against our holiness. They will be in disobedience. We can't just let that stand. You know that right?
 - Jesus: Yes, I'm God. We could wipe them all out at that point and start over. We could try again. Or maybe we just shouldn't start on this in the first place.
 - God: Or . . . you could go. You could go live with them. It would mean becoming so small and being like one of them. It would mean putting some of your God stuff aside. Even though you are God, you will have to become fully man.
 - Jesus: They won't recognize me. They won't appreciate me. They won't want me. They will react poorly to me.
 - God: But you can model love. You can model what it is to serve. But someone has to pay the price for their sin and rebellion. You know where this will end?
 - Jesus: Yes. After all, I'm God. It means I have to die. I have to suffer. I have to allow these . . . people, to abuse me, torture me, and ultimately end my life.
 - God: It will be painful. It will be hard. You don't have to do this.
 - Jesus: I will. What better way to show the power of a serving love? Besides, death isn't the end. I will give them a couple of days to think about it, and then I will come back to life. I will serve them with my death and even more with my life. Then they will be able to serve others and show them my love so that even more people will come into that amazing, glorious relationship that we designed between them and us.
 - God: That, my son, is a good plan.

- The essence of a conversation like that was captured in the bible by a man named Paul.
- Paul, the man who wrote a lot of the NT. A man who met Jesus and it changed his life. A man who went from being a man of power and position to a servant.
- In one of his letters he wrote to some people in a place called Phillippi.

Phil 2: 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

- This is what Jesus was like, and by the way, it's exactly what you are to be like because just like Jesus modeled, **LIVING AS A SERVANT IS GOD'S PATH TO SIGNIFICANCE.**
- What's the difference between DOING service and BEING a servant?

I. SERVANTS USE THEIR ENERGY TO BENEFIT OTHERS.

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

- What is selfish ambition?
- Selfish ambition means to promote yourself. It means putting your self-interest first and seek your own gain, regardless of the problems or impact it causes.
- Obvious ways this plays out is the person who is trying to make a name for themselves. Utterly selfish. Exists only for themselves.
- But it can also be subtle. It could be doing something for someone and feeling irritated that we didn't get credit. It is not having a conversation because we know it is not going to be a quick one and they are going to dump on us. It might be taking care of all of our own needs first before looking to help another person.
- Think of it like having a will. While we are alive, all our stuff is ours. But when we die, we decide where all our stuff goes. To kids, grandkids, friends. For their use. It is not for me, since I'll be dead. Servants live this way now with their money and time.
- Living as a servant kills selfish ambition. When we learn to not always act off what is best for me in the moment, our hearts begin to change.

II. SERVANTS LEVERAGE THEIR POWER AND POSITION FOR OTHERS.

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

- Do nothing out of vain conceit.
- Vain conceit is to think highly of ourselves. But not the positive, healthy self-assessment way, but a view that claims power or position and asserts or compares itself against others.
- It is operating with the assumption that at some level, I deserve more, have earned it, or conversely, they haven't. When we act like this, we serve on our terms only.
- The entire story of Easter is a story of a God who had more power and prestige than anyone. He was the creator of all things. He could do what he wanted, when he wanted, for himself and his own benefit.
- Yet instead of using all this power for himself, he leveraged his position as God, he used what mattered for us. He put aside what did not help and used what did, for us.
- Only God could die in my place. Only a perfect man could take the penalty due me. Only the creator could make things right again. And so he did.
- A servant is one who looks at what they have in terms of time, energy, health, money, stuff and is continually asking how they can leverage that for others.
- What's interesting about Paul's wording is that he calls it "vain" conceit. This means an empty pride. There is no basis or justification for any superiority we have over others.

III. SERVANTS PRIORITIZE PEOPLE.

3 Rather, in humility value others above yourselves

- When Jesus came and died, he was making an enormous statement. His suffering and crucifixion and then his coming back from that day was in essence saying, "I value you enough to do whatever it takes for what is best for you."
- This characterizes a servant.
- They value others above themselves, which is simply to make sure they come first in priority.
- Prioritizing others is the opposite of narcissism. Narcissism is a preoccupation with self. It's when the filter for our relationships and actions is me, how I feel and how it will impact me. My decisions are based ultimately on what makes me feel better, look better or think well of myself.
- It can even color our relationship with God. It is about how God is speaking to me. My struggles. My issues. What I heard from God. How he helps me.
- Because it so easy to land here, we are to put others not equal, not the same as us, but above ourselves. We do this when our first thought is not about me and how this will affect me, but how I can help someone else.
- If true serving kills selfish ambition, it destroys narcissism. Servants make a practice of making their first thought the other person.

IV. SERVANTS PRACTICE EMPATHY.

4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- Our natural tendency is to take care of ourselves first. In fact, the idea of serving someone else when doing so would hurt our own interests goes against what we feel.
- If paying for something for someone else means I have to go without, we shy away from it. If helping another person means I lose my personal space or down time, I might hesitate.
- Have you ever considered that Jesus' death did not benefit himself?
- He got nothing out of it. There was nothing he needed from it. He did not get a "high" from serving. He didn't gain wonderful relationships. It did not give him something that he was missing. It was not an experience to be enjoyed.
- His death and resurrection was for us. He thought of our interests, our needs, and he went there.
- In order to live as servants, we have to begin to look at things from the perspective of others. What do they need? How are they hurting? What is going on?

• **LIVING AS A SERVANT IS GOD'S PATH TO SIGNIFICANCE.**

- What happened as a result of Jesus serving us as he did?

9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Jesus is alive. Exalted. He is more powerful than anyone. His name is glorious. He is Lord and eventually, every single person will bow down and acknowledge that he is Lord of all.
- His serving actually resulting in greater exaltation than he had before. It led to relationship with us. It led to an opportunity for us to know him.
- He tells us the same thing.
- You want to be significant, serve.
- I did not do this so you could be comfortable and happy.
- You want to make a difference, serve.

- I served you so you could serve others. Confidently. Without reservation. Not worrying about what you will get out of it.
- Because of Jesus:
- A servant will use their energy for others because Jesus used his energy for us.
- A servant will leverage their power and position to serve, because Jesus leveraged the power and prestige of heaven for me.
- A servant will prioritize people, because Jesus made me his single greatest priority.
- A servant will practice empathy, because the God of the universe saw my greatest need, and chose to live and die in my place, so I can know him and be assured of his presence in this life and the next.
- On this Easter, may we remember Jesus example and begin to lives as servants. As we do, we will change and we will change others, because **LIVING AS A SERVANT IS GOD'S PATH TO SIGNIFICANCE.**