

- I have been blessed to travel around the world in my lifetime.
- When possible, Yvonne and I love to go to new places, see new things, and experience new activities, try new foods – it's great.
- Here's what we have noticed as we travel around the world.
- Americans have a pretty bad reputation as tourists. When we travel, we sometimes make a point to tell people we are Canadian. Many studies of people around the world (including Americans themselves) say that the worst travelers are American. There is even a term that's been coined called "Ugly Americans" – which is someone who behaves offensively when abroad. Kind of makes you proud, huh? I have even noticed this behavior on missions' trips.
- Some of the things that "Ugly Americans" do?
  - They criticize "strange" customs and cultural differences. "Why do they do that? That's stupid and backwards. Ha-ha, look at this."
  - They demand to find America wherever they are. "What, the air conditioning broke down? Where are the waffles, eggs and orange juice for breakfast? Why aren't they on time?"
  - They make no effort to communicate with the "natives." "This menu isn't even in English." The US is at the top of the pyramid and all the other less developed countries are trying to get there.
  - They say the classic ugly American question: "How much is that in real money?"
  - The truth is that it is probably a minority of people that made this reputation, but what it is based on is the thought of superiority. They see themselves as a privileged people. As members of one of the most powerful nations on earth, a country that had gotten it RIGHT militarily, industrially/and culturally.
- It's a self-centered, ethnocentric way of looking at the world.
- What happens when that kind of attitude is part of our everyday life? What happens if we as Christ-followers begin to see ourselves as having gotten it RIGHT, while everyone else tries to "catch up"?
- We started last week a discussion about living as servants. We saw that there is a difference between being someone who serves and someone who lives as a servant.
- We are to live from our identity as servants, following Jesus example.
- In our discipleship family dinner this week, we had a fascinating discussion about being servant. As we talked about the whole idea of serving others, there were some problems that came up that we all had felt, encountered or lived with when it comes to serving.
  - 1) It's exhausting. We are all busy. Yet I feel the guilt that I should be doing more. The more and more I think about serving others leads to me feeling like it is just one big burden. There are always more needs and more people and more things we could do. We are already busy. If serve like I feel like I should, then I will never have any time for me or down time or anything else.
  - 2) I can get into mindset of serving being the indicator of whether or not I am a good Christian. It can become a way to gain God's approval or at least feel better about myself for a time. When I don't serve, I feel less good about myself, when I do serve, I feel better about my relationship with God. I'm already doing a lot of things and now you want me to do more?
  - 3) I end up having to do all kinds of things I don't like or enjoy or am not good at. I have to fix someone's house or yard, run a 5k for charity or help with kids. What happens when I really don't want to do something and serve in a way that I am not good at or don't like?

- When we think about living as servants, and following Jesus example, I think that we sometimes miss it.
  - We end up exhausted, tired, irritable because of all we do and judgmental of those who don't, or we have guilt and shame because we don't do "enough."
  - I don't believe either end of that spectrum is the place to be.
  - That's because **SERVING FLOWS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**. If we get this right, it changes our entire approach to serving.
- To help us with this, I want to look at part of a letter written by someone who walked and lived with Jesus. From someone who did not understand the idea of living as a servant, but who saw Jesus model and teach about it and was ultimately changed.
  - It is in the letter written by Peter, we call it the book of 1 Peter, to a church of people that were suffering, going through all kinds of hardship, living in a culture hostile to following Jesus. He writes to encourage them and in the midst of this, he writes this:  
*1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so 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.*
  - Peter begins this little paragraph with the statement, "*The end of all things is near. Therefore . . .*". The end of all things means the end of this world. Since this world is not forever, this is how you are to live.
  - Have you ever wondered why God doesn't just immediately take us to heaven the moment we accept him? I mean, we believe in him. We ask for his forgiveness. Why does he leave us in a messed up world?
  - Because God has a role for us in fulfilling his purposes. We have a greater purpose rather than simply doing everything that feels good to me. The fact that the time is short should be motivation to live for and serve Jesus by serving others.
  - **SERVING FLOWS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**, because:

### I. "WHAT" MATTERS MORE THAN "HOW MUCH".

*7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.*

- Why would Peter start a discussion of serving by talking about being alert and sober minded so that we can pray effectively?
- Serving, the kind of serving that Jesus calls us to, starts with God.
- Jesus modeled this to his disciples. There were times he stopped serving in one area to start serving in another because he spent time with God and God redirected his efforts.
- To be alert and sober minded allows for proper spiritual relationship, for prayer.
- We don't impress God by our busyness or the sheer quantity of how much we help other people. This is how we get exhausted, burnt out, working to gain God's approval or to look good to others.
- What God wants is for us to listen to him so that where we serve is where he wants us to serve.
- This means slowing down enough to hear him.
- I most often hear God prompt me to do something for another person when I am in the midst of praying for that person. I will be praying for them and a thought of something that would be good to do pops into my head. Sometimes it's immediate, sometimes it will mean making a commitment later.

- A couple of things happen when we make a point of listening to God.
- First, what we do is more effective. God knows what is needed and when it is needed. It is amazing to me when God prompts something and we do it, it is exactly the right thing at the right time.
- Two, more happens with less. When we listen to God first, the things we do fit with his plan. They match what God is already doing. The result is disproportionate. Example: I recently had coffee with someone. It was just a casual 1-hour coffee where I felt it was important. They came back 3 months later about how God had used something I said to utterly change their approach to ministry.
- Hear what I am saying. I am not saying that listen to God and you will get to serve less. Sometimes God asks us to do a lot. It can be tiring and hard. Jesus gave up his life to serve. But when we follow God's voice, it will always work out better.
- How do we hear? Pray for others. Ask God to show you opportunities. God gives us plenty of opportunities to imitate him if we are willing to do it. Then, when God prompts you, do it. Don't overthink it. If possible, obey immediately. If you are in doubt that you are hearing God, do it anyway. It is hard to mess up by serving another.
- **SERVING FLOWS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** When we are in relationship we learn that:

## II. "DO" ≠ "BE"

*8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

- A bird is not a bird because it can fly. It flies because it is a bird. Fish swim because they get to, not to prove they're fish and to please the other fish.
- What should flow from our relationship with Jesus is service. It starts with him and then moves into our lives.
- It begins as we love. We are to love one another. Deeply. The word deeply means stretched or strained, like an athlete straining to win a race. To cover over a multitude of sins means we can see and accept others despite their faults, sins and shortcomings, and love them through it.
- Love is deeply connected to living as a servant.

### *[ILLUSTRATION / STORY]*

- Christopher Hitchens was a militant atheist who died in 2011 of cancer. He hated Christianity and often used demeaning and insulting language with Christ-followers. He engaged in many debates a number of Christian apologists, and he wrote a book called "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," which was a best-seller.
- Then Hitchens developed throat cancer.
- There was a wide range of online comments made by Church goers about his cancer. Several were from believers expressing concern. Some offered hope for his recovery. And some said they were praying for him. But then, there were also comments like these:
  - "How apropos, losing the throat with which he used to blaspheme."
  - "This foul reprobate in the end, knowing he shall die, will beg for forgiveness."
  - "I can't wait until the last little breath in his miserable body starts to fade, and then he will know if there is a God or not."
- Thomas Kempis, a famous theologian from the 1300's, said: *"Whoever loves much, does much."*
- Right on the heels of this, Peter says we are to offer hospitality without grumbling.
- The primary reason for hospitality as Peter is writing is not to entertain the guests, but to meet their needs. In the culture of the day, hospitality to people traveling, other Christ-

followers being persecuted, was huge. You were to provide the guest a place to stay, food to eat, a listening ear for conversation, a heart to express love and acceptance.

- During times of persecution, hospitality was especially welcomed by Christians who were forced to journey to new areas.
- We are to be a people who love others the way Jesus loved us deeply.
- We are to be those who are looking for needs.
- Here's an interesting principle. If we truly love where we see a need, we will always serve.
- It won't be from guilt. It won't overwhelm us. It won't be about trying to earn God's favor, or be a good Christ-follower, or about looking good to others. **SERVING FLOWS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** He directs where we serve and it isn't to earn his love. Because of that:

### III. WE DON'T HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING.

- Peter then proceeds to be a little more specific with the whole idea of serving others. Loving and caring for needs lays the groundwork.

*10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others,*

- "Each of you." No one is exempt from this command. It is not for some people to serve and others to not. It's who we are.
- "Whatever gift you have received." Everyone has something to offer. Every single created person has something they can serve with. What's interested is the word "received." No matter what gift you have, it is from God for the purpose of serving others.
- If we see our stuff, time or talents as ours, or earned by us, or belonging to us, then we get to be the ultimate decider of who "deserves" our service.
- Look at what you like to do. What are good at? What do you enjoy? Where do you seem to be making a difference? Serve there. Serve those people. You might be right where you need to be or you might need to make some adjustments.

*as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

- We are extended God's grace to others because we have received God's grace. It does not look the same for everyone. "Various forms" means it is manifold, varied, rich in variety.
- We all serve differently and this is how God planned it because the needs of people are vast, with different ways of receiving God's grace.

*[ILLUSTRATION / STORY]*

- Did you ever try to teach your child something and they did not seem to get it? You repeated it over and over. Then, one day when they are 14, they come home and tell you about this amazing thing someone else said. It was life changing for them. And you say, "that's what I've always told you." They received it differently from a different source.
- Likewise with serving. We serve differently and God knows which of us will serve a person in just the way they can best receive it.
- We have to stop these self-deprecating comments like "I can't do anything" or "I have nothing to offer" and its arrogant opposite, "I have to do everything." Yes, you do and no, you don't.
- Peter breaks down serving into two broad categories.

*11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so 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.*

- We serve through our words. Peter understood better than most the power of words.
- We can absolutely serve others through what we say. How we listen. The things we speak (or text, or email, or write, or teach). Our words should reflect the heart of God. How can you serve someone through what you say?

- We serve through our actions. The word used is the same one to specifically talk about helping others in physical, practical ways. The list of ways to help physically is too long to even list. Whatever it is, we are to let God direct and empower our effort.
- Serving is not about trying to think of more and busier things to keep us occupied.
- Rather, think of the relationships you already have. Perhaps you have a spouse, or kids, or co-workers, or neighbors, or parents or friends.
- Talk to God about them. Ask God to help you love them and reveal their needs. Look for how you can serve them in what you say. See if there is any action that could show the grace of God to them. Then do it!
- **SERVING FLOWS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**
- Let God set the agenda. Listen to him. Don't define yourself by what you do. Don't try to do everything.
- Following Jesus is not about what we can get out of it. What the church can do for me, for my kids, for my wife, for my husband. We don't follow Jesus to feel good. We don't get to walk around saying, "The church should . . ."
- We serve so that in everything we say and do, God gets praise through Jesus. Serving is always designed to point people to God.
- If we only serve when we are energetic, have time and "feel it" then we are not living as servants. Serving can be tiring. It can be hard. But when we start with God, what we do will have more impact than trying to do a bunch of things. We are free to love others because how God sees us doesn't change because we do or do not serve.
- We are most like Jesus when you we serving others.
- Ask God to put you on high alert to the needs of others.
- Genuinely ask people how they are doing. Seek to learn what's going on with them.
- Listen more and talk less.
- Plan margin in your day. Don't over-schedule your day. Leave space for interruptions.
- Rather than pushing to be first, let them go ahead of you.
- Imagine others as if they are Jesus. Treat them the way you would treat Him.
- We are unable to control most things in life, but we have complete control over our attitudes. We can choose to serve or be served. It's that simple.