



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Sept 28th - Oct 4th

Sermon: September 27th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

September 28

Matthew 20:28

The Greek word that is most often translated in English as “serve” is used 38 times in the New Testament. When we look more deeply into this rich term, we can quickly discover that the word has a deep and multi-faceted meaning and this becomes quite clear when we discover that it is translated into multiple different English terms based on the surrounding context. My goal this week is to examine several of the passages where the original Greek term shows up in order to see how different English words contribute to an abiding and deep understanding of the biblical idea of service.

Today’s text gives us an obvious example as Jesus’ teaching on the topic of service is recorded for us. The context is rather humorous as the mother of two of Christ’s disciples approached Jesus with a request for her boys. Essentially, she desired for them to gain a position of prominence within the Kingdom which caused quite a stir amongst the larger group!

Christ was a master at seizing opportunities to teach and, in this case, He transformed this little interaction into a moment of instruction by shedding light on His mission and His posture towards those He came to save saying, “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...” This idea of a serving Savior was revolutionary, but it really should not have been. Many of you will recall that some of the most poignant and obvious prophecies about Christ in the entire Old Testament are found in Isaiah’s “servant songs” (see chapters 52-53 in particular).

Christ came as a servant, and He also came to triumph in exaltation and those things are connected! In fact, Jesus says that if a man desires to be considered great in the Kingdom, he must be the servant of all.

The idea of service here is unveiled as we consider the tenor and mission of Christ’s life. Jesus came, denying Himself by offering Himself in life and death to those who did not deserve even His presence, much less His atoning sacrifice. Christ’s service was one of unmerited grace, and it was not conditioned upon the response of others. Some embraced Him but many rejected His ministry and yet His service remained steadfast and resolute.

In the same way, our service should mimic His. Obviously, we cannot give ourselves to redeem others, but we are called to offer ourselves as living sacrifices for the glory of God and the well-being of our fellow man. We offer ourselves in service by extending grace, meeting needs of those around us, offering counsel and walking with those in grief (just to name a few) and all along the way we are to be motivated in instructed by the One who came to show us what it means to serve.

September 29

Matthew 20:28

Before we move on to the next passage on service, let's take a day to focus on the two components of service that we see listed in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 20. First, notice that service requires self-denial. Jesus did not come to be served! Now, He obviously deserves to be served. In fact, He is the only One in the entire history of mankind who rightly merited everyone else's deference. Nevertheless, He did not live His earthly life with that mentality.

In the same way, if we are going to serve, we must think more about the needs of others than our own. It is easy to serve those who are kind, appreciative and reciprocate but the kind of service that we are called to is not nearly that circumstantial! Christ served those who mocked Him, despised Him and doubted Him. How about us? We will not be faithful in serving such people if we are constantly thinking about our own interests and recognition!

Second, service requires initiative. Think about all that had already happened prior to Jesus' Words in Matthew 20. He had taken on flesh, dwelt among the people, called the disciples to Himself, ministered in a variety of context by feeding the hungry, helping the sick and preaching the truth and He was preparing to serve in the most fundamental way by giving His life to redeem the lost! Jesus always took the initiative in His service. He ran towards those in need and gave sacrificially so that they could have provision.

How about you? Does your service require someone's request? Are you looking for ways to serve or are you content to sit back and wait until someone makes their request made known to you? Obviously, there are times that we are unaware of a need prior to a person's request but, generally speaking, those who desire to serve are those who are actively looking for opportunities to serve.

As you consider our corporate "Life in the Body", think about ways that you may be able to emulate your Savior by denying self and running to those who could use your help! I am always amazed at the joy, hope and faith that comes out of my service to others. The Lord is never more visible to me than in moments of loving my neighbor and I would surmise that this is because He has called us to imitate Jesus and, when we do, we experience His presence as we follow His steps.

September 30

Matthew 25:44

Today's verse utilizes the same word that is translated "serve" in Matthew 20... can you spot it? If you guessed "ministered," you would be correct! This famous passage of Scripture records Jesus' commendation of those who serve or "minister" to others in need in His name. The point of the passage is easy to grasp as the Lord is affirming those who are faithful to help others in need. In doing so, God reminds us that service is often geared towards helping and encouraging others.

Interestingly enough, there are a few other places where the term "ministered" is utilized in the Bible (Mark 1:13; Matthew 4:11; 2 Corinthians 8:19) and in all those places we are reminded that service includes encouragement through meeting people's needs and rejuvenating them (physically and spiritually). Simply stated, service is about more than a good deed, it is often about helping others to carry on in their God-given responsibilities as well.

I wonder how many of us look at service in this light. Service is not some ritual or duty-bound activity as much as it is a privileged opportunity to encourage and help others. This being so, I have found that there are few things in life that are more rewarding than the result of this kind of service. Indeed, when we serve through the eyes of faith, we are reminded that the proverbial cup of water given in the name of Christ can both assist our fellow man AND help us walk with God more closely as He highly esteems our labors of love.

Do you see service as a ministry in this regard? I do believe that one of Satan's great devices is to trivialize or minimize our service by lying to us about what is actually being accomplished. I can't tell you how many times I've encountered a discouraged or despondent saint whose joy was sapped precisely because they came to believe that their service was either not valuable or not noticed.

Brother or sister, if that is you today, be encouraged by this passage! First, the ministry you render is valuable not because of the mortal who receives it but because our God commends it. Second, be reminded that this service is noticed even if the people who receive it take you for granted. God is the One who is all-knowing and God has clearly taught us that our service is valuable in His eyes. Fight for the faith to see your service through the prism of your relationship with the Almighty. Look for ways to employ the gifts and resources He has given you for His glory and trust that His commendation is worth far more than any other recognition or notes of appreciation you could possibly receive.

October 1

Luke 8:3

Today's text translates our word of the week as "provided". I love the picture here of service being provision! In its context, Luke 8:3 is a description of the ministry of service that several ladies offered Christ and His disciples in providing for their needs as Jesus continued to minister.

While the idea is simple enough to grasp, the implications are far more comprehensive than I sometimes consider. As I pondered this text, I found myself wondering if I look at my service as a means of God's provision. Stated differently, do I see my service to the Lord at Smyrna (or in my personal life) as a vehicle through which God provides for the needs of others?

The difficulty here is that we don't always see the fruit of our labor in the provision of others. It can be challenging (if not downright impossible) to discern how our labor can meet needs that we may not always comprehend but that should not change the fact that we offer our service unto the Lord in the conviction that He indeed can, and will, provide through us!

Would your motivation to serve be increased if you saw your service as a means of helping someone else? Would you be more prone to show up and serve in our church if you considered the ministry you offer in the nursery, for instance, as the means God is utilizing to give an exhausted and spiritually dry young mother a chance to replenish her soul with the truth of the Word? Would you serve with more gusto and commitment if you realized that your singing in the choir contributes to the ministry of the Spirit amongst the people? Would you be more apt to help in the welcome center if you knew the effect a warm cup of coffee or a kind greeting had on an individual who needed to hear God's Word and fellowship with God's people?

I do wonder if the ladies described in Luke 8 had any concept of the magnitude of their ordinary service. My assumption is that they made some connections between the provision they offered and the gravity of the ministry of Christ. Their meals and financial support were God's way of providing for the earthly needs of the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! In like manner, your service to the Lord is a way that God ensures that this lamb of God is proclaimed and honored such that many are drawn to Him and those who are already apart of the fold are strengthened. What a marvelous opportunity we have to serve!

October 2

Acts 19:22

Today's text utilizes the term "helpers" to denote those who are servants of the Lord. When I think of the term helper, I tend to land on the concept of those who operate underneath the watchful eye of someone more qualified, and more publicly recognizable! In this case, my description surely fits as the Bible tells us that Paul sent his "helpers" (Timothy and Erastus) into Macedonia to assist in Gospel work.

Timothy and Erastus were not the "main event" in that moment in history. They were best known by their association with a missionary who was greater than they were. Their credibility did not necessarily lie in their own resume, instead they were sent by the authority of one who was more accomplished and more respected than they were.

When these men arrived, they were undoubtedly accepted but their standing in the church was largely based on their relationship with Paul. I have learned that some folks love this role of "helper". I have seen people that are not only indifferent to the spotlight of leadership, they actively avoid recognition! These folks seem to have no problem with the "helper" tag but there are many others (myself included) who can struggle when they feel like they are relegated to the background or not considered as one of the leaders.

Jesus spoke about this in a text that we have already studied in a previous devotion when He said, "those who wish to be great must be a servant of you all" (Matthew 20:26). In other words, Jesus is telling His disciples that those who desire to be recognized in the Kingdom must be helpers! There is no place in the Kingdom for limelight hogs, there is only a spot for those who realize that they are the Lord's helpers.

Interestingly enough, Luke describes Timothy and Erastus as Paul's "helpers" but Paul would state that he was nothing other than a servant (or "helper") of the Lord Jesus Christ! Paul did not think he had arrived as the authority over all things, and this meant that he was uniquely suited to guide others who desired to help him as he served the Lord.

Could it be that some of you struggle with bitterness and unrest because you are actively searching for a position that you will never have? If so, I have learned that there is no greater joy than realizing the beauty and significance of being a helper in God's Kingdom. The moment that I look for glory is the moment that I slide into despair but when I place my eyes on the magnitude of Christ and consider that I am able to help further His mission, I find a life of purpose and joy that the world knows not.

October 3

2 Corinthians 8:20

Some of us think the word “administration” is a cuss word! I know that my experience with an “administration” runs all the way back to elementary school when I used to run afoul of the principal and his administrators quite often! Administration, in that context, had leadership connotations but, as I have grown, I realize that administration is most often associated with support. At Smyrna, we have an absolutely awesome “administrative assistant”. Audrey keeps many things running around here and often her work is not seen out in the open. Additionally, your pastors have a responsibility to be faithful administrators, as we are called to steward the resources that God provides in this place so that our ministry can be as functional and fruitful as possible.

Today’s passage shows us that administration is an act of service in this respect. Paul understood that he was responsible for the “gift” (in this case, financial) that was given to him on behalf of the church for the mission of the Gospel. In this sense, his service was grounded in taking that which had been provided and leveraging it to the best of his ability for the most impact on the church and world.

In the same way you and I, as servants, are called of God to steward the gifts and assets He gives for maximal glory. This means that your act of service is also an act of stewardship! Has God given you a beautiful voice? Then you have been called by Him to administer that gift to the best of your ability! Has God given you the gift of teaching? Then you have been called by Him to leverage that gift for His glory amongst His people and around those who don’t yet know Him.

When we think of our service in administrative terms, we are reminded that we answer to someone! Some people seem to fly through life with little consideration given to their responsibility before God. It seems that many think that God will simply accept any crumbs or pittance we are willing to give Him and, therefore, they give little thought to administration in their service! Unfortunately, this way of thinking robs others and, most importantly, dishonors the Lord!

I would implore you today to give thought to your service before God. Consider what He expects of you and do all that you can to administer the gifts you have been given with a grateful heart and with conviction that all that you have is meant to be used for the good of others and the glory of God!

October 4

1 Timothy 3:10-13

If you read the text prior to reading the devotion today, you might wonder where in the world the term “servant” is found in a passage about deacons! After all, you might think, this passage isn’t about servants; it’s about leaders in the church. Paul starts out talking about pastors and then quickly pivots to deacons and yet, somehow, we find the idea of service in this text... where?

The answer, believe it or not, is in the name. Did you know that we have been studying the Greek term “diakonos” all week? Look for just a moment at that Greek word and see if you can’t spot the connection between the Greek and the English word “deacon”. Isn’t it interesting that those who hold the office of deacon in the church are literally the servants of the church?

Over the years, many churches have corrupted and conflated the idea of the office of the deacon. When I was a kid, the deacons were the ones who ran most of the churches my dad pastored. Some of them would flatly tell you that they ran the church but even those who would not go so far as to say they were the leaders participated in a system that elevated the deacons to the ultimate authority structure. Everything in these churches had to be approved by the deacons; no decision was made without the deacons. The deacons were the ones who called the shots and, consequently, there was oftentimes very little opportunity, or desire, to serve!

In fact, many deacons aspired to the office of deacon because they wanted some clout. This being so, the significance and the biblical importance of the deacon have been missed... but it shouldn’t be so! After all, we read that Jesus is a servant. Paul was a servant and his disciples were his “helpers”. We have all been called to “administer” the gifts we have been given, and our administering gifts should lead to “provision” for those who need it and, in all these things, God has ordained an office of the church to lead the way by example.

Smyrna folks, I must tell you that I believe our deacons do a marvelous job of servant leadership. These men are faithful to assist you and are concerned that the needs of the body (particularly the physical needs of the body) are met. We are blessed to have such faithful deacons and we are blessed, in part, because they understand that to be a deacon is to be a servant and that is true by definition.