

The Spiritual Discipline of Service

Bible study material taken from Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991)

1. Intro:

- a. *"An 1860 San Francisco newspaper printed this ad for the Pony Express: 'WANTED: Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk daily. Orphans preferred.'" Donald Whitney*
- b. The pony express operated from April 3rd 1860- Nov. 18 1861- It stopped when the telegraph lines were put up.
- c. We need to be honest with the facts about the Discipline of serving God.
 - i. Like the Pony Express, serving God is not a job for the casually interested.
 - ii. It's costly service.
 - iii. He asks for your life.
 - iv. He asks for service to Him to become a priority, not a pastime.
 - v. He doesn't want servants who will give Him the leftovers of their life's commitments.
 - vi. Serving God isn't a short-term responsibility either. Unlike the Pony Express, His Kingdom will never go under, no matter how technological our world gets." Whitney, 116
- d. *"In some ways we would prefer to hear Jesus' call to deny father and mother, houses and land for the sake of the gospel, than His word to wash feet. Radical self-denial gives the feel of adventure. If we forsake all, we even have the chance of glorious martyrdom. But in service we are banished to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial."*¹
- e. The ministry of serving may be as public as preaching or teaching, but more often it will be as sequestered as nursery duty.
- f. It may be as visible as singing a solo, but usually it will be as unnoticed as operating the sound equipment to amplify the solo.
- g. Serving may be as appreciated as a good testimony in a worship service, but typically it's as thankless as washing dishes after a church social.
- h. Most service, even that which seems the most glamorous, is like an iceberg. Only the eye of God ever sees the larger, hidden part of it.
- i. That's why serving must become a Spiritual Discipline. The flesh connives against its hiddenness and sameness. Two of the deadliest of our sins—sloth and pride—loathe serving.
- j. *"Not every act that may be done as a discipline need be done as a discipline. I will often be able to serve another simply as an act of love and righteousness, without regard to how it may enhance my abilities to follow Christ. There certainly is nothing wrong with that, and it may, incidentally, strengthen me spiritually as well. But I may also serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or*

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), page 110

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covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life.²

2. **Expected** to Serve

- a. **Hebrews 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- b. Motivated by Obedience
 - i. **Deuteronomy 13:4** You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.
 - ii. *"If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will."* John Newton.
- c. Motivated by Gladness
 - i. **Psalms 100:2** Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!
 - ii. *"Something is wrong if you can't serve the Lord with gladness. I can understand why the person who serves God only out of obligation doesn't serve with gladness. I can understand why the person who serves God in an attempt to earn his way to Heaven doesn't serve with gladness. But the Christian who gratefully acknowledges what God has done for him for eternity should be able to serve God cheerfully and with joy."* Donald Whitney
 - iii. **Psalms 84:10** For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
 - iv. Do you serve on that church committee with gladness or with gloom?
 - v. Do you serve your neighbors willingly or reluctantly?
 - vi. Do your kids get the impression from you that serving God is something you really enjoy or merely endure?
- d. Motivated by Forgiveness, not guilt
 - i. **Isaiah 6:1-8** "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:
ii. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
iii. 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!**"
iv. 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a **burning coal** that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold,

² Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989), page 182.

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this has touched your lips; **your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.**" 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**" **Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."**

- v. "The people of God do not serve Him in order to be forgiven but because we are forgiven" Donald S. Whitney, 121.

e. Motivated by Humility

- i. **John 13:12-16** When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.
- ii. We must never think we are any better than anyone we serve. We serve to share Christ's love, never because we have pity on someone.
- iii. That is why we can serve someone no matter whether we think they deserve it or not, rich or poor, sick or healthy.
- iv. **Philippians 2:3** 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
 - 1. *Can you serve your boss and others at work, helping them to succeed and be happy, even when they are promoted and you are overlooked?*
 - 2. *Can you work to make others look good without envy filling your heart?*
 - 3. *Can you minister to the needs of those whom God exalts and men honor when you yourself are neglected?*
 - 4. *Can you pray for the ministry of others to prosper when it would cast yours in the shadows?* Donald S. Whitney, 122.

f. Motivated by Love

- i. **Galatians 5:13-15** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
- ii. *"A missionary in Africa was asked if he really liked what he was doing. His response was shocking. 'Do I like this work?' he said. 'No. My wife and I do not like dirt. We have reasonably refined sensibilities. We do not like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse.... But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? God pity him, if not. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to 'Go,' and we go. Love constrains us."* Donald S. Whitney, 122-123.
- iii. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
- iv. **Mark 12:31** "Love your neighbor as yourself"

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g. Spiritual Gifts

- i. **1 Peter 4:7-11** The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- ii. Whatever gift you have or have seen, it has to be for God's glory and His kingdom alone, it is not for us.

h. Serving can be Hard Work

- i. **Ephesians 4:12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
- ii. **Romans 1:1** Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,
- iii. Every Christian is a servant of God, and servants work, they don't sit and watch!
- iv. **Colossians 1:28-29** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil (**labor, work to the point of exhaustion**), struggling (**Strive, agonize**)) with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.
- v. *"But remember that service costing nothing accomplishes nothing. And even though serving God can be agonizing and exhausting work, it is also the most fulfilling and rewarding kind of work. In John 4:34 we read where Jesus has been talking with the woman of Samaria. He's been walking all day. He's tired, thirsty, and hungry. And it's all because He's been serving His Father. While He's resting at the well near Sychar, this Samaritan woman comes to the well. They talk and her life is changed forever. As she goes back into Sychar to tell others about Jesus, His disciples return from town, where they've been to buy food. When they offer some to Him He says, 'My food ... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work' (emphasis mine)." Donald S. Whitney, 126.*
- vi. **John 4:31-38** Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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- vii. **1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
- viii. **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.
- i. Sometimes we Serve in **Secret**
 - i. Matthew 6:1-4 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
 - ii.