



DEVELOPING  
AN  
ENVIRONMENT  
OF SERVING

*Thinking*

What reasons have you heard for why people should serve others?

What approaches have been taken to get you to “pitch in” in some way at a local church?

*Reflecting*

In the midst of a “Gospel message” Paul offers some insight into our thinking about serving. Read Acts 17:24-25.

What is Paul affirming about God?

What does he say about people serving God?

Back in the Psalms, David also has some insight for us on serving God. Read Psalm 50:12 and 15.

What does David tell you about God?

What does he say about how we are to relate to God?

*Taking it to heart*

Although these aren’t the only passages that address the topic of “serving God,” they help us get our orientation right. What perspective about serving God arises from Paul and David’s words?

How do these passages challenge or help define the way you think about serving?



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## LEADERS' GUIDE FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

MAY 11, 2008

### SELECT SCRIPTURES

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## DEVELOPING AN ENVIRONMENT OF SERVING

### *The big picture*

This week we begin a short series on the topic of service. But what we want to focus on is not so much "getting people to pitch in," but helping them understand what it is that God has in store for them as they find their place of service in the community of faith. In other words, it's not so much about getting workers but giving opportunity to others to grow in their life with Jesus.

In this first week, we really want to bring the attention to just one simple thought: When we serve we are not "meeting a need" that God has. That is, in serving, we are neither making up for some lack in God or pulling our weight so that His plan won't fail. That's not the Biblical picture of why we serve.

### *Thinking*

In the opening section of the discussion guide, the questions are geared toward raising to the surface the kind of motivation that is sometimes used to involve people in serving. Just think out loud with your group about the kind of invitations they have heard through the years.

Sadly, the call to serve is sometimes couched in the terms of "Think of all that Jesus has done for you! Shouldn't you do something for Him?" But the subtle implication behind such a call is that *we had a need that Jesus met and that now He has a need that we can meet.* That's the somewhat wrong-headed motivation that we want to address in our discussion.

### *Reflecting*

When you turn to Acts 17:24-25, make sure you note that this is not the only place "serving God" or "serving

for God" is described in Scripture. We are not arguing that this exhaustively addresses the issue. However, it is crucial to note that when Paul begins to speak to those who don't yet really know God, he wants to make it clear that the God of the Bible is not like the pagan gods; those gods *need help* while the God of the Bible does not. However else we think about serving God, we must not think that in our serving we are giving Him something He is in desperate need of.

In Psalm 50: 12 and 15, David gives us a contrast between us and God. What is David underscoring? Only this: We don't come to God to give Him something He needs, we come to God to get from Him what He alone can give.

Some might say that although this is true when we come to God for something big, like salvation, but that other times we, in fact, can "give" something to God. But keep this simple truth in mind: If we make up some lack in God or give to Him something that He needs, then He becomes our beneficiary and we step into the role of benefactor. But that, in reality, is never the case! God is never the beneficiary of our "grace and goodness;" He always is the benefactor.

If you want to root this idea a bit further in Scripture, consider looking to 1 Chronicles 29:10-14. There, after David and the people generously gave toward the building of the Temple, David announces in his prayer that "For all things come from You [Lord], and from Your hand we have given to You" (29:14). The idea? Whatever the people might be giving to the Lord actually were simply returning to the Lord what already was His.

This is the truth that underlies all Christian serving. We don't give to God something He needs nor fill up some lack He has. Whatever we give to God is only returning to Him what He has so richly first given to us. This attitude is reflected in Paul's words to the Corinthians when, in chastening them for their haughtiness in ministry, reminds them: "What do you have that you did not receive [from God]?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

What is the point of all of this? Let's underscore the key idea again. When we serve, we do so out of the riches of God's grace that He has bestowed on us. We give only what we have been given. We serve, as it were, out of His riches.

### *Taking it to heart*

Over the next two weeks, we will explore a bit more about serving. But as you take this week's thoughts to heart, try and help your group get their arms around this idea that there serving is not so much a giving to God but an experiencing God's riches through participation. We serve to join God in what He is doing in bestowing His riches on others. We are conduits of grace, not personal resources of blessing. We are channels of His giving, not rich reservoirs of goodness in ourselves. With such an attitude, we might just be freed, in fresh ways, to genuinely serve in God-honoring ways.