

Reforming Servanthood The Centrality of Gospel in Christian Service

By Nathaniel Loren Palmer

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PART I – The Vision

Chapter 1: Leaving the Jungle – Serving Reformed

When Japanese Lt. Hiroo Onoda emerged from the jungle of the small Philippine Isle of Lubang, some people considered him a hero, others a fool to be pitied, and a select few held him up as the last vestige of a once glorious but now defeated Empire. All these reactions to his story were natural given the fact Lt. Onoda was still fighting World War II some thirty years after it actually ended. Over the years, numerous attempts were made to persuade him to leave the jungle. Leaflets with newspaper clippings touting the war's end were dropped. Japanese officials were sent traipsing into the jungle. Even his own father paid him a visit. However, nothing could convince Lt. Onoda that the war was over and that Japan had been defeated. He dutifully refused to abandon his jungle post.

After his former superior officer trudged into the dense jungle in 1974 to order him to surrender, Lt. Hiroo Onoda finally turned himself over to the victorious Allies. Once back in Japan he found that for three decades he had lived in the wilderness and had waged his own war with a deluded view of the world. The world in which he now found himself in was vastly different than the one he so dogmatically clung to in his jungle. He discovered that Japan had indeed lost the war.

Sometimes we find our selves standing at the edge of our own proverbial jungle, and feeling just a little bit like Lt. Hiroo Onoda. This is especially true when God reveals things about His creation that go against our deluded man-made vision of our own world. *“I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish”* Isaiah 44:24-25. Serving in the local church has been my jungle island.

In the past, serving in my local church has been many things including a vehicle for selfish gain. I felt that serving is just what good Christians must do. Sometimes I served the church trying to atone for sins I committed that week, as a way to justify myself to God. Other times, serving on Sundays was simply a way to gain attention from church leaders. I hoped that they might see my works and then use them to evaluate me for higher positions of leadership.

Serving to self-promote, to appease a guilty conscious, or to commend one's self to God is not what God intended. Serving is neither to be defined nor to be performed with these motives in mind. This book is for those of us with myopic eyes towards serving the local church and stuck in our own jungle of self-delusion. We will explore the depths of God's vision for serving the local church as well as our role and motivation.

My Jungle Home

When I became a Christian at the age 25, immense joy and gratitude fueled me to do anything I could to give something back to God. The church I started to attend offered a great opportunity to do exactly that. I was so excited to be a part of God's kingdom, that I did not mind spending the time or effort serving. Before church I set up the book table and after church I would help load all the equipment back into the church van. The great relief of knowing I was (because of Christ) saved from God's wrath, had me unfazed about any hard work for God. I knew my future was in heaven and so my present discomfort or sacrifices did not matter to me.

After awhile, the feeling of joy and passion to serve had faded entirely. Struggles with remaining sin and the concerns of everyday life began to cloud my passion for God. The truth of my salvation had dimmed in its significance. Slowly I forgot how novel and amazing it was to actually be a part of God's kingdom. I eventually no longer understood why I was coming to church so early and leaving so late. Every Sunday I was spending considerable time and effort serving the church while more and more I had to force myself to continue serving.

The environment in the church did not help me either. I saw others, seemingly able to survive without serving, enjoying their Sunday's while I toiled. Maybe they understood something I didn't. If faith, not works, saves us then what does it matter if I serve in the church? The more I thought about enjoying my Sundays, the more I became bitter to the idea of serving and to the people I served. This bitterness was further enhanced through the seemingly monotonous and meaningless tasks on Sunday morning. How could stacking chairs be any benefit to me or to God? I could no longer comprehend why I served. I had become "burned out" and extremely frustrated by serving. In a matter of years, my focus shifted from amazement of the Gospel onto burdens of Church life.

Then our church decided to send a church planting team to Dallas, Texas. My wife and I felt God calling us to go with them. I knew the embryonic church would need people to serve a lot more than in an established church, but I questioned if I could do that. I knew I couldn't serve in the condition I was in. I felt as if I would be a dead weight to the church and a liability to my pastor.

As I remembered the passion I had when I first became a Christian, I started asking myself how I got to this spiritual malaise. Just a couple years ago I was so "on fire"... what happened? Why did I serve in the first place? Why should I continue to serve? Who am I serving for anyway and why them? Is there any purpose to serving? How can I stop from drifting into bitterness? Why should I serve when other people never do anything? Where in the church should I serve? What is the incentive and motivation for me to serve?

Many Christians constantly struggle with these and similar questions and I certainly was no different. I began to write my feelings down after the move to Texas. I searched the Scriptures and Christian books for help. That is when I came across a passage that profoundly affected me. It started me down a path that revolutionized my view of servant hood:

Now as they were on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

On first glance, this is not the most motivating of scriptures when it comes to serving the church. Jesus actually tells Martha not to serve and to sit down like her sister Mary. I was prepared to treat this passage as irrelevant to the topic of serving when I began wondering just what Jesus was communicating? What is He really telling Martha? What was he telling me? Am I a Martha? When I looked closer I saw that the emphasis of this passage is not on how to serve but rather whom to worship.

I discovered that answers to questions on serving are derived from the very core of everything Christian: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This truth makes the person and work of Jesus Christ the epicenter of serving. The good news of Christ brings meaning, motivation, and power to all we do, including serving. It transforms serving into worship. I found that serving is the innate response to having an eternal savior.

Jesus is telling every Martha out there that serving is ultimately just a lot of activity if its focus is not on Christ. Jesus was explaining that the “whom” our focus should be on in serving, gives birth to the “why”. Our understanding of Him informs, motivates, and defines our serving. Unless Christ is our focus when we serve, then we are just distracted with meaningless busywork. This truth opened my eyes to the false reality I had immersed myself in. I had had a Lt. Hiroo Onoda moment.

The Gospel Manifesto

When I started this journey, I was certain that serving was tied to mimicking Christ’s example and teaching. Christ served others so we should try doing likewise. However, following Christ’s teachings does not save us. Even if we wanted to, we could never fully reproduce His example. None of us could ever serve anyone like Christ did when he died on the Cross. Our salvation lays in the person, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Our salvation requires nothing or no one else.

Serving is not primarily about following an example. It is a reaction to possessing Christ as a savior. In his teaching, Jesus is merely informing us what that reaction should look like. Without Jesus Christ, there would be no reason to spend time and energy serving. No matter if billions of lives were made better through our serving, without the life and work of Christ, all of it would be totally irrelevant. *“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes”* James 4:14. Without the Gospel, our lives, our actions, and our words are like mist that vanishes upon the morning light.

Devoid of the news that Christ bore our punishment, serving would be useless and meaningless. There would be no hope of eternity; all of us would be destined to Hell. Life would be a free-for-all, with every man for himself. There would be no motivation, no benefit, and more importantly no reason to serve. Without the Gospel, we would not understand love, mercy, or grace. The Gospel makes serving possible and provides the fuel for the fire of our hearts. That is why serving must be always saturated with the Gospel.

Historically, I have treated the glorious news of the person and work of Jesus Christ as peripheral to serving others and the church. The Gospel was simply the background information to my Christian walk. Scripture, however, shows us that serving starts with the Gospel, flows out from the Gospel, and is intended to enlighten others to the Gospel. A deficient view of the Gospel leads to an incomplete understanding of the meaning and importance of serving in the local church. More notably, we would never bring the glory to God that he deserves.

The implications of the Gospel must be clearly understood and then applied to every facet of our life.

This level of application requires servants who are obsessed about the Gospel. Being obsessed about something means to be enraptured, possessed, and totally pre-occupied with it. In other words, the Gospel is not a pill to be swallowed once upon conversion. Although its justifying power is singular, the Gospel is a constant companion that both motivates and facilitates our serving. If that is true, then the Gospel must be the starting place for defining a vision for serving in the local church. There can be no other starting or reference point.

A proper Gospel-based vision of serving is the fulcrum and foundation of any service ministry. It is more central and vital than the methods or tools used to carrying out serving. Our serving by itself cannot save anybody from his or her sins. Only the Gospel can do that. Only the Gospel can radically change us from serving ourselves to serving God. That is why the Gospel is so important to serving.

The Vision

So what is God's vision of serving? What did I find that altered my perspective? I discovered that God *intended serving to magnify the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and to the benefit of others*. This book will examine that vision closely by unpacking each of those ideas.

We are about to delve into a complex subject that contains many different facets, each derived from direct application of the Gospel. Each one has a major impact on our lives. Serving is a vital piece in God's plan to sustain a people for Him while they live in a sinful and hostile environment. This biblical vision will reform our Christian service from a self-centered to a Gospel-centered orientation.

It is impossible to fully understand serving as God intended because we are not God. However, we can plumb the depths of serving with insights into God's plan and character given to us by Scripture. Then we can seek to find ways to impart and apply that vision to the local church and ourselves.

Creating a vision, nevertheless, is only the beginning. Once it is established, the vision becomes useless if it is not applied in our life on a continual basis. We can all have an intellectual grasp of the Gospel and yet still serve with grumbling and bitterness. But to really live in and through the grace of the Gospel, we must be possessed by it in our hearts. We must move on to application because in this we can bring glory to God, which is what we were put on earth to do. So are we ready to explore the Biblical view of serving? Good. Pack your bags and be prepared to say farewell to our little jungle islands.

Chapter 2: Bowling for Righteousness – Magnifying the Gospel

Believe it or not the game of bowling is inundated with religious history and dripping with theological significance. Throwing a round ball into pins all while wearing funny colored shirts and pre-worn shoes has deep roots in the atonement for sin and the assurance of salvation, or so at least some people thought:

The modern sport of bowling at pins probably originated in ancient Germany, not as a sport but as a religious ceremony. As early as the 3rd or 4th century AD, in rites held in the cloisters of churches, parishioners may have placed their ever-present club, or Kegel (the implement most Germans carried for sport and, certainly, self-protection), at one end of a runway resembling a modern bowling lane. The Kegel was said to represent the Heide (“heathen”). A stone was rolled at the Heide, and those successfully toppling it were believed to have cleansed themselves of sin. Although the peasants’ club evolved into pins, the association remained, and even today bowlers are often called keglers. - *Encyclopedia Britannica.*

The Cross of Christ was obviously not enough to atone for our sin, and that is why we must bowl! I seriously doubt however, that Paul had a bowling outfit in mind when he wrote in Ephesians 6 about having us be dressed in the armor of God. For that matter, Christ did not tell his followers to “pick up your bowling ball and follow me”.

To these ancient Christians, the ability to hit the pin was a sign of God’s favor on the bowler’s life and acceptance of their faith. So where did these Christians, who were only two to three hundred years removed from actual events of Christ, get such a notion that the cleansing of their sin was equal to their bowling score? (By the way if it were, this certainly would change the modern church landscape.)

Third century Christians lived in very difficult and violent times. Their faith was constantly challenged as they tried to reconcile all the evil and hardship they experienced with a loving sovereign God. It must have seemed with all the chaos that God was not in control. Somehow they came to designate the skill of bowling, as a sign that God was still there and still loved them. This had no basis in Scriptures nor is it even close to being true, but to them bowling brought comfort (and no doubt exercise).

There was a tragic misunderstanding that God’s sovereignty was not to be found in Christ. Instead they demanded more tangible signs to reassure themselves of salvation. The Cross had thus been exchanged for a bowling pin. Like the third century AD German bowlers, we can define things based on what we want them to mean rather than from Scripture. Serving is often one of these concepts.

We can define serving in a multitude of ways: as a precursor to worship, a means

of salvation, a means of penance, or just a necessary evil in the life of the church. The biblical view of serving is none of the above. Rather, Scripture shows us that serving is a reaction to having faith in Christ. The Bible explains how serving is intended to magnify the Gospel not replace it.

Defining Serving

The famed sixteenth century reformer Martin Luther loved to bowl. He had his own bowling lane made in his garden and he standardized many rules that still exist today. In fact, he is credited with limiting the number of pins to nine. Unlike the previous generations of German bowlers, Luther knew that his scores had nothing to do with his salvation. Actually, Martin Luther had what was at that time a revolutionary idea concerning justification. In his treatise to Pope Leo X called *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Martin Luther outlined his biblical stance that salvation was by faith alone.

From these considerations any one may clearly see how a Christian man is free from all things; so that he needs no works in order to be justified and saved, but receives these gifts in abundance from faith alone. Nay, were he so foolish as to pretend to be justified, set free, saved, and made a Christian, by means of any good work, he would immediately lose faith, with all its benefits. Such folly is prettily represented in the fable where a dog, running along in the water and carrying in his mouth a real piece of meat, is deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, and, in trying with open mouth to seize it, loses the meat and its image at the same time. ... he who wishes to do good works must begin, not by working, but by believing, since it is this which makes the person good. For nothing makes the person good but faith, nor bad but unbelief.

Martin Luther was making it clear that good works has nothing to do with our salvation. He argues that works based theology can actually be detrimental because someone can lose faith along with all its benefits. But what does justification by faith and serving have to do with one another? Just what does that word "serving" mean anyway?

Webster's dictionary defines *servicing* as performing tasks on behalf of another person, master, or personal employer. This definition is helpful but glaringly devoid of all reason and motivation. It does not explain what would make one serve someone else. Why would we want to be a servant? Is it for money or love? Are we being forced to? Is it for salvation? What differentiates Christian service from worldly service is that we do have the reason that motivates us to serve - Jesus Christ. We serve God because He first served us by sending His son to die as our substitute. As we place our faith in Christ, God looks upon us and sees Him who not only paid our penalty but also gave us His righteousness.

So do we serve God to be justified in Christ or did Christ's service justify us? What is the relationship between serving and our salvation? The relationship is

causal to be sure. But the connection is that our salvation causes our serving not vice versa. Salvation does not depend on works, on serving, or on knocking down bowling pins. We could never have produced enough righteousness through all Christian service to pay for even one of our sins. *“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”* Romans 3:28. Our righteousness, that is our basis for being given eternal access to God, is found solely in the person and service of Jesus Christ. Clothed by His blood, we can enter into the presence of a Holy God for all eternity. Nowhere is this truth more exemplified than in the thief who was crucified next to Jesus.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Luke 23:39-43

There was no possible way this convicted thief could have served other people. He was physically nailed to a cross. He could not comfort Jesus’ disciples, or bring meals to Jesus’ family, or atone for his own sin. Professing Jesus as the Messiah and then in faith begging for forgiveness were the only avenues open to him. Faith in Christ was all this criminal had and was all he needed.

So if serving has nothing to do with our salvation, then why should we be concerned about it? We must be concerned because good works, which include serving, are the barometer of our faith. Serving is both a consequence and testimony to our faith. The apostle James addresses in his epistle those in the church who think they can profess faith but never lift a hand to help anyone. James explains that an important by product of salvation is good works. Without this fruit apparent in someone’s life, the genuineness of his or her faith should be in doubt.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:14-16

James writes that both works and faith justify us. This seems to contradict what Paul wrote in Romans 3:28. So who is right, Paul or James? In actuality these are complimentary statements. Paul writes that faith is all we need for salvation. James is stating that we know that faith exists because of good works. Genuine faith births good works. Good works are a sign that the Gospel has changed our

hearts. So sanctification (becoming more conformed to Christ's image) is a symptom of justification.

James warns hypocrites, who say they believe in Christ yet show no signs of it, that if there are no works their faith is dead. He tells the church that faith, which results in good works, is a sure indication that we have received the Spirit of Christ. As John Owen explains in his edited Calvin's Commentary of James:

"The doctrine of Paul, that man is justified by faith and not by works, that is, by a living faith, which works by love, is perfectly consistent with what James says, that is, that a man is not justified by a dead faith but by that faith which proves its living power by producing good works, or by rendering obedience to God. The sum of what James says is, that a dead faith cannot save, but a living faith, and that a living faith is a working faith -- a doctrine taught by Paul as well as by James."

So faith without works is dead. But are works without faith similarly deceased? While works without faith would have earthly benefits to others, they in fact have no spiritual or eternal worth. Without faith, God is not glorified, man is. *"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."* Hebrews 11:6.

That also means that serving without the Gospel is also spiritually useless. It may benefit others but it does not testify to Christ nor bring God honor. This would not fulfill the purpose of serving which is to magnify the Gospel for the Glory of God and to the benefit of others. Serving is a reaction to the Gospel that testifies to our faith. Without the Gospel, our serving is about as meaningful as bowling. That truth induces, defines, and characterizes our service to others. It transforms serving into an expression of worship to God.

Magnifying the Gospel

We just discovered a totally different paradigm that revolutionizes the way we serve. The power of the Gospel is applied and spread through serving. Ordinary people like us highlight the Gospel when our service to others demonstrates one joyful, unyielding truth: God sent his son to live the life we could not, die the death we should have, and grant us eternal life.

Servant-hood is birthed and driven from an understanding and an obsession with the Gospel. We want to magnify it because we are grateful and we desire that others come to know that same truth! So just how does something like counting the physical inventory of books every month magnify the Gospel? Our faithfulness and devotion communicates a changed life willing to serve in gratitude. This magnifies the Gospel.

In Luke chapter 7:37, we find a woman who not only anoints Jesus feet with oil, she also wipes his feet with hair and tears, and then kisses them. This woman understood the Gospel. For those at Simon's party seeing a known prostitute get down on her knees and serve Jesus in such a way was very moving thing to witness. This unusual act communicated the power and grace of the Gospel message, which can radically change lives. Everyone in that room must have wondered what would make a hardened sinful woman serve with such obsession and joy. Simon asked a similar question and this is how Jesus answered him:

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." Luke 7:44-47

Like Simon, there are many people around us taking note of how and why we serve God. They notice that we miss the football games because we leave home early on Sunday and then return late in the afternoon. They observe the multitude of meals brought by strangers to their sick neighbor. They observe the joy with which someone washes their car and asks for nothing in return.

God is at work in all of these witnesses. He is magnifying the Gospel of Jesus through our service. It is like God is telling them, "Look here. Here are people who have been saved by my Son's sacrifice. Look and behold my power and mercy." Most people know and understand Webster's definition of serving. So when they see the biblical definition played out they have a difficult time reconciling the two. They ask themselves what's different here? Why would they serve like that? Who are they serving? What is the matter with them?

In that chasm, between the world's view and the Bible's view, is the Gospel. If they investigate the difference, they will encounter its truth, its impact, as well as its grace. In the book of 1st Peter, Peter similarly encourages his readers to keep magnifying the Gospel in all they do so that "*they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*" One affect of serving is to magnify the Gospel so others may receive Christ.

An unbeliever can witness firsthand the power of the Gospel to change lives, as people serve in gratitude for the eternal salvation they received from Christ's life, death, and resurrection. God may not use these occurrences to regenerate their heart, but he definitely uses them to either soften hearts or increase curiosity. God can even use our servant hood to illuminate the Gospel to those who hate and persecute us. "To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals

on his head.” Romans 12:20. Paul in quoting Proverbs 25:22 lays out the principle of how someone in Christ can point others, even when they are hostile, to Christ and to the grace and mercy of within His Gospel. Pastor John Piper says about this passage,

So now we know that this is not a mere call from God to imitate Christ. It is a call to trust Christ for our own salvation, and then, in the hope and strength and joy and assurance of that salvation show it to others by the way we live. Point them to Jesus as the only possible ransom for their sins—the only one who can pay their debt and overcome their evil with the good of his own death and resurrection.... So when we get to verse 20 and we hear that loving our enemies will bring “burning coals on their head,” there are two realities in this context, not just one. One is mercy and blessing if they repent. And the other is justice and wrath if they don’t.

[Sermon from 3/20/05]

So therein by serving our enemies in the love of Christ, we communicate Christ to them. We share the forgiveness and mercy once showed to us by Christ. Through Christ we are giving them a chance to repent and recognize their need of a savior. When we feed our enemy, we nourish them not only with mere food but we nourish them with the Gospel as well.

Case in Point - An Easter Story

This past Easter, our pastor greeted a gentleman who visited our church for the first time. When asked how he heard about the church, the man replied that he lives in the neighborhood and walks his black lab every Sunday morning. Each Sunday he said he witnesses something very unusual - a bunch of adults and teens unloading a trailer full of crates and pushing them into a school at 7:30am.

The man began to wonder why, regardless of the weather, people would do such a thing. After inquiring, he discovered that these people were part of a church. He became interested in finding out why people were so committed to such a menial task. Those curiosities lead him to attend our Easter service even though he does not usually go to church.

I do not know if we will ever see that guy again. However, I do know that God is somehow working in his heart. Our setup team was employed by God to show this guy something of how the Gospel affects lives. God utilized people’s service and dedication to the church to spread the Gospel to an unbeliever who was simply walking his dog at the same time every week that we unloaded the trailer.

Our hope and prayer is that God uses this occurrence to bring salvation to that man. It’s incredible that God used our setup crew to highlight the Gospel to that

gentleman. Maybe someday we will all rejoice together in heaven. That is the power and mercy of God. That is what happens when the Gospel is magnified.

We define serving or bowing to mean just about anything. Nevertheless, that does not change the definition God has defined and given to us in Scripture. God designed serving as an act of worship to God, performing tasks motivated by the Gospel, to glorify and honor Him. Once we grasp this truth, we will realize that our service is not required for salvation but is inspired by it. And I am overjoyed at that truth because I seriously stink at bowing.

Questions

- 1 Why do (don't) I serve in the local church?
- 2 How does my view of serving compare to God's view?
- 3 What qualifies me to serve? Is it my righteousness and obedience or Christ's?
- 4 What currently motivates me to serve?
- 5 Is my serving inspired by my salvation in Christ or am I bowing for righteousness?
- 6 In what ways does my current service magnify the Gospel?
- 7 How do(don't) I magnify the Gospel when I serve?
- 8 Are there any ways I am trying to replace the Gospel with serving?

Chapter 3: His Royal Highness of Sealand - Glorifying God

Laying six nautical miles off the coast of Suffolk, England, the Principality of Sealand has no visitor bureau nor does it in fact tolerate tourism. Its island territory comprises of an old sea fort built in international waters of the English Channel. The fort's 550 square meters is home to a grand total of five citizens. The little micronation has produced its own stamps, currency, and until recently passports. Its lone athlete has even represented Sealand at several athletic competitions.

Their Royal Highnesses Prince Roy Bates and his wife, Princess Joan Bates, founded the micronation of Sealand in 1967. That year "Paddy" Roy Bates and his associates set up a pirate radio broadcast tower on the old War War II sea fort and claimed it as its own sovereign country. The Bates' quickly created Sealand's Constitution which contains seven articles and establishes the hereditary succession of the new monarchy. One these articles called for a defense force called the Sealand Guards, which (believe it or not) actually saw combat. In 1990, the Guards fired in "defense" against the British vessel *HMS Golden Eye* when that ship sailed into Sealand's territorial waters.

Roy Bates went to some length to establish his own sovereignty. But what qualified him to rule an old sea fort in the middle of the cold and windy English Channel? Well nothing qualified him per say other than owning an active imagination and having some initiative. Roy showed it was possible for someone in the modern age to become anything he wants to be, even a king. Unfortunately for His Royal Highnesses Prince Bates, Sealand and consequently his royal status is not officially recognized by any other country. Roy's glory and rule ends at the rusty, sea worn-edge of the fort.

Unlike Mr. Bates, God's glory was not given or taken. It is intrinsic. God's rule has no restrictions or borders. Everyone and everything is subject to Him. As his creations, we were designed to glorify him. We are to worship God because of who he is, the Holy, Just, and Almighty God of the Universe.

Our service is an extension of that worship. *"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"* 1 Peter 4:11. Peter states in this passage that a purpose of our serving is to glorify God. We have studied at how it magnifies the Gospel, now we will see that serving glorifies God because it expresses devotion and honor to God.

God worthy of Glory

First we must stop and ask if God is even worthy of any Glory? I would say unequivocally, "yes." Not only does God deserve glory, he invented it. In fact, he created everything in the entire universe down to the neutron and quark. That is pretty impressive, I cannot think of another being doing similar feats (including our Mr. Bates). I am pretty sure that creation of the entire universe qualifies for some glory. The writer of Psalm 96 explains the unique majesty and holiness of God. He encourages us to ascribe the rightful glory due to God:

Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord, for he comes,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness,
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

The psalmist starts by encouraging the entire planet to praise God and declare His works among the nations. The writer explains that God is unique and that He must be feared above all other gods. He tells us that God's majesty is unmatched; that all other gods are worthless man-made idols. The psalmist then describes God's throne as the place where strength and beauty make their home.

In the second verse, the psalmist switches tacks by bursting out with commands

to praise God. The use of exclamation marks provides both power and urgency to the writer's calls for us to ascribe glory to God. He extols us to worship God because of God's power and holiness. He commands us to spread His name among the nations. In the last stanza, Psalm 96 explains how the universe from the heavens down to each individual tree will sing and bow before God. The psalmist writes that God's creation will rise up in worship when He comes to judge the world. Psalm 96 is a great reminder of why God is worthy of all glory. God's nature and power is unique.

Despite the vast difference to lowly humanity, He provides for us through his creation. We have a God whose holiness and mercy is also unmatched. Those of us who have been washed clean by the blood of Christ have even more reason to glorify God: He made our salvation possible. God orchestrated our eternal salvation because of his grace and mercy. He was the only one who could forgive our trespasses on His law. God sent His only Son to be substitute and pay the penalty our sins deserved. Through Christ's sacrifice we now have unlimited and eternal access to this holy loving God. This is why God is worthy of glory. *"to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen"* Jude 1:25.

No book ever written by man could even begin to fully explain or give an accurate portrayal of God's glory and worth. The subject is simply way too vast beyond our comprehension. *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure."* Psalm 147:5 But I wanted to give us a taste of God's power and character with Psalm 24. In reality, every Christian need only look to their testimony of salvation to comprehend something of God's worthiness. This should set the stage for understanding the need to give God glory. It also helps enlighten how we give God glory as well.

Worship and Serving

To glorify something means to bestow distinct honor and praise upon it. So just how do we bring glory to God? We worship him. In everything we do, we ascribe honor to God and bring devotion to him. *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* Corinthians 10:31. So does that include serving? Serving brings God glory because as we magnify the Gospel, we honor the God who made that Gospel possible. *"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciple"* John 15:8. In other words, serving is an act of worship that brings glory to God. To understand the biblical nature of worship we need to first define it from Scripture. Equipped with this definition, we will discover that worship is intertwined and undistinguishable from serving. Wait! Hold on. Can serving be classified as worship? I thought worship was just about singing?

Most Christians, including me, would immediately define worship as singing. We call the music portion of the church service “worship” time. Our church band or choir is called the “worship” team. When people say, “Wow wasn’t worship awesome!” my first assumption is that they are referencing the music. To be sure, there is something profoundly glorious and unique when the people of God sing His praises in unison. That is worship. But is singing all there is to worship or is it just a subset of worship? What is worship and what does it encompass?

Worship has a much broader definition than singing. According to Webster’s Dictionary, worship is to regard someone or something with extravagant respect, honor, and devotion. In other words, worship means to glorify. Usually, we are not having in-depth conversations about setting up chairs or baking cookies for a sick friend when discussing the topic of worship. However, should we consider these acts of service as worship? Do they bring glory to God?

Martin Luther writes again in *Concerning Christian Liberty*, that works in them themselves do not bring God honor or glory. Rather, Luther contends that it is our faith that defines our worship. He is laying the foundation that anything can be worship given it is done by faith in Christ.

For you see that the First Commandment, which says, "Thou shalt worship one God only," is fulfilled by faith alone. If you were nothing but good works from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you would not be worshipping God, nor fulfilling the First Commandment, since it is impossible to worship God without ascribing to Him the glory of truth and of universal goodness, as it ought in truth to be ascribed. Now this is not done by works, but only by faith of heart. It is not by working, but by believing, that we glorify God, and confess Him to be true.

Certainly by this definition, worship includes anything in which we demonstrate in faith extravagant devotion to God. This means that serving becomes worship when it is done out of faith, honor, and devotion to God. Just as we can sing without actually worshipping, we can serve without worshipping when our works are not accompanied by faith. Luther concludes this train of thought by saying that works when done by faith glorifies God:

Works, since they are irrational things, cannot glorify God, although they may be done to the glory of God, if faith be present. But at present we are inquiring, not into the quality of the works done, but into him who does them, who glorifies God, and brings forth good works. This is faith of heart, the head and the substance of all our righteousness. - Concerning Christian Liberty

The Bible itself has a lot to say about our worship of God through our service to God. In Deuteronomy 11:16 Moses warns the Israelites, “*Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them;*” He makes the connection between serving other gods and worshipping them, telling his fellow men not do either. In fact, the third commandment equates

worship and service. *“You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God”* Exodus 20:5. In both cases, serving and worship are used in conjunction as a commandment. This is only possible if God defines serving as part of worshipping something.

The New Testament continues this link in Matthew 4:10 where Jesus himself, in rebuking Satan for his temptations, exclaims, *“Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”* So serving is a response to having a savior and an expression of worship to God. Serving God is devotion to Him when it is out of a response of who God is and what he has done for us. In other words, it transforms into worship.

Worshiping God therefore is much broader than honoring God through our voices. It also includes our actions. Would getting up at 6:00am to set up heavy sound equipment be classified as extravagant devotion? Would driving across town to serve dinner to a needy family in the church be worship? Both of them would be, if they were done in response and in honor to God. In all of these examples, God is being glorified and his love manifested through serving.

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Music and singing are vital pieces in helping us glorify God. They focus our hearts to the things of God. However, these are not alone in the category of worship. Setting up chairs or sound equipment can in themselves be acts of worship, and not merely precursors to it. These acts are mute expressions of praise to God described in deed not just in words. Serving should thereby be classified as worship. It is worship without sound.

The Biblically based definition of serving is a combination of the classical definitions of serving and worship. To serve as worship means to perform tasks with great honor and devotion to God our King. Serving therefore becomes worship when it is a response to who God is and what he has done for us. It then is both a visible manifestation of, as well as response too, God's invisible grace in an individual. *“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”* Romans 15:7

Trouble in Sealand

Sealand's Royal family quickly found out that being a king was not all fun and games. In 1978, a coup was staged by the Prime Minister while his Royal

Highnesses Prince Roy was out of the country. Prince Roy, however, managed to retake the fort with an armed escort. The plotting Prime Minister was then held prisoner for treason until several European nations petitioned Sealand to release him. When Sealand did, the ex-PM set up an exile government in Germany and continues to claim to this day to be Sealand's legitimate ruling authority.

Without an economy to speak of and without modern day conveniences, the Bates' moved back to the comfy shores of England. While they still maintain their royal titles, Sealand is no longer the home of Roy and Joan Bates. Thankfully we do not have to worry about God losing sovereignty or giving up his power. God is the unique being that created us and made way for us to live in heaven. For this, God deserves all the glory in the universe. He is worthy of our service.

Serving is biblical worship in action. It does not matter if we straighten chairs or play lead guitar. Both can be worship or both could be dry obligated tasks. Service in the church is an act of worship, expressing gratitude for our reconciliation to both God and His people. Thus, a heart giving extravagant devotion to God, not the tasks performed, defines worship. Everything in life from singing to baking is about our worship of a loving gracious God who saved us from ourselves. With this faith and devotion to God, we bring Him glory.

Questions

- 9 Do I consider singing the only worship part of the Sunday morning?
- 10 Do I hold singing or playing an instrument more worshipful than setting up chairs or wiring the stage?
- 11 Do I see setting up church as just a precursor to worship?
- 12 Am I worshiping God when I serve?

Chapter 4: An Economy of Wampum – Benefiting Others

In 1625, the Dutch West India Trading Company established Fort New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island to control the Hudson River fur trade and protect Dutch settlers. A year later on May 24, 1626, Peter Minuit was sent to purchase the island from the Lenape tribe to ensure legal ownership. The island cost Minuit approximately sixty Dutch guilders, the equivalent to half of the average yearly income back in Holland in the seventeenth century.

Of course, Minuit did not pay the natives in Dutch guilders. The Lenape had neither use nor value for gold. The items that Minuit offered in payment were a various mix of practical items: axe heads, cloth, blankets, iron kettles, and wampum. Wampum, also known as sewant, was a string of polished beads made from seashells. It was the predominant currency used to transact business in the seventeenth century New World.

But the major currency, the most common thing dropped in the plate when it came time for contributions during Sunday church service, was sewant. Wampum, as it is now more commonly know, was a much more widely used currency among this East Coast Indians than is generally realized today. For tribes from different linguistic groups, it formed a kind of universal language, a way to cap joint rituals, to seal treaties, pay homage to dignitaries. Shorto 118-119.

The Europeans adapted to the wampum economy. The traditional coin held no buying power with the natives, who the Dutch relied on heavily to survive. As more and more people arrived and the colonial economy grew, wampum grew scarcer. With demand for wampum high and supply low, wampum inflation racked the colony of New Amsterdam starting circa 1640. With inflation growing, counterfeit (low-grade) wampum began appearing. Made from less valued and unpolished beads, people were passing it off at the same exchange rate as the good stuff. The colony's economy was thrown into confusion about the real value of wampum.

They (the Dutch) learned which variety of polished beads was most highly prized – that of a purple clamshell that came from the easternmost shores of Long Island – and not only adopted it in their dealings with Indians but became wampum speculators among tribes. With the sudden increase in freelance trade on Manhattan had come a flood of low-grade sewant, and (Director General) Kieft understood that the accompanying confusion was causing financial havoc. Shorto 118-119.

Hence, Director Kieft set the value of wampum for each type of shell and put stiff

penalties on people using unpolished beads. The Wampum Crisis was averted and the economy thrived. Unlike New Amsterdam's, the church economy does not run on business transactions but on biblical relationships. Biblical Relationships are just as essential to the building of a church as procuring goods were to establishing a colony. Without biblical relationships, the spiritual economy of the church grows stagnant, confused, and unsustainable. The currency with which these biblical relationships are transacted is not wampum. It is serving.

Benefit to Others

Serving acts as the currency for biblical relationships because it strengthens the basis that holds not only believers together but also our relationships with unbelievers. That foundation is the Gospel of Christ. Serving others has two distinct benefits, which build biblical relationships. First, the livelihood and happiness of others are tangibly improved as their earthly needs met. The second benefit is that through our Gospel centered servanthood the Gospel is being magnified. The two benefits could be summed as the following:

1. God's grace and faithfulness for the person is tangibly displayed.
2. The Gospel's power and grace is magnified through us.

20th century theologian Gustaf Wingren states in his book *Luther on Vocation* that, "God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does."Pg10. All around us, other people need help. They need meals, friendship, a babysitter, accountability, help with chores, comforting etc. The only way these needs are met is by other people serving them. These tasks need someone who is willing to lay down their life to magnify the Gospel for the Glory of God to the benefit of others.

Here is the truly Christian life, here is faith really working by love, when a man applies himself with joy and love to the works of that freest servitude in which he serves others voluntarily and for nought, himself abundantly satisfied in the fulness and riches of his own faith. *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Martin Luther.

When the Gospel first transformed our hearts, we were reconciled to God through His Son. But, as the first 3 chapters of Ephesians explains we were also reconciled to God's people through Christ. Amongst God's people, serving not only magnifies the Gospel and glorifies God. It also is a means to benefit others by providing for their earthly needs. People lives are bettered because we serve them. In these acts of servanthood, others can see and feel the grace of God demonstrated practically. For Christians, this should act as a reminder of God's faithfulness and kindness. For unbelievers, this may be the introduction to a God who could is faithful in all things, even their eternal salvation.

You and I get to play a part in God's mission and care for people. We are largely the means by which God practically provides for people. God is not sending angels or other heavenly beings to cook, clean, and toil for others here on earth. We are it. This, of course, is not to say that if humans did not exist, God wouldn't get anything done. Rather we humans are his means of providence here on earth. God works through us to provide for the earthly needs of others. Gene Veith Jr., in his book *God at Work*, writes (pg 38-42), "In His spiritual Kingdom, we rest in Christ; in His earthly kingdom, we serve our neighbors... God expresses His love as He provides for His created order, and He calls human beings into the process." Meals do not cook by themselves and clothes do not walk out of your closet and down to Goodwill.

The second benefit to others is not so clear. In fact it maybe not even recognized by them at the time. Each act of service to another person benefits them because they see the Gospel. They witness a heart changed by Christ. "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" John 13: 34-35. They see someone who, because of Christ, wants to serve them. The greatest benefit we can give anyone is the witness and praise of Jesus Christ. This has a much more significant impact in the bigger picture than meals, clothes, or money.

Love and Serving

If we have placed our faith in Christ, then loving one another is not an option. It is a clear command of Scripture. Jesus lists loving others as part of the Greatest Commandment. Matthew 22:34-40 has the clearest profession of this, as Jesus is asked what the Greatest Commandment is,

and he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

These two ideas (serving God with all our heart and then loving others) are clearly wed together. As Jesus explains, both of these commandments form the basis of the entire concept of the Law.

So then we cannot say we serve God yet neglect others. This is to deny God's love for the sinners that was so painfully demonstrated on the Cross. Serving is an active manifestation of God's love and work in us. Loving others is part and parcel of what it means to serve God and follow Christ. 1 John 4:8-12 continues the foundation for loving others,

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

John argues here that God's love for us was not some ethereal ideal but a physically demonstrated truth. As a tangible act of love, God sent his only son to die in our place to pay for our sins. God's love wasn't theoretical but was in full display before the world to see. If we understand and embrace that love, then we should also exemplify it. That love should characterize and define us. As practical needs are provided for within a community, people come to trust and love each other. They come to see God's provision for them through the work of others.

If we say we have been transformed by God's love but do not live like it, then the Bible calls us hypocrites. So John summarizes this truth by stating that as God loved us we are to love others. He defines love as being sacrificial in nature. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:2 *"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Love and serving are directly correlated to each other. Paul in his letter to the Galatians states in verse 5:13 *"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."* We are to serve another through love. Paul doesn't state that we are to serve or love independent of each other. Both are needed. We should not use this new freedom in Christ to love ourselves, but use it to show love to others and thereby perfecting his love in us through sanctification.

Paul calls us to love one another by putting the other person first and attending to their needs. In others words in serving others we express our love and Christ's for them. We demonstrate love by preferring others more than own self (Philippians 2:1-4). Preferring others is the basis for servant-hood. Christ himself modeled this.

Model of Christ

The famous passage in the Gospel of John *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* 3:16 shows that so great was Jesus' love for the people, that he was willing to suffer and die to provide them with eternal communion with God. Despite our sinful unrighteous condition, he made a way to bring us into God's presence. Romans 5:8 states *"but God shows his love for us in that while we*

were still sinners, Christ died for us." We know that God loves us because he saved us through the death of his son.

Jesus' earthly ministry was characterized by love and compassion for people. As he traveled, Christ healed and resurrected people even when it put him in conflict with authorities. He cast out demons for people in need. He did not regard his time here on earth as a vacation so he could get some "me time". Rather Jesus strove with passion to tell people about the coming of the kingdom of heaven by practically showing people the love and power of God.

The passion of Christ does not refer to the fact he liked being flogged or that he liked being mocked. It refers to Jesus' motivation to go through pain, disgrace, and death to provide for people's most basic need, a savior. It is no accident that John recounts the sacrifice of Christ as the prime example of God's love for us. If Christ went to such lengths to provide for our needs, how should we do likewise for others.

As we come to develop a stronger understanding of Christ's love and sacrifice for people, our serving will transform into passion. We will have a passion to see people's earthly needs met while God is glorified and the Gospel is magnified. This passion is expressed by our extending love through serving them.

To be perfectly honest, there are certain people or types of people that I would really rather not serve. I wrongly give myself an exemption from serving them. They may have offended me in the past, in one form or fashion. They may annoy me. Exclusion is even awarded for people that I just think are plain weird. But Jesus made no such exclusions on the Cross. He did not say to love your neighbor as yourself except for that guy that offended you, or the girl with the Mohawk and the nose ring. In fact, Jesus even died for a particular individual, who had hated and mocked him for 25 years, me.

Loving and serving one another, like Christ's death on the cross, is not easy or convenient. Sometimes serving goes against everything the world and our desires tell us. That, the apostle Peter says, is the kind of love we should model. *"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor"* 1 Peter 2:15-17. Our love for one another, like God's love, is to be economically, racially, nationality, and age blind.

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one. . – Concerning Christian Liberty, Martin Luther

Unified Relationships

God modeled love through Christ's service to unify us to him. But He also unified Christians together into one body, "*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility*" Ephesians 2:15. God desires unity not only with a specific local church but the whole worldwide church as well. Serving one another is how we build relationships within that body.

As we build relationships within the local church, our passion for it and its members increases. Through sharing in both struggles and triumphs with others, we develop a deeper appreciation for not only God's grace and each other as well. The relationships in the church become so important that we begin to identify other people's need as our own. How else are we going to identify people's needs if we do not have a relationship with them? Relationships fuel the church because through them needs are identified and are met.

Through serving, we become increasingly familiar with our fellow redeemed. Our love for them will grow in direct correlation. We know that Joe has been dealing with health issues; we know that Cindy has lost her Job; we know that the Millers gave birth to a new baby girl. Together as a church we have seen God's grace at work in good times and in bad. But how does it work? How does building relationships transform into passion in serving others?

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:15-16.

This familial bond should inflame us to serve because we know the people we are serving and have seen God's work in their lives. Their well-being and sanctification have become of vital importance to us because God has knit us together into His body. In 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, Paul writes that the purpose of loving one another is so that our hearts will be blameless when we appear before Christ. And so that we may be one unified church in both focus on God and love for each other for the Glory of God. God also gives us the tools by which we can benefit others, our talents. Paul writes in Ephesians 4, that God grants us each specific gifts; *for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.* Peoples' various gifts in are intended to build relationships and unify people together.

Cultivating these relationships will ignite our desire to serve. This cause and affect is found in Paul's own passion for the local churches. Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, "*So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you*

had become very dear to us." Paul developed such a passion for them for all that they went through and for having helped Paul after being shamefully treated in Philippi. He and his helpers were ready to share everything with them including themselves. So too will our passion grow for seeing the needs of those around us being fulfilled. God has given us both the desire and the talents to meet those needs by serving others.

The Wrap

New Amsterdam was built through an economy powered by wampum. Peter Minuit used it to buy a little island in the middle of an unknown wild land. That transaction facilitated the very settlement that eventually became New York City, home to 14 million people and worth over \$60 billion in real estate today. It is amazing what a little wampum will do.

In his letter to the Church at Colossus, Paul outlines how Christ's finished work for the church should influence how we treat the local church. In Colossians 3:12-15 Paul explains that because we are bound with Christ and subsequently to one another in the body of Christ (that is the Church), then Christ's passion and care for his own body should become our passion and care. The love that Jesus had for sinners like you and me now binds us together.

Powered by the Gospel, serving others builds the body of Christ. It provides the currency that sustains biblical relationships. God commands us love others with sacrifice and deference. He calls us to serve them first before we look to our own needs. He demonstrated that serving love to us by sending His only son to die in our place and suffer the Wrath due us. His church is unified through that love and established by serving others. The church is being built through one act of service at a time. Eventually the entire body of Christ from throughout history will gather in heaven. There, an untold number of redeemed souls will be fully unified together in Christ. It is even more amazing what a little serving will do.

Questions

- 13 Is there anyone or any group of people that I cannot see myself serving?
- 14 Do I value and pursue unity in my local church?
- 15 How does serving benefit others?