

Reforming Servanthood The Centrality of Gospel in Christian Service

By Nathaniel Loren Palmer

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PART III – The Effects

Chapter 10: Rock Me Amadeus - Serving Joyfully Obsessed

Born in 1756, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart became one of most popular and influential composers of all time. It was said that Mozart, despite being blindfolded, could perfectly play whole movements without error after just hearing them once. The 1984 film “Amadeus” won eight Oscars for chronicling (albeit with much flare for fiction and literally license) Mozart’s life and his genius for music.

The film also dealt with Mozart’s fellow composer Antonio Salieri’s obsessive and ultimately deadly jealousy of him. As a young boy, Salieri had made a deal with God that in return for the talent for music, he would give God his chastity and industry. In one scene, the envious Salieri enters Mozart’s apartment to find newly composed music written without erase marks. He is stunned and shocked at how a man as crude and lewd as Mozart could compose such masterpieces without any mistakes. Salieri erupts. He curses God for giving such amazing talent to a vulgar wretch like Mozart while Salieri’s own sacrifices are being mocked and forgotten. Salieri tosses his collection of crosses into the fire and vows to destroy God’s abomination – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

What occurs in the rest of movie is the unfolding of Salieri’s driven obsession, as he stops composing music to focus in on destroying Mozart. In the end, according to the movie, Salieri successfully sends Mozart into delusion and eventually death. Years after Mozart’s death, Salieri is still haunted and obsessed with him. An old lonely and brooding man, he attempts suicide by cutting himself while yelling the name of his obsession. While the ambulance cart is dragging a bleeding Salieri to a doctor, they pass a formal ball in which Salieri hears Mozart’s music being played loudly. Fixated and gloomy, Antonio Salieri could never escape his obsession even in his own death.

When we think of obsession we tend to picture subjects like poor Antonio Salieri. Obsession brings to mind the dark brooding joyless soul trapped into preoccupation with something or someone. Usually this obsession ends in futility and anger. This negative connotation of obsession is not what I mean in Gospel Obsessed Serving. Gospel Obsessed means to be joyfully infatuated with God's amazing grace. The cross of Christ took our punishment and placed it on Christ who then was raised on the third day so that we may also have eternal life in heaven. This truth should not only capture our undivided attention forever but also produces immeasurable joy!

Joy Obsessive Joy

As Christians, we get to be in heaven with God forever. This wonderful blessing of salvation is by grace a free gift. We did not and could not earn it. God in his goodness spared us the punishment due us for our sins. We have so much to be thankful and joyful for.

Joy, for the works of God, is expressed many times in Scripture both in the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, we see the people of Israel who had witnessed God's faithfulness and deliverance into the Promised Land express gratitude for God's work: Joshua 24:18 *And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.*" The Jewish Nation was moved to service by seeing firsthand the Power of God which was used to see them through the wasteland and which drove their enemies before them. The Book of Judges also recounts this time in verse 2:7 *"And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel."*

This Old Testament expression of gratitude towards God was a result of tangible yet temporary measures of salvation. 1 Samuel 12:24 says, *"Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you."* These instances of God's salvation were not eternal; the Israelites had to be saved over and over again from enemies and themselves. They had to offer up continual sacrifices year after year to redeem sins, yet they expressed gratitude for things they received, no matter how temporal. Psalm 100 says it this way:

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the Lord, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,*

*and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

This Psalm recounts how just upon crossing the threshold of his court should cause us to leap for joy and praise God for his greatness. As we enter into his presence our hearts are stirred to song and praise. Then, after explaining the effect, the writer gives the reason why these things should happen: because we serve a God whose love and grace has been extended to us for eternity.

We serve a God who made us from nothing and protects us when we do not deserve it, *For the Lord is Good*. God desires that we find joy in serving him to bring him glory. The gladness when serving the psalmist describes does not seem to be optional but rather a natural reaction to God's character and goodness. It becomes clear, as we reflect on these passages that our worship, whether it is serving, singing, or meditation, is both birthed and motivated by the Gospel of Christ. This Gospel outlines how God sent his only Son to die for our sins so that we may spend eternity with him and are not left to death and despair.

Yet in the New Testament, we see that the reason for our gratitude is from a salvation that is intangible but eternal salvation. Hebrews 12:28 explains that, "*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*" How much more do we have, as the recipients of the eternal Grace of God, to be thankful for! We have inherited this unshakeable kingdom through no work of our own, only by the work of another, Jesus Christ. This passage explains that the proper response to this truth is worship with reverence and awe. Is this truth my motivation? Let it be so Lord.

Jesus' death and resurrection did not save us for a period of time but from time itself. We do not have to be saved or cleansed over and over again, left to wonder if God will remain faithful through each trial. We have the final eternal conclusion of our salvation in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:13-15 states,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

None of us died for the sins of man. Nor were we resurrected to bring redemption for mankind. Christ did both. Our works and our accomplishments did not bring

about the hope of man or the satisfying of God, Christ's work did. It makes it so clear what and whom our focus should be on. Nowhere, as God is explaining our reason for faith and hope, is my name mentioned. It does not say because Nate set up the books and cleaned the foyer every Sunday do we have Hope! In fact, if someone read this passage in China, they would probably have no idea a guy named Nate in Dallas even existed, let alone place their hope of eternal salvation in him.

The Joy Of Serving

A question was asked of me recently: 'Do we serve to find joy or do we serve because there is joy?' I think the answer is both! We have godly joy that is motivated by grace and also by the character of God. Joy is found in God by basking in his goodness and faithfulness. Psalm 16:11 says, "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" There is inherent and limitless joy as we enter into the presence of the eternal, all-powerful, yet gracious King who has allowed undeserving people like you and me in. We find as we serve God through serving His people we draw closer to Him and his eternal joy, in this He is most glorified.

Our call to serve is just only a dry command we must grudgingly obey. As we reflect on new blood-bought status with God, serving becomes something through which we can express our gratitude to God. We model and express God's love to others by our serving them. Serving God and one another should be one of the most joy filled things we do on time here on earth. In fact, God seems to desire service with gladness and detest dry "let's just get it over with" serving. From Scripture it is clear that not only does God desire joy in our serving but also that God inspires joy for our serving.

Thus from faith flows forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbour voluntarily, without taking any account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss – *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Martin Luther

In Deuteronomy 28 47-48 we see the inseparable nature of serving God and joy,

Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything.

The passage seems to suggest that they did obey God's command to serve and still provoked God to anger, due to their serving being carried out as a chore rather than joyful worship.

God brought this nation out from slavery in Egypt to a land filled with everything necessary, for comfortable living. Yet the Israelites still had very little joy in God. What did this communicate to God? Here were hearts filled with ungratefulness and indifferent attitudes towards God and His work in their lives.

Moses is warning the of this same truth, “*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,*” (Deut. 10:12). God does not want us to serve for serving sake out of some dry sense of duty or guilt, but wants us to serve Him with our whole heart! Why should there be Joy in Serving?

Just the Beginning of Joy

God’s definition of serving is a serious yet noble command that we, through joy and gratitude for our salvation, glorify Him alone by serving Him and one another. Serving is not an option to be debated but a natural expression and perfection of God’s love. As we understand how God loved us first and moved to secure our eternity with him by the Cross of Christ, serving becomes joyful and natural.

For thus did its Father, distributing all things to all men abundantly and freely, making His sun to rise upon the just and the unjust. Thus, too, the child does and endures nothing except from the free joy with which it delights through Christ in God, the Giver of such great gifts. – *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Martin Luther

Being obsessed with the Gospel is not the obsession witnessed in the movie “Amadeus” in the tragic character of Antonio Salieri. In the Gospel of Christ we find eternal and immense joy, not a brooding dark fear and oppression. The more we reflect on what God has done on our behalf by reconciling us to Him and to His people, the more our joy in God will experience a corollary amplification. Salieri was consumed by hatred; we are to be consumed by joy and grace because of Christ Jesus. *Gospel Obsessed Serving* applies this joy to serving God and His people in the local church.

Chapter 11: Not Just Elevator Practice – Remembering Joy

December 17th, 2003. How I longed for this date to finally arrive! Two long years of waiting in giddy anticipation and was now but days away. The final installment of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Return of the King*, was soon to be released at a theater near us. My preparation was thorough and complete; I had read the book, re-watched both prior movies (extended versions of course), and had done countless hours of research on the Internet. The detailed to the minute plans of

how, when, where, and with whom, were intricately developed.

So passionate was I for this movie, that my wife wondered aloud what our dates would be like if I'd show the same kind of passion to them. "Honey, its *Lord of The Rings!* The future of middle earth is at stake!" I would say, to which she would reply, "Its three hours of men in rubber suits jumping around for some possessed piece of jewelry" Even my wife has limits, so I pulled out my last ditch excuse, "You know Tolkien was a Christian", as if that somehow validated my obsession with a bunch of Hobbits and Elves.

I now own *Return of King* (extended version of course). I can watch it anytime I want in the privacy in my own home. Of course, I'll most likely have to watch it alone. Nonetheless, the film I so desperately wanted to see and experience is now at my fingertips. I have unfettered access to the world of middle earth to which I can travel at my own bidding. Despite this access though, I have maybe watched the movie but once in the year I have owned it. I know the story, I am familiar with the scenery and the special affects. When the giant spider stings Frodo, I no longer jump out of my seat. I have grown complacent with the very movie that consumed me just two years ago.

This same phenomenon sadly can occur with my own passion for serving God in the local church. I can become so familiar with or forget about both the privilege and meaning of serving that complacency easily sets in. How is it I frequently think I can just roll out of bed and nonchalantly serve God in his local church without any preparation or reflection or excellence? As if this access to him through the gift of his son has made serving the all powerful, all seeing, and infinitely holy God commonplace and meaningless! Has the Gospel become so familiar and habitual that I can assume a level of complacency?

Meet Complacency

The comic Steven Wright once said, "When I was little, my grandfather used to make me stand in a closet for five minutes without moving. He said it was elevator practice." We may think reviewing the past to inform our present is like standing in a closet to practice being in an elevator – that is, being utterly useless. However reviewing the past is the exact prescription Jesus gives to people who have lost their passion and love for serving God.

In the beginning chapters of the book of Revelation, Christ is evaluating seven churches one of which is Ephesus. He tells the church, despite the appearance of spiritual vitality and despite the amount of activity, that they were spiritually dead.

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call

themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first (Revelation 2:2-5).

Christ praises them for their diligence and endurance but warns them that they have forgotten why they do these things. The church had lost its focus on Christ and had consequently lost the love and passion they used to have. Christ's remedy for the Ephesian Church to regain their passion and love was *to remember*.

Remember what they once were. Remember how Christ changed and saved them. Remember and the passion will flow back and cause them to repent and serve like they did in the beginning when the truth of the Gospel first came to them. Is there joy and passion when you serve or is there just bitterness and complaining?

How do we get this joy and motivation in serving back? How do we be like the great basketball coach John Wooden and "don't mistake activity for achievement?" We start with realizing our motivation to serve must stem from Christ and His work. If we find that it does not, then we must follow Christ's advice to the church at Ephesus to remember. More specifically we are to remember the Gospel and our salvation repeatedly.

Repetition is useful for us. The Holy Spirit will enable, through the continual reviewing the Gospel and God's vision for serving, our hearts for service. Remembering why we should serve and whom we serve provides two key benefits in that it both motivates us to action and guards us against burnout. We see remembrance and repetition being used to enflame passions and worship for God throughout the Bible. No more so than in the Psalms. Psalm 77 verses 11 – 15 states:

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?
You are the God who works wonders;
you have made known your might among the peoples.
You with your arm redeemed your people,
the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

Here the Psalmist Asaph details the immense joy in pondering and remembering

who God is all that He has done. Asaph starts to meditate on God's work the more enthralled he becomes with God and he no longer considers them deeds but wonders. Then the psalmist says that among the notable wonders that God has done was making himself known to his people and redeeming them. Asaph is reflecting on the care and redemption God has provided and it stirs him to wonder and joy and the work of God.

In the following verses in Psalm 77, Asaph paints an amazing picture of God's sovereign control over everything as he reflects on the creation of the universe. This big picture provides a clear picture of God's grace to his people, as Asaph explains how God moved earth, water, and wind to create everything on earth. Then this all-powerful God stoops to care for flawed people like a shepherd tends to a beloved flock.

Here is a picture of a God who needs nothing or no one yet He lavishes care and grace on a race of sinful creatures. When reading his psalms, one gets the impression of Asaph's joy and gratitude in God as he is remembering what God has done. Remembering God's faithfulness to us is not just elevator practice to keep us busy. It is a joyful act in which we come to a better understanding of the Grace we have been given.

We have all personally seen or experienced burnout when it comes to serving the church; we lose our zeal and our ability to worship God in serving. God uses repetition to help us draw parallels for the importance of remembering His grace and provision with examples of the *feasts of the Lord* in Old Testament and with *communion and baptism* in New Testament. During these experiences, remembering God's grace through repetition emerges as both a joyful and vital tool in our sanctification for service.

The Importance of Remembrance

So, if remembering God's faithfulness and power is a good thing, just how vital is it to our Christian lives? The well known Renaissance man Leonardo da Vinci stated that, "He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast." To answer this question from a biblical perspective, we need to look back at the Old Testament in the book of Exodus.

We touched on this incident earlier in Chapter 9 but looked at it from the perspective of needing the Holy Spirit. The plagues that God brought forth on Egypt proved that God was both capable and faithful to save his people. Then God actually delivered them from slaves to freedom through parting the Red Sea.

Despite witnessing these miracles firsthand the Jews still begged to go back because they ran out food once they left Egypt. Exodus 14:12 asserts, "*Is not this*

what we said to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." Talk about a short memory. The Israelites had forgotten God's powerful provision for them in just a few short days.

But this mass ingratitude did not catch God off guard at all because two chapters earlier in Exodus 12 verses 12-17, God explains to Moses what will happen on the actual Passover night and that He should lead the Jews in remembering this work. God knew our propensity to forget and graciously made a way for us to remember, the necessity of which was displayed once the Israelites grumbled across the Red Sea.

And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped (Ex. 12:26-27).

Moses is further commanded that once in the *Promised Land* the Israelites should keep in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 the Feasts of the Lord to remember various acts and mercies of God. The commandments were so valued to God that he commanded his people to review them and God's provision at all times, especially with the next generation that was not present to see them first hand. Scripture was supposed to be posted on doorframes so that they might be mediated on and understood to avoid falling into sin from forgetfulness. Remembering God's provision and power was vital to the survival of the Jewish nation. God took detailed steps to assist the Jews to do just that.

The importance of remembering God's faithfulness did not die off with the New Testament and the bringing of salvation to the Gentiles. It is as joyful and vital today as it was before Christ because the problem our sinful nature on earth still exists. One of the only commandments Jesus gave was to remember his work by performing the Communion Feast.

In 1 Corinthians 11 verses 23-26, Paul is explaining communion by relating Jesus' words, saying

This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me" In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So like the Passover feast, God provides a unique way we can both identify with and remember Christ's act of dying in our place. The bread being his broken body and the wine being the blood shed to free us from the penalty of our sin in

order that we may have eternal life. In this ritual we have visual elements to remind us of specific truths about the Gospel of Christ. As we take and consume the elements, we are to be reflecting on grace bought for us through Jesus' death.

Jumping to Conclusions

So how does remembering figure into our joy while serving the local church? Hall of Fame baseball player Reggie Jackson once commented that, "A baseball swing is a very finely tuned instrument. It is repetition, and more repetition, then a little more after that" (Reggie Jackson Quotes, http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/reggie_jackson/). So, it is with our affections towards God. Our joyful desire to serve God is a finely tuned instrument that needs to be developed and exercised. Reflecting on God's grace in our own lives, how he justified us and continues to sanctify us, builds our joy for God.

Author Edward T. Welch explains in his book *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness – Light for the Path*, the relationship between joy and reflection,

If you are going to find joy in loving others, it will come from seeing that you have done something more important than relieving your depression. You have just seen the Spirit of God at work in your life. You have just seen the evidence that you belong to Christ, and he is using you to accomplish his purposes.

Here we see that as we reflect on God's work in and through us our joy for Him and His people will be manifested.

Our Joy in the Gospel does not have to nor should it fade because the Gospel itself does not fade from our lives. "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" Romans 8:38-39. We cannot lose our salvation nor can it be taken from us.

The novelty of the splendor of the *Lord of the Rings* faded as I became more familiar with the movie. Once I became familiar with the plot and the special effects, it no longer held the same importance to me. I had received what I desired from it. But the Gospel along with my salvation is eternal; I have not yet nor never will understand the meaning and impact of either. So why do we allow our joy in Christ to fade? Our joy in serving God and his people fades because we forget that at one time we were enemies of God yet He made us His sons. So remember and reflect on where you once were and how Christ changed where you were going.

Chapter 12: The House That God Builds – The Legacy of Serving

Linville Creek Baptist Church, in the colony of Virginia, was stationed at the vanguard of English colonialism in September of 1757. Encouraged by the French, attacks on Linville by natives were quite frequent. But on the 21st of that month, the little frontier church was harassed by a different kind of assailant. Reverend Alexander Miller and some of his followers from a nearby Presbyterian church interrupted a service, offended the preacher by calling him a papist, and took over the pulpit. He then proceeded to lecture the entire Baptist congregation on the merits of infant baptism.

When my father retired from work a few years back, he started researching my family's history. According to my father, our genealogical tree contains missionaries, nobles, criminals, war veterans, frontier scouts, and businessmen. One of these ancestors was the very same Reverend Miller. The Reverend could never have dreamt of how centuries removed from him, his distant descendant was reading his story and was wondering what in the world he was thinking on that distant day. However, while I know that Presbyterians today are not like Reverend Miller, I also realize my children and I are Miller's legacy and he is our lineage.

Recently, I was reminiscing over my testimony with some close friends. God had used one of these friends to illuminate the Gospel to me back when I was still a heathen. This same friend then went on explain that if it wasn't for another person, who modeled the Gospel to him, that he would not have had that opportunity to help me. I began to wonder if I charted that line of serving of person to person, what wonderful stories of God's faithfulness and love I would find. It is then that I realized that I had a genealogy of service to God.

In The Beginning

This spiritual family tree is filled with people who responded to the Gospel and modeled Christ's love to others. At the top of tree sits the one who started it all, Jesus Christ. The entire world's serving genealogies all find themselves beginning at the same place: the ultimate service of the son of God dying in the place of sinners that they may spend eternity with God in Heaven. In that one instant, He cleansed the sin of all believers for all time.

His Gospel has flowed down generation to generation by people's service to one another. For in response to his direct service to them, people begin to start serving others. We all remember the nursery rhyme "the house that Jack built" about how each event keeps building on the next event until the last line when ties all the events together:

This is the farmer sowing the corn,

That kept the rooster that crowed in the morn,
That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
That married the man all tattered and torn,
That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog,
That worried the cat,
That killed the rat,
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

Christ's impact on people has carried throughout time as those so affected and saved by Christ start to serve others in order to point them to Christ. The universal Christian Church down to each local body, from the historical Pentecost to future promise of the Rapture, is the house that God built. He builds it one soul at a time using their newly changing hearts to affect and serve others who then trust in Christ, and who go on to affect and serve new people, who will trust in Christ and so on and so on. What does the scripture say?

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Heb. 2:3-4).

Like the nursery rhyme, a past event affected subsequent events, which in turn begets future ones until eventually Christ calls us all home. Each of us exist today as Christians because, by God's will, someone responded to the Gospel and in turn served someone else until that act of gratitude reached us. This real life house didn't start with a mouse but with the Christ's service to mankind through his coming to earth, his obedience to live perfect life, and ultimately through his death and resurrection.

For by Christ actions, untold numbers have received salvation and peace with God. Romans 5:18 states, *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."* His service on our behalf is the starting point for all the services ever to be or have been performed by any Christian. This wave of serving, started with Christ and moves through time like a spiritual tsunami changing lives forever. God designed serving as a means of grace to help us live in a jungle of a fallen and sinful world.

This truth is highlighted in the first verses of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew 1:1-16 recounts the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew is primarily using this passage to establish Jesus' lineage back to David and Abraham to prove he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Before I used to just skim this section because I already accepted he was the Messiah and didn't feel reading a bunch of names was useful to me. But once I

understood that this genealogy is more than names, rather it is also filled with stories of God's work and faithfulness, how each generation affected the next until Jesus was born.

Each of us has our own lineage of service of people sharing and modeling the gospel to others, this is undisputable. The question then is does this lineage stop with me or with you? Are we ensuring a legacy of God's work in us by serving others and keeping this waterfall of grace flowing throughout history to come?

Changing of the Paradigm

As we emerge from the jungle of non-biblical serving, we find a totally different paradigm that revolutionizes the way we serve. We see the power of the Gospel being applied and spread throughout history by ordinary people like us because of one overriding unyielding truth: God sent his son to live the life we could not and die the death we should have. Our serving is to be birthed and driven from an obsession with the Gospel. We want to glorify God for his goodness and love towards us and we desire that others come to know that same truth!

How we serve the church today is being used by God to build the church for eternity. Our serving is not just "filler" time, something to do to keep us busy while we wait for the real future. Rather the local church is being added to with justified and further sanctified souls like a giant avalanche gaining mass and speed. So just how does Joe's counting the physical inventory of books on the book table every month reflect God's grace to others? Well it may not be front and center. Joe's faithfulness and proper context of worshipful serving glorifies God, but it also communicates a changed life willing to serve in gratitude.

Now I'm guessing for those at Simon's dinner party that seeing a known sinner get down on her knees, weep, and anoint Jesus feet, was very moving thing to witness. This passion-filled act of serving not only communicated the woman's feeling towards Jesus to Jesus but also to those who witnessed it as well. Just like our serving, people, many we might not know who are watching, are taking note of how and why we get up every Sunday morning.

They notice that we miss the football games, or leave early on Sunday to lug tables and chairs and then put them up again after church. It might be your children, it might be your neighbor as he watches you pull out of the driveway every Sunday wondering what drives a person to do so. Peter in 1st Peter extols his readers to keep conduct honorable so that "*they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*"

As discussed before the classical definition is without motivation or reason, and most people know and understand this definition of serving so when they see the

biblical definition played out they have a difficult time reconciling the two. In that chasm between the world's view and the Bible's view is the Gospel. If they take the time to search for the reason or investigate the difference, they will encounter the Gospel, its truth, its impact, as well as its grace.

Through these encounters, an unbeliever can witness firsthand the power of the Gospel to change lives and give deeper meanings 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.

The Fountain of Service

But the legacy of serving is not propitiated just through direct acts. Some are indirect. For serving frees up pastors for the reading and studying of God's Word, allowing them more time to study and prepare sermons, which will most likely change more lives in the church. Imagine if the Book of Titus said something like "all pastors must do everything at the church and preach." No way, we'd have burnt out pastors everywhere. It would be like, "hey is that the pastor, didn't he just park our car, greet us, and sell us this book?" It wouldn't be practical. How do I know? Because the early church tried it out in Acts Chapter 6:1-4,

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

The early church saw that qualified people not in the pastorate could do certain services provided by the church. The apostles tried to do too much and as a result some things were not done as well as they meant them to be. Also when the leaders delegated these activities, the church as whole benefited because the leaders had more time to study and be more equipped for preaching.

The services provided actually improved in quality and the church could reach more people, since someone with more time, could focus to do them. Acts 6:7 excites and motivates us when it says, "*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*" However, while the laity was allowed to participate, it still remained the responsibility of the pastorate to govern these non-pastoral ministries, because they are held accountable for the

vision and direction of the Church.

Notice that when the church changed to this practice the Bible says the church multiplied greatly. The infrastructure needed to be in place first and that included delegating non-ministerial roles to the laity. So as we serve we are even playing a greater role in the church by freeing up the pastors to minister to people more effectively. We as servants in the church become in effect an arrow in the quiver of pastoral ministry. What a great privilege!

Freeing up pastors allowed more people to be served, not only through better preaching but also more effective service to God's people. The church could now stretch beyond its few pastors to provide service to a greater number of lost or needy souls. This was the catalyst that accelerated the propagation of the Gospel through service to wider audiences.

On the cross, Christ made our souls clean before God, but that does not make our labor here on earth in vain. *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul wrote, *"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"* (1 Cor. 15:56-58). This should be so encouraging to us when it seems we are worn out that God is not only honored by our work but He gives meaning to it in ways we might not see or comprehend.

Our service for God to others is not in vain because it is through that service that God helps others understand the Gospel. They then will spend eternity with us in heaven worshipping God. This eternal purpose of serving is the topic for the next chapter. Next time you have a couple spare moments ask somebody, who was instrumental in serving you, about his or her own story. You may catch a glimpse of your spiritual family tree. Who knows, the Reverend Miller may even be included in it.

Chapter 13: Magnifying Ants - Serving's Eternal Nature

Ants. Their colony situated under the orange tree in our yard was extensive. Thousands could be constantly seen scurrying to and fro on some urgent task or another. The ants had spent countless days constructing the elaborate structure. They exhaustively foraged for food and hauled it back to create a rather large stockpile of sustenance for their brethren. That is until my eight-year-old feet began to summarily destroy it with lethally accurate kicks. All their hard work and dedication was first kicked to shreds and then flooded away as I turned to using the water hose for the coup-de-gras.

For me as a young child this was great fun, especially when the ants came scrambling out and scattered in all directions to get away from their giant

attacker. Sometimes the magnifying glass awaited a select few. Other times, showing mercy, I just sat and watched. For the only time in my life I knew how Godzilla must have felt.

The ants however were not defeated; they rebuilt their colony under the orange tree time after time. I destroyed that colony on numerous occasions growing up and after each occurrence they reconstructed it. Why did they persist in building the colony when it was seemingly an exercise in futility? (Maybe the real question is why I kept destroying it? But that is for another book.)

It might be comforting to know, but I don't destroy anthills anymore and my magnifying glass is retired. But when I think about serving in the church, my mind quickly identifies with those poor ants. If this world is going away when Christ returns, what does any of it matter? If it is Christ's work and not my serving that secures my salvation, then why should I serve in the church? Are the church and my service like an anthill that God will wipe away? Will all my hard work and sacrifice for the church be in vain? Are we just ants to God?

The good news is that our serving in the local church has earthly benefits, which we examined in the last chapter, but it has eternal purposes as well. The first eternal purpose of serving in the church is that it prepares believers for heaven. A second purpose is that the church, on a broader scale, is itself eternal. Serving helps to build and strengthen it for this eternity. The church will never be destroyed and so our service in the church will never be in vain. Unlike the aforementioned work by the ants our service is not a useless exercise because of the eternal purposes that God designed for serving the church.

A Reflection of Heaven

Someone once said if you want to be a Christian you must be comfortable with mystery. The greatest mystery of course is why God would choose to save sinners like me and allow them to spend eternity with Him. Within that mysterious truth, other smaller oddities reside. Somehow God uses serving the local church to reflect what our future in heaven will be like. Not only that but serving here is simply preparation for serving there.

How do we know that we will be serving God in heaven? In Revelation 7:15 John states that the saints will be serving God for eternity: *And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence".*

Does this mean I will be stacking chairs and handing out bulletins in heaven for eternity? I don't know, God doesn't reveal the nature of our serving Him in

Heaven. We are only told that we are washed *white in the blood of the Lamb* and that we will be sheltered by Him in His presence as we serve Him.

Nonetheless the passage is clear that we will be performing tasks, only what they are is a mystery this side of heaven. Maybe our role as heavenly servants for eternity factors into why God takes serving Him here on earth so seriously. He is letting us practice and showing us what heaven for us will be like - where of course our serving will be finally free of sin and we will be unconfined by our sin to serve God with all our heart mind and soul.

There is another aspect to our future service to God in heaven, one that I have often overlooked. In a parable in the book of Matthew, Jesus tells of a master who leaves his servants with some money (talents). Two of them invest the money that earns the master even more money, and the master rewards the servants by saying in 25:23, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*" I had always applied this scripture verse to church matters and wanted to use this as an example of how starting small is rewarded, but that essentially isn't true.

The essence of Matthew 25:14-30 refers to what the kingdom of heaven is like. This is but one of several parables describing the kingdom of heaven, each highlighting a different aspect. The parable of tenants talks as if those who have been faithful with little here on earth will enjoy the kingdom of heaven. We have an opportunity to serve God here on earth, while we are away from him. We will be given even greater opportunities for serving God when we are united with Him in heaven for all eternity.

Conversely we see in this parable an example of another servant of the master who does nothing with the money he was given. He is rebuked by the master and stripped of his place as a servant.

But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus is seemingly making the statement that the one who isn't serving god (i.e. placed their faith in Jesus) on earth will be removed from God's presence in eternity. Now obviously Jesus is not saying that a professing believer who

doesn't serve on Sunday's is going to hell, not at all, but He is saying that people who don't serve at all him will.

Despite the considerable amount of mystery concerning heaven, we are thankful that God is allowing us to experience one important aspect of it by allowing us to serve Him on earth. While our service is curtailed by our sin, nevertheless it will be rewarded in Heaven because we get to serve God in perfection for eternity. There is no way my mind can fully comprehend this wonderful mysterious future!

The Church Eternal

The amazing thing about the promises included in scripture is that Christ just doesn't make us capable of being better people, but he saves us so that we might spend eternity with Him in heaven. This plan includes uniting the church in a wedding ceremony with Christ in heaven in order that the church may spend eternity with God. Cultivating a passion for the local church also involves reviewing Christ's future plan for his church.

Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in these terms, "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*" (Matthew 13:44) Jesus suggests that when people realize the true worth, the radiant brilliance, of the kingdom of God that it will affect how they re-orient their lives. But how does the value of the kingdom of heaven apply to having a passion for the church here on earth?

We have seen earlier in the chapter that the church is the means of grace by which God uses the preached Word to teach, encourage, correct, and bless believers. He also intended the church to be His conduit to reach the lost through its good deeds and proclamations. The local church you and I attend is God's small but significant representation of heaven to both believers and non-believers.

As we understand more and more the significance of being part of the kingdom of God and of our future in heaven as part of his church, we will come to appreciate the local church in an even greater manner. For we come to discover that the local church is a colony of the people of God's Kingdom right here on earth. The local church is the closest anyone on earth will be to the kingdom of heaven. Because that is true, we are to cherish and serve the local church as if it were a treasure in a field. This is the essence of the doctrine of the local church, that while it is intended for us, it is about God and His kingdom. Understanding the value of the local church is wrapped up in its future value when the church will be in heaven.

In Colossians 3:1-4 Paul is telling a beleaguered church in Colossus to keep their

mind on the promised future state of grace with Christ in heaven,

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

When Christ comes to call his church, they will be brought to heaven among the shouts of Angels and trumpets. Paul in his letter to Colossus was trying to teach the church that despite the hardships they face now, a time is coming that they will be in a place devoid of suffering for all eternity. Paul was telling them to keep their hopes and thoughts on this kingdom of heaven to which they received through Christ. By focusing on their future heaven, they would come to endure the present. Even more than enduring, Paul hoped they would rejoice in their present sufferings.

Paul hammers this theme of future hope affecting the way we live throughout his writings. One of his main concerns for existing churches was maintaining the hope and faith amongst their members as various persecutions and trials came. While he addressed each trial individually (i.e. false teachers, in-fighting, as well as dangerous false doctrines, etc.), Paul always tied each one back to the hope of the Gospel.

All of us, who by God's grace were transformed by the truth of Christ's sacrifice, should be absolute raving nutty obsessed fans of this news, which is the Gospel. It is greater than any Super Bowl or World Series. It is way more amazing and wondrous than any play ever devised in any professional sport. Eternity with God! Let our minds wrap around that and meditate for a moment. Not just months or years or even decades but for all time, forever, without ceasing or intermission. No sin, no suffering but rather pure unadulterated joy!

During this eternity in Heaven, we will be with God basking in his goodness and rejoicing in Him. Rejoicing because he has washed us clean of sin. There will be no tears, no heartache, no pain, and no sin. Imagine this: For all time we will be sinless and finally able to worship God in the way he deserves. And here's the kicker: we will be there because God made us righteous through Christ. That's right. We will be in this wonderful place forever, for all time, with no sin, worshiping God face to face even though we didn't deserve any of it. It is all a gift! So why given this miraculous eternity, I am so apt to have such low expectations of power of God here on earth? The apostle Paul didn't.

In Romans 8:39 Paul went further when he wrote, "*nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The application of this truth is significant because not only

is the worth of heaven real but this hope once obtained may never be taken from the believer. This brought enormous relief and hope to churches that were struggling to understand the everyday application of the Gospel.

Wrapping up Eternity

Today, despite years of history and a multitude of books to learn from, many of us still struggle to consistently apply the value of the future hope we have. But the answer to help us to serve the local church remains the same. We will develop a passion for the church, as we understand God's future plans for the church. God intends the church to spend eternity with him in glory.

As we serve, we are building the eternal church by helping believers worship God more as well as allowing the church to effectively reach the lost. Making sure there is enough rows of chairs may not seem like it is building the church for eternity – *but it is*. People won't be distracted by having to stand (as in Luther's day) so that they could focus on the truth and character of God. Ensuring that everyone is greeted at the front door in grace may not seem like it is building the church for eternity but it is. People would feel welcome and would experience the tangible greeting and grace of God inviting them to understand more about His love for them.

Every act of service helps to magnify God for the benefit of people so that one day they might be standing next to us worshipping him in heaven forever and ever. This is the end result of our service in the local church. Realizing this eternal value of the church, our passions for the church should be fanned. Our service in the church is then transformed from dry half-hearted duty into informed and enflamed passion.

Ants are driven to do repetitive menial tasks by some God-given need to survive. However, the mere foot of a destructive child can easily negate their hard work by destroying their colonies and storehouses. Yet each time they rebuild in the same manner and with same urgency as the time before. At times, unlike the ants, we shuffle our feet and complain when we have to serve on Sunday morning because we think it has no meaning or eternal significance.

On the contrary, serving the church has in fact tremendous eternal significance. It helps to prepare us for heaven where we will serve God around his throne forever and ever. Serving also builds and strengthens the body of Christ on earth that will be in heaven with Christ forever and ever. These truths inform and motivate our temporal work here on earth. Maybe I need to be as fastidious and dedicated like the ants under that orange tree.

Chapter 14: About Brooks Robinson - Serving's Playfield

Brooks Robinson's play at third base was arguably unmatched by anyone who has ever played the game of baseball. He played twenty-three years for the Baltimore Orioles setting major league career records for games, putouts, assists, chances, double plays and fielding percentage. (www.baseballhalloffame.org). Brooks played in four World Series, winning the MVP in 1970 and was inducted into the *Baseball Hall of Fame* in 1983. His fielding was as beautiful to watch, as it was daunting to opposing teams. The longtime manager for the rival Detroit Tigers, Sparky Anderson, once quipped, "I'm beginning to see Brooks in my sleep. If I dropped a paper plate, he'd pick it up on one hop and throw me out at first."

Brooks played and lived baseball simply because he had a passion for the game. He once said of himself, "I'm a guy who just wanted to see his name in the lineup everyday. To me, baseball was a passion to the point of obsession." This passion made Brooks a great player because he put himself into every play. People that watched him play could not help but notice his devotion to the sport of baseball. Umpire Ed Hurley once said of Brooks, "He plays third base like he came down from a higher league."

Brook Robinson's passion in life was the thrill he received from stopping an impossible grounder, throwing someone out at first from his knees, or turning a double play. The baseball diamond was place where his dreams were realized and his passions were played out. Yet despite all of his zeal and drive to succeed, Brooks could not have done so much without an actual field to play on. How could throw someone out without there being a first base to throw to? How could he turn a double play when there is no second base?

Like baseball, serving needs a context. Serving needs a playing field. How can we magnify the Gospel to the world when we are all alone? How can we benefit others when they are not around? Where does this worship-filled, gospel-centered serving take place? Well serving happens where God's people gather together, the local church. Within this community, care and kindness are practically demonstrated. People serve and love one another in the church context, motivated by God grace, propelled by His love, and enabled by His Spirit. The local church provides the context for Christian service. The church is serving's playfield.

Serving's Playing field - The Church

Throwing humility aside for a second, I am exceptionally gifted in distinguishing between a baseball and a soccer field. Both fields have a unique shape, one a diamond, the other rectangular. The field provides context for the game, for when you see a particular field you immediately know how it's used and why. You can't

play baseball properly on a soccer field and you can't hit a hit a triple without bases. In the same way, the local church is the playing field for serving to magnify the gospel for the glory of God and to the benefit of others. It provides the context for biblical servanthood. *"For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building"* (1 Cor. 3:9).

In the book of 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 10 states *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."* So like a forward in soccer needs a goal net to provide context for a score, the serving gifts need context within the church to be effective in benefiting others. As the church provides ways to serve, whether it is valet parking or handling out bulletins, the church is simultaneously giving contexts to its members to be good stewards of God's varied grace. Someone can have all the zeal and gifting to serve but without anyone to actually serve all that passion will sit idle.

God's command to serve him is most always made in a certain context. That context is usually within the presence His people. The commands in the Old Testament were regarding the temple or the tabernacle or public rituals. The seven appointed to serve in Acts 6 were do so in the local church to satisfy needs within the church. The local church provides the milieu for serving God's people. To understand this is to grasp a vital aspect and mandate of the local church. God's design is nothing short of amazing, serving needs the church for a context to magnify the Gospel and worship God, the church needs serving to build unity and satisfy needs with the church. It is a perfect symbiotic relationship. The local church and serving cannot survive without one another.

God developed the concept and structure of the church to be his instrument on the earth to accomplish his plan of salvation and sanctification. In fact, this is the very purpose of the church, as seen in Ephesians 3:8-10,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Paul states that God invented the church before the outset of time to be his vehicle on earth to make his wisdom known in the earth.

Thus, the church is vital and unique in providing care and magnifying the Gospel. It enables believers to serve others all so that God's glory may be manifested. Ephesians 4:11-16 makes it clear that being properly equipped for works in ministry is an essential part of the Christian life. Paul again writes,

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the

pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, 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.

The church equips the saints for spreading of the Gospel.

The result of our adoption into the kingdom of God is a joining with God's other sons and daughters here on earth. God saved us individually to him, but he also saved us into fellowship with his people. His people are brought together to glorify and worship God as one unified body in the local church. They gather because the church is the oasis within the sea of sin both in and around us. And here as they rest from the fallen world is where we can serve them.

The local church equips people to serve in that it provides a structure and framework within which serving is carried out. We all could as individuals go from house to house trying to develop biblical relationships and serve others. If that were our only context, serving would be limited in scope and effectiveness. We could never serve others beyond our own abilities to track down people and develop biblical relationships.

Thus, within the confines and reach of the local church, God has given us a field of play to serve within. Here people wearied by the world and beset with sin can come and tangibly taste God's provision and love. As chairs are arranged, children are watched, books are sold, and instruments are played a great testimony of praise is offered to God. The local church is vital to fulfilling the command to serve. It is the place where God's people gather and from whence His name and Gospel light shines forth into a dark world.

Using the Whole Field

In baseball there are different positions one can play, each with their own rules and traditions. For example the pitcher knows he will be involved in every play when his team is on the field. The rules for the position and body movements of the pitcher are strictly regulated. He must stand on the pitcher's mound, with one foot on the marker. The pitcher must keep one fluid motion or else risk a balk (a penalty for all you non-baseball types).

The center fielder on the other hand can play wherever he wants to. In fact, he could stand right next the pitcher if he wanted. The center fielder can run, jog, skip, sashay or even walk to the ball. It doesn't matter; he is free to do whatever (although it is recommended that he run). The center fielder may not necessarily be involved in a single play during an entire game. Each position in baseball is different in their involvement, rules, and place on the field. So, too are service roles within the local church. Within the confines of the church, there are many different positions to play, also with their own unique rules and traditions.

Generally speaking, however, serving can be classified within two distinct types: structured service and spontaneous service.

Structured services are designated roles within the church that are scheduled and staffed ahead of time. Examples would ushers, setup crew, sound crew, the band etc. These roles are designed and regulated by church, usually to deal with vital needs or with the liturgy in the church. Structured service provides care and protection for the church. People assigned important duties are well known and their roles are fully understood. Members of the church can feel confident that their trust, possessions, and children are in safe hands.

Without a structured service ministry, the church would experience chaos. During the offering, 50 people (including some guests) decide to help and start haphazardly collecting offerings. Without any order they wander aimlessly down aisles with wads of cash and checks in their hands looking for people who want to give. How do they count it to make sure no one misplaces the collected funds? What did they do last week? Where did the guy in the red jacket go, he collected money from half the rows? In the children's area, teenagers looking to escape the sermon start charging babysitting fees. Some shifty looking guy no one seen before volunteers to watch anyone's toddler. In short, chaos does not serve the church nor protect its members.

Part of providing context for serving is providing structure; this helps the person serving focus their gifts to the position they are to perform as well as providing boundaries. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 states,

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Administration, as Paul points out, is a gift given by God to serve the body of Christ. The church needs administration to be effective in using the gifts God has given its members for his increasing glory.

But what is administration? Well some synonyms for it are management, government, and organization. In fact its root word is minister, which is the same meaning as *to serve*. To administer is by definition serving others by bringing order to chaos. Organization is the way a team is arranged to best use the given structure to accomplish its goals. Establishing organization should be distinct from providing structure. The two are different but complimentary. On a soccer field, the in-lines on the field and rules provide structure but as I've seen many times with my nephew's soccer team that does not necessarily mean that there is any organization.

Organization is the focused use of order to achieve the desired results within a

structure. Without structure organization has no idea how to achieve any goals, and without organization a structure becomes meaningless. What is needed in the church is not just organization for organization sake but an organizational structure whose focus and ultimate end is to point people to Christ. The church can use the gift of administration to organize people in way that they can worship God by serving others.

This is what exactly happened in the early church in Acts Chapter 6. Widows were being neglected because the pastors were trying to do too much on their own. Creating the first service team to provide food and care to these widows the church solved the problem. The pastors appointed seven men whose responsibility was to solve the problem and provide ongoing care so that the pastors could continue to focus on teaching.

If we want to exemplify God's vision for serving in the local church, we need to examine our methods for producing gospel-obsessed servants in the local church. With some exceptions, we can expect the level of worship in our Sunday service teams to be equal to the level of effort spent equipping them to serve. Sunday administration is often times only about getting things done. Equipping people to serve means not just providing them with schedules and tools, they must also be given the Gospel.

In the big picture the hallmark of Christian life is not about how well organized or structured things are. Rather it is whether we have built our faith, our church, and our ministries on the foundation of the Gospel That means resting in Christ's work on the Cross and in not our ability to organize. So then what is the point of equipping people to serve then? Well if the church provides the needed context to serve then that means that the church also plays a vital role in equipping people to serve. God grants the church the ability to apply gifts like structures and organization to help its members be more effective in serving His people. These tools allow Christians to glorify God and spread the Gospel more than they could individually.

Conclusion of the Conclusion

Lt. Hiroo Onoda, that Japanese soldier who fought his own extended war, never really adjusted to the world he found once he left his little jungle island in 1974. He tried for some years to live in Japan, making the media circuit as a minor media star. But eventually he had trouble acclimating to the new modern world and left Japan for the jungles of Brazil. He ultimately settled on a cattle ranch with some of the money he made from doing those media spots. He chose to no longer serve!

While Lt. Onoda could afford to abandon the newly revealed world for another remote jungle, we however cannot adopt a differing vision for serving. The notion

of serving we leave behind is that it is simply defined as performing tasks for self-advancement or self-atonement. The biblical vision we adopt for serving is that we should *serve one another to magnify the gospel for the glory of God and to the benefit of others*. We discovered that serving, like any form of worship, is motivated and birthed by the transforming power of the Gospel.

To understand serving, is to ultimately understand the implications and applications of the Gospel itself. The Gospel not only makes our serving possible, it compels us to serve. Through serving motivated by the Gospel we magnify its message, its savior, and its power. Relationships between believers and un-believers are built by service that models tangible expressions of God's love. As we serve God and subsequently one another, we are spreading the Gospel with action and works, and not just words. As we serve, the changed heart that was regenerated by Christ is being displayed for the entire world to see as well as benefited from.

Before understanding God's His vision of for biblical serving, I was burned out and nursing a growing bitterness towards the church. You may be reading this and struggling with these same feelings. Perhaps you know that this serving stuff may sound good but doubt if anything will change. For those of us like that, God has a wonderful message – it will because He desires it to be so.

He will change and conform us to the image of Christ because it is what he desires. Our continued sanctification is God's plan to change us in action. Philippians 4:12-16 states,

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

This is great hope and truth we have in the sovereignty and supreme goodness of God.

Thankfully, God in his mercy did not abandon us to figure this stuff out by all by ourselves. First and foremost God has given us the Holy Spirit to enlighten our eyes to the things of God. The Spirit of God enables our sanctification (meaning progression in godliness, while understanding there is also *definitive sanctification*) by helping us to act beyond our own fallen desires. Serving is empowered by Holy Spirit working in us. Only the Spirit of God could transform our hearts from serving ourselves to serve the holy God of the universe and his

people.

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you

Books of Interest

- 1 Concerning Christian Liberty – Martin Luther
- 2 Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America – Russell Shorto
- 3 Wellington's Rifles: Six Years to Waterloo with England's Legendary Sharpshooters – Mark Urban
- 4 No-Surrender: My Thirty Year War – Hiroo Onoda
- 5 God at Work - Gene Veith Jr.
- 6 Humility: True Greatness - CJ Mahaney
- 7 Amadeus: A play by Peter Shaffer – Peter Shaffer
- 8 www.sealandgov.com – official website of the Principality of Sealand
- 9 Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe - Laurence Bergreen
- 10 Charting the Sea of Darkness, by Donald Johnson