

THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICE

1 Peter 4:10

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PROLOGUE

"I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go" is a well known missionary hymn that was once the class hymn for student nurses at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. However, there is a new version of it that I hope does not become popular:

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Real service is what I desire.
I'll sing You a solo any time, dear Lord,
Just don't ask me to sing in the choir.

I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I like to see things come to pass.
But don't ask me to teach boys and girls, O Lord.
I'd rather just stay in my class.

I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I yearn for Thy kingdom to thrive.
I'll give you my nickels and dimes, dear Lord.
But please don't ask me to tithe.

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
I'll say what you want me to say;
I'm busy just now with myself, dear Lord,
I'll help you some other day.

SCRIPTURE

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10 TNIV).

INTRODUCTION

It is God's plan that every believer engage in ministry, come to maturity and help the church grow in its ability to carry out God's mission in the world. We are Christ's hands and feet in the world. If we truly believed this then the functional direction of the church would change. We would shift from an inward focus to an outward focus. We would emphasize equipping, dispersing and multiplying followers of Christ. But something seems to be holding us back.

Non-profit organizations all across the country are crying out for help. The number of

available volunteers seems to shrink daily. Considerable time and effort goes into recruiting volunteers to get the work done.

Unfortunately, the church is often regarded as just one more non-profit organization competing for workers. But this is a false image. The church is the people of God, called by God, to serve God. Don't say, "I'm waiting for someone to recruit me," because if you are a Christian you have already been recruited by God - He's just waiting for you to show up for work!

God desires to use us to do his work not because he needs us but because he knows we need him. Jesus prayed to the Father while in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). If it is our heart's desire to serve God then we will gain a knowledge of God's will for our lives and learn to work together in the joy and adventure of being the Body of Christ in the world.

In light of this, I have three questions to ask you about your service.

1. HAVE YOU DECIDED TO SERVE?

The first question is, "Have you decided to serve?"

God wants each one of us, each believer, to serve him. But God does not force us to serve him. We must be willing to serve. We must decide to serve.

When we talk about service to God we need to recognize two things: our vocation and our ministry. The word "vocation" is often used as just another word for job or career, but historically it has been a Christian term used to describe how we serve God through the way we live our lives. The word "vocation" is from the Latin word for "calling." This came into common use after the Bible was translated into Latin.

The point is, God calls us into service. Unfortunately, during the Middle Ages, the idea of a calling from God was limited to religious vocations such as priest or nun. Later, the Reformer Martin Luther taught that any honest labor was a way to serve God. Therefore every Christian has a calling or vocation to fulfill. Another Reformer, by the name of John Calvin, had an even broader view of vocation. He said:

"The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to God's calling"
(Institutes of the Christian Religion 3.10.6).

This is consistent with what the New Testament teaches us:

"...Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Eph 4:1).

Vocation has to do with how we honor and serve God in all aspects of our existence including but not limited to our careers. Ministry, on the other hand, usually has to do with how we serve God in connection with his Church. Every believer is a minister. Not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. Not every believer is an active minister. Some seem to be on holiday. Some seem to have joined the “secret” service.

But God wants each one of us to serve him. It seems to me in order give an honest “Yes” to the question — “Have you decided to serve?” — then we need to be trying to live a life that pleases God, doing something that benefits the Church, and working to make the world a better place.

2. HAVE YOU DISCOVERED YOUR SERVICE?

The second question is, “Have you discovered your service?”

In order to discover our place of service we need to acknowledge that God has given to each and every believer one or more abilities to be used in service to others. Paul says:

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7 NIV).

Eugene Peterson puts it this way:

“Each person is given something to do that shows who God is.”

Thomas Edison invented the incandescent electric light bulb in 1879. It was a remarkable achievement. But it would be more than half a century before many Americans could appreciate it. The problem was not with the light bulb. The problem was the lack of electrical power. Many rural communities did not receive electrical power until the 1930's. The light bulb may be a great idea but it has no practical benefit without power.

Just so, it is a great thing to want to serve God. We are to show the light of God’s truth and love to the world. But this is not practical without power. We need God’s power. The Bible speaks of this kind of power in terms of spiritual gifts.

We learn our place of service as we recognize and use our spiritual gifts and other abilities to strengthen the Church of Jesus Christ. Do not wait until you have a complete understanding of spiritual gifts before you start to serve. Jump in and help out as best you can. And if you think you have a particular gift then try to use it. God wants you to use what you *have* to help others. God does not expect you to use what you do *not* have. Finding out what you have been given will help you discover your place of service. If you do not know your place of service, I challenge you to find your place of service between now and September, when we renew our ministries for the new program year.

3. ARE YOU DEVELOPING YOUR SERVANTHOOD?

The third question is, “Are you developing your servanthood?”

We are not left to our own devices to learn how to serve. We have a model for service in Jesus Christ. If we want to develop our servanthood then we need to serve like Jesus.

Serving like Jesus means being faithful. The Bible says:

“The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful” (1 Cor 4:2 TEV).

Jesus was faithful in his service. He did not give up. If we want to serve like Jesus then we must not give up. You may retire from your job someday, or you may already be retired from your job, but you never retire from serving God. The nature of that service may change. You may even need to take a break every so often, especially if you have been so deeply wounded in the past that you need a time of healing before you can begin to serve again. But the fact of service does not change.

The motivation for faithful ministry is God’s faithfulness to us - his love will never let us go. The fruit of faithful ministry is great joy - it is to someday hear Jesus say:

“Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21).

CONCLUSION

It is a great privilege to serve God through our vocations and our ministries. We need to decide to serve, discover our service and develop our servanthood.

At the beginning of the 20th century an American company sought to expand its business in China. They needed someone who knew the language, knew the customs, had the connections and was already in place in the country. The only person they could find who fit all these requirements was a missionary. The company found out the missionary was making only \$600 a year. They offered him \$20,000 to work for them. \$20,000 was a huge sum in those days. To the surprise of the chairman of the board the missionary said no. The chairman asked, “Is \$20,000 not enough?” “More than enough,” said the missionary, “far more than can be justified by the work.” “So what’s the problem?” asked the chairman. The missionary replied, “The problem is the job - its too small. I work for the Kingdom of God.”