

## Why Look at Our Serving?

“How’s your serving going lately?” No one has ever asked me this question, and I imagine you’ve never been asked it either. But if we were to be asked, we’d likely figure they’re talking about what we’re doing at church. “Serving” is commonly used for tasks in the church world.

But God is actually interested in all our doings, not just those in a church setting, and serving is a valid and useful way to describe everything we do. Jesus summed up all God’s directions to us in two commands: to love God and to love our neighbor (Matt 22:37, 39). When asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), a story which emphasizes the action-focus and comprehensive coverage of these commands. Both the action and the extent are also in these words of Paul, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col 3:23).

So God is already looking at all of our doings as service to him. Everything we do to keep our homes running, our bodies working, our tools and toys operating; everything we do to make a living; everything we do to help out family members, neighbors and our church family; everything we do in our socializing, hobbies and even our own pleasure; it all falls within ‘serving.’

What would it look like if we considered all our doings as service to our loving Father? How could we tell if we were achieving some success at it? It would certainly look different for each individual, but I suggest we’d see some common characteristics.

Intentionality - *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Eph. 2:10*

We’d be more intentional in what we do. God set aside one day out of seven for rest, so we’d aim for a healthy balance of rest and work, between time for self and time for others, avoiding both laziness and overwork. We’d acknowledge our unique package of skills and abilities as gifts from our heavenly Father, and so would seek to emphasize the use of them. But we’d also acknowledge that sometimes, for the good of others, we may need to step outside those gifts. When offered new opportunities or responsibilities, we’d ask God’s guidance.

Joy - *“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” Psalm 100:2*

When we serve according to how we are wired, we experience joy; these tasks that ‘fill our bucket’ and reenergize us. But sometimes God calls us to serve in ways that are difficult and painful. Caring for a parent with dementia or an adult child with severe disabilities can be exhausting and frustrating; serving as a soldier or a first responder can be terrifying and dangerous. But when we’re doing what we’re doing because we feel it’s what God wants us to do, there is a deep down confidence, a sense of ‘rightness’ and peace that is its own kind of joy. Underneath all our actions, easy or challenging, pleasant or not, would be an attitude flowing from joy and gratitude for all God has given us and done for us.

Impact *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.” 1 Peter 4:10*



How does what we're doing affect those around us? How do our daily actions line up with God's purposes and goals? God wants a world of peace and justice, where all can provide food for their families, where people live in community with him and each other. He did the hard part – paying the debts of sin to reestablish the relationship cut off in Adam's fall. He will one day bring about the new heavens and new earth we're promised. In the meantime, he works through us to meet people's needs. Do our choices enhance his desires? Are we helping able-bodied people provide for themselves? Are we providing for those not able to provide for themselves? Are we building community across barriers of race and class? Are we ready to respond to opportunities to share God's message of hope? Are our efforts to help people also building community?

Faith-Full *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Joshua 24:15

Faithful servants are faith-full. Our relationship with our God is part of all we do. We talk to him about our doings – our decisions, our challenges, our routines. Although he doesn't often speak to us by writing on the wall (Daniel 5:5) or through sheep's fleece (Judges 6:36-40), he does guide us as we read his word, as we worship with our community, as we talk with fellow believers, as we include quiet listening time in our prayers. We look for his presence in all our doings. Our faith influences all our doings, and what we see and learn in our doings impacts our faith.

As long as we're on earth, none of us will always serve intentionally, joyfully, impactfully and faith-fully. But as we recalibrate in these directions, we begin to experience the benefits.

- More help. The more we bring our doings to God, the more we're reminded of his unfailing love and support, and the more open we are to guiding.
- No competing expectations. As Os Guinness wrote in *The Call*, "I work for an audience of One. Before anyone else, I have nothing to gain, nothing to lose, nothing to prove."
- Freedom from anxieties and insecurities. God's love for us is never conditional on our performance.
- Neither crazy-busy nor boredom need be our norm.

When we join others in our church family to recalibrate our serving, the benefits are multiplied.

- A supportive friend or group increases our growth through accountability and the benefits of differing perspectives
- Growth in serving is growth in discipleship.
- 1 + 1 = 3. Serving together, we can accomplish more than we would individually.
- People are attracted to a group of people who are serving intentionally, joyfully, and impactfully, and that creates conversations about the faith aspect of our serving.

What we do flows from who we are – doing follows being. We become God's children solely by his grace, his action. Our actions have no part in creating our identity or establishing our relationship with God. So also in all our doings, we remember that tasks are servant to relationships. As we grow in our serving, may we also grow in our relationship our God and to others.

