

Lord of Our Service



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 10:38-42, John 13:1-15, Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12:28-13:3.*

Memory Text: “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant’ ” (*Mark 10:42, 43, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Our Lord Jesus Christ provides the ultimate example of service. He reminds us that “ ‘the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*). As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to serve in Jesus’ name.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, He invites us to follow in His steps. This is not a call to greatness as the world counts greatness. Rather, it is a call to service. It is a call to have the mind of Christ, who humbled Himself in the form of a servant. Like the disciples, we often find ourselves struggling for the place of honor, the position of authority. But Jesus lovingly reminds us, both in word and in life, “it shall not be so among you” (*Matt. 20:26*).

We are called first and foremost to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then to serve others in Jesus’ name. We will serve, not out of compulsion but out of love for Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us. That’s the only service that’s truly acceptable in His eyes, service born out of a heart of love for God and others.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.*

The Example of Jesus (*John 13:1-15*).

Only the apostle John records the story. Not a word from Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Not a single reference in the writings of Peter or Paul. And yet, when you read this story, it reminds you so much of the character of Jesus.

How did the conduct of Jesus in the upper room demonstrate His willingness to serve rather than to be served? *John 13:1-15*.

The foot-washing service is an opportunity for Christians to reaffirm their need for spiritual cleansing through faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Jesus made this point clear when He said “ ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean’ ” (*John 13:10, NKJV*) and “ ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me’ ” (*John 13:8, NKJV*).

However, the foot-washing service is not only an opportunity to say Yes again to Jesus as your Savior and Lord. It is also an act of service. Jesus provided for the disciples, and for each one of us, a perfect example of service. He had every right to sit back and let someone else serve, but Jesus humbled Himself. He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant.

Explore some other incidents in the earthly ministry of Jesus that demonstrate His willingness to serve. What can we learn from these stories about the call to service? *Mark 1:32-34, Luke 9:12-17, John 2:1-12*.

Jesus demonstrated, both in word and deed, that He came to serve rather than to be served. When He calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him; He is calling you to a life of service.

When was the last time you went out of your way to do a service for someone who had no possibility of repaying you, a service that took your time, your money, or both, a service that offered you nothing (at least in tangible goods) in return? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Key Text: *Philippians 2:4*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that Christians are called to service.
2. To show that Christ is our Example in serving others.
3. To discuss ways we can serve.
4. To show that service must be done in the right spirit.

Lesson Outline:

I. Accepting a Life of Service (*1 Cor. 10:24, 33*).

- A. Why is service part of the Christian life?
- B. What should motivate our service, and why?
- C. How can ministering to the needs of others be an avenue for winning souls? Is winning souls the only reason we should live a life of service? Explain.

II. Following Christ's Example (*Rom. 15:1-3*).

- A. In what ways was Jesus' life a life of service?
- B. How was even His death an act of service?
- C. Discuss practical ways we can imitate Christ's life of service.

III. Different Forms of Service (*1 Cor. 12:28*).

- A. How can the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28 be of service today?
- B. List and discuss biblical examples of people who lived a life of service.

IV. Serving in the Right Spirit (*1 Cor. 13:1-3, Gal. 2:16*).

- A. How do acts of service strengthen our relationship with Christ?
- B. Why should service be free from stress, worry, and competition?

Summary: Serving others will come naturally when we have a right relationship with Christ. We will serve because of our love for Him and our desire to do His will. Our acts of service testify of Christ's love for all people.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Service.

The first line of a popular Christian song is "Make me a servant, humble and meek."—Kelly Willard, "Make Me a Servant" (Maranatha! Music, © 1982).

This plea asserts a Christian value where the power pyramid is inverted. In much of Christianity the giving of service is lauded, while the withholding of service is shamed. Christians, however, are called to serve humbly.

At times, service can be difficult. Several years ago, doctors diagnosed that my mother had terminal cancer. She told me she had

Our Greatest Service

Of all the good things we can do for others, the greatest is to lead them into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, the One who, at the cross, paid for the sins of every human being. And if we believe that every Christian is commissioned to share this good news of Christ's sacrifice with the world, the question is not whether we should witness to others, but how. Here again, we can learn from the example of Jesus. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Dwell on what the Lord's servant wrote above and go through some of the Gospels and note specific examples of where Jesus was doing what she wrote. *See, for example, Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 2:15-17, Luke 19:2-7.* After you find some examples, answer this question: Even if I can't perform these same kinds of miracles, how can I, nevertheless, minister as Jesus did?

Christ's method of reaching souls, however, took something that many of us, even professed Christians, don't want to give: And that is ourselves. Oftentimes we might be tempted to think that throwing some money in a collection plate for a mission offering or handing out a few flyers for an evangelistic series is enough. And though these acts have their role, they are not the same as mingling with people, spending time with people, and ministering to their needs. To do this we need to give of ourselves in unselfish service. That's not always easy; it takes a painful death to self and a willingness to serve the Lord by serving others. Only through a daily commitment, a daily taking up of our own cross, will we be doing what we could for the Lord through ministering to others. This is the essence of Christian service, and it can open hearts to our message in ways that all the argumentation, Bible studies, and prophecy charts could never do.

Think of individuals within your sphere of influence who need to hear the gospel message. What are some practical ways that you can use Christ's method to reach them? Also, are you willing to make the personal sacrifices needed in order to reach them?

appointed me executor of her estate, meaning it would be my responsibility to see that all her affairs were legally settled. I am the first of my mother's five daughters. As the day of her death approached, I became anxious about my upcoming responsibility and begged her to give me some guidance regarding how she would like me to handle her affairs. She looked me in the eye and sighed, as if she had failed. Then she called for a meeting with all her loved ones, and as we gathered around her, she pulled out her big black Bible and read, "[The] first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (*Matt. 19:30*). It was then I realized what she expected me to do. Instead of worrying about doing it "right" or about how the rest of the family might perceive what I did, I was to look at my responsibility as an opportunity to serve the rest of my family.

There are at least two ways Christians think about service. For some, to be of service means to put the needs of others ahead of your own. This involves stretching your personal boundaries in order to give yourself for the betterment of another. Jesus modeled such selflessness when He willingly gave His life for our salvation. He calls us to pick up our cross and follow Him (*Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23, 24*). Paul tells us to consider others better than ourselves because Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death" (*Phil. 2:3-8, RSV*).

For other Christians, this emphasis on sacrificial service is an unbalanced interpretation of Scripture. It is sometimes referred to as the "Messiah complex." Treatment for such thinking asserts that Jesus alone died for us, and we cannot and should not try to do it again. His death is sufficient. It is not our call to die in serving others. Rather, we should live to serve out of the abundance of what God has given us instead of depleting ourselves.

Most likely, Christ's lordship embraces both these views. Jesus did not give Himself in service indiscriminately. There were occasions when He said No to going to Jerusalem because it was not yet His time. Yet, He did not flinch in going ahead when the time was right. As Christ's disciples, we, too, must be open to God's leading. Sometimes our service will be one of self-preservation for the greater good of the body; and sometimes it will be characterized by self-sacrifice. There is no single guiding principle. Instead, there is a guiding relationship with the Spirit of God, who will make it clear whether any given call to serve is one of self-sacrifice or one of self-preservation. Jesus has promised us this.

As we trust God's Spirit to direct our service, our spirituality will mature. There is a difference between obeying God because we are told to or obeying Him because He lives in our hearts. It is the difference between being a child and an adult. How often have you heard someone say "I don't do that, because I'm a Seventh-day Adventist"? Hiding behind a label is for the immature. Embracing one's identity as a child of God is for the mature. Rather than

Varieties of Service

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28).

We are all called to share the good news about Jesus Christ with others. This is our greatest service, and we will be effective when we follow Christ’s method for reaching people. It is important to realize, however, that the way in which we serve others will vary, based upon our personality and spiritual gifts. We are not all called to do the same thing. Part of the death to self required for Christian service is being willing to accept just what our gifts and callings are and are not.

Make a list of various forms of service recorded in Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28–13:3. In what ways do you sense the Lord calling you to serve others in His name? Justify your reasons.

When we consider the various ways Christians are called to serve in Jesus’ name, a natural question to ask is this: “In what ways is the Lord calling me to serve?” Every follower of Jesus Christ has to answer that question personally, but here is a process that might be helpful.

- Step 1: Explore the forms of service found in Scripture. The list you just made is not exhaustive. Other forms of service can be found in narrative passages of Scripture.
- Step 2: Experiment with various forms of service. As you serve others in a variety of ways, be attentive to your own thoughts and feelings. When you serve others using the gifts the Lord has given you, you will experience freedom and joy.
- Step 3: Be attentive to the counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord frequently uses people either to confirm the fruitfulness of your service or to suggest alternate forms of service that might be more appropriate, based upon the gifts they observe in your life.

How were you able to identify the gifts the Lord has given you? How are you using those gifts in service for others? Might you need to make changes in how you work, or maybe you should be doing something else entirely?

encouraging any person to adopt a collective identity instead of a personal identity, it is the goal of Christianity to have our service spring out of the core of who we are in Christ. How much better to say we do not want to do something, because Christ is Lord of our life. We are each created to serve our God in a unique way that is in accordance with whom He created us to be. I am a Seventh-day Adventist in part because I believe my Lord created me for rest and worship and that He spent time designing the specifics of that experience for my good. I relish this gift from Him. Then, when our lives are fully in tune with Christ and when our service is fully in line with His lordship, He can say to His accusers as He said of Job,

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Luke 10:38-42, John 13:1-17, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28-13:3*

- ① When we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, we abandon the world's standard of greatness and power. The question we ask ourselves is not How can I be honored? but How can I serve? How have you answered that question in your own life? What biblical role models (besides Jesus) are good examples? What modern examples inspire you to be more involved in service?
- ② Jesus' act of washing His disciples' feet was an act of outrageous humility (*John 13:1-17*). It shattered all cultural standards of the day. When we commemorate that act in connection with the Communion service, our actions are largely symbolic. In most cases, our feet are not really dirty. What, therefore, is the real meaning of this symbolic act? Use your imagination to think of real-life acts that would demonstrate real—not symbolic—humility.
- ③ “There is a time for everything” (*Ecc. 3:1, NIV*). Yet, often we crowd our days with so many activities we cannot possibly do them all justice. Often things we should value most—relationships, spiritual growth, re-creation, service, etc.—get shoved to the side. Part of making Jesus Lord of our lives is ordering our priorities according to His will. What adjustments have you made to your daily schedule that allow you more time to serve Him and others? What adjustments do you still need to make?
- ④ “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (*Rom. 12:6, NIV*). What are some things you really enjoy doing for others? For the church? For your community? How do these acts reflect the fact Jesus is Lord of your life?

Examples of Service

The New Testament is filled with examples of men and women, boys and girls, who served others in Jesus' name. Some well-known examples include Andrew, when he brought his brother Simon to Jesus (*see John 1:40-42*), and Dorcas, who sewed garments for those in need (*see Acts 9:36-39*).

You may find it interesting and educational to select a book of the Bible and read it entirely, looking for examples of service.

Skim through the book of Acts, which contains numerous examples of service in Jesus' name. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify examples of service you might imitate in your own life. (Or perhaps you might find another book and do the same thing.)

When we serve others in Jesus' name, we are not only following the example of our Lord. We are giving evidence of His transforming presence in our lives. We are no longer self-centered and self-serving. Rather, we find joy in serving others. There is a power in unselfish service for others that no force in the world can negate. Again, for sinful beings who are inherently self-centered and selfish, this doesn't necessarily come easy. Daily surrender to the Lord is crucial.

What's so important, too, is to keep the Cross before your eyes, for here is the greatest example in all the universe of unselfish service for others. As we day by day contemplate the great sacrifice made in our behalf, the spotless Son of God, the One through whom the worlds were made (*see Heb. 1:2*), taking upon Himself the sins of the world, our hearts will be broken. Before the Cross, nothing Christ asks of us will be too much; before the Cross, our service to others will be the least we can do for the God who has said to us, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (*Matt. 25:40*).

Take time to dwell on the sacrifice of Christ, the greatest example possible of unselfish service. How does dwelling on the Cross impact you and your willingness to serve others?

“Have you considered my servant?” (*Job 1:8, NIV*). What an affirming endorsement! In essence, God is saying, “Think about My servant’s service; think about the consistency of his behavior, and you will recognize that I AM the Lord of My servant.”

Witnessing

This week’s study talks of “taking up our cross,” but what does this mean in terms of service? Too often, Christians seem a miserable lot because they appear as martyrs. Self-appointed martyrs quickly become preoccupied with themselves, but God is looking for His people to be so closely identified with Christ that there is no thought of self.

Indeed, Jesus promised that “ ‘whoever believes in me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him’ ” (*John 7:38, NIV*). Rivers run their course, from source to ultimate destination, reaching places unknown and finding their way around or through any obstacle that stands in their way.

Is our connection to the Source so strong that living water streams from us, or has it slowed to a trickle?

Are we so intent on reaching our destination that nothing can stand in our way?

Has the overflow reached those around us and even to places unknown?

If you know all those you’ve touched, or they can each point to you as the stream through which their blessings came, your witness has been too small. Just as rivers will drop out of sight for miles, so, too, should much of our service be unrecognized.

The best way to keep from serving out of competition is to realize that our standard of comparison is not with one another but with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus met needs people did not even know they had. Surely we can never measure up to the example of service Christ left for us, so let us simply carry on the ministry of caring for *all* those He came to save so they might see Him.

Misguided Service *(Luke 10:38-42).*

We must be careful not to allow our service in Jesus' name to hinder our relationship with Jesus. Indeed, we need to keep our relationship with Jesus as the center, the foundation, of our desire to serve others. Otherwise, a number of things can happen. For instance, we can become proud, thinking our good works are things we do that add to our salvation, that are meritorious toward our basic acceptance with God.

At the same time, it is possible as followers of Jesus to become so preoccupied with serving others that we have no time to spend with Jesus Himself. A classic example of misguided service is seen when Jesus visited the home of Martha. In many ways, Martha is a model of devotion. She believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (*see John 11:27*). She was willing to keep trusting, even when she did not see the way (*see John 11:21, 22*). On one occasion, however, when Jesus visited Martha's home in Bethany, she allowed her service to hinder her relationship with Jesus.

How does Martha's preoccupation with "serving Jesus" affect her personally and, consequently, impact her relationship with the Master? *Luke 10:38-42.*

Martha is worried. The verb used here in the Greek (translated as "careful" in the KJV) is a strong one. We find this same verb in Philippians 4:6, where Paul exhorts the believers to "be anxious for nothing" (*NKJV*). We find a variation of the word, as a noun, in 1 Peter 5:7, where Peter appeals to believers to cast all their anxiety, all their cares, upon the Lord. But Martha is holding on to all her anxieties. She is anxious. There is a division and distraction in her mind. She is full of inner turmoil.

Martha is also troubled. The Greek verb (translated "troubled" in the KJV) implies external agitation. Martha is not only full of inner turmoil. She is also externally agitated. Her service for Jesus is misguided. As a result, her relationship with Jesus suffers. Instead of sitting at His feet and experiencing intimate communion with Him, she accosts Him with these words: " 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me' " (*Luke 10:40, 41, NKJV*).

How can we avoid this trap, where our preoccupation with serving in Jesus' name gets in the way of our relationship with Him? Why must we not let anything, even our service for the Lord, hinder that relationship?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Can you remember when you were little and doing dishes with Mom was fun? Later, doing dishes became one of your *chores*, and you did all kinds of things to avoid it. Where did the fun go? Jesus, the eternal God, came to earth to serve humanity. See *John 13:1-15*. Discuss what motivated Him and how you can recapture the joy of blessing others through acts of service.

Thought Questions:

❶ Mary sat at Jesus' feet while Martha scurried around the kitchen preparing to meet His needs. She was "distracted with all her preparations" (*Luke 10:40, NASB*). When she complained to the Lord, He pointed her to a better choice. How do we sort out our agendas so we receive from Jesus in anticipation of serving others? How would this prevent discouragement and burnout? Take some time this week to schedule time to "sit at Jesus' feet" before you seek to go out and serve on His behalf.

❷ In the context of spiritual gifts, our God provided and empowered abilities to serve others. In the same context, Paul takes time to show us "a still more excellent way" (*1 Cor. 12:31, NASB*). This is the linking concept to 1 Corinthians 13 that describes the depth of love. Why is it necessary to allow God to motivate our service for Him through a heart filled with His love? Reflect on when you have served out of a sense of duty versus serving for the joy of making a difference in someone's life. Ask God to fill your heart with His compassion for others and profound joy in blessing them.

Application Question:

Cookie cutters are designed to create uniform cookies. God desires we unite in our focus to serve Him, but He didn't make us all exact duplicates of one another (*Rom. 12:4-8*). "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (*vs. 6, NASB*). Discuss the diversity of spiritual gifts recorded in the Bible. (*Also see 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.*) If you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, ask your pastor to help you discover them. Covenant to let God work through the gifts He has given you to serve others and honor Him.

Further Study: Another danger Christians face as they serve others in Jesus' name is a spirit of competition. We can easily fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with others or measuring our service against theirs. Consider the following passages of Scripture that address the issue of competition in our service for others: *Luke 9:49, 50; 1 Cor. 1:11-13*. What lessons can we learn from the teaching of Jesus and the attitude of the apostle Paul?

Note: The teaching of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25:31-46 suggests that our service for others is an important indicator of our Christian experience. This account of the dividing of the sheep and the goats suggests that those who are not involved in acts of service to others will be sent away into everlasting punishment. How would you explain this passage in the context of salvation by grace through faith? Are acts of service necessary for salvation? Is it accurate to say that we must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick if we expect to enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 A friend tells you she would like to explore ways of serving others in Jesus' name, but she feels her schedule is already overloaded. What counsel would you give her?
- 2 What can you do together, as a class, to reveal to others the caring and serving spirit that should be the hallmark of all who profess to follow Jesus Christ?
- 3 How can we avoid the trap of believing that our service for others somehow earns us merits with God, that somehow good works can add to our salvation?
- 4 What contemporary example of serving others has been most inspirational to you, and why? Discuss.