COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE
49

The Way *of the* Servant Leader

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 5:
The Foundation of Servanthood

An overview of leadership expressed through humble service.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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Servant leadership begins with Jesus Christ. Before we consider positions, responsibilities or the work of leading others, we must first understand the foundation upon which all Christian leadership rests: servanthood.

Jesus did not measure greatness according to position, recognition or authority over others. In His genuine humanity, He willingly humbled Himself and took the place of a servant.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:7-8**:

> *"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

The servant life of Jesus was not weakness. He willingly gave Himself in obedience and love. Throughout His earthly ministry, He cared for people, ministered to their needs and finally gave His life for them.

This establishes an important principle for every believer: servanthood is not reserved for those who hold a particular position or office. Every believer is called to serve. Christian service belongs to the life of every person who follows Jesus Christ.

However, Christian servanthood is not an attempt to copy Jesus Christ from the outside through human effort. The born-again believer possesses something far greater: Jesus Christ Himself dwells within His people, and His servant life is to be expressed through them.

His love within moves us to care for others. His humility governs the way we respond to people, and His life within teaches us that no genuine act of service is beneath us. Christian servanthood therefore flows from the life of Christ within rather than from an outward attempt to appear humble or religious.

Servanthood is not a stage that we pass through on the way to leadership. A person does not begin as a servant and then graduate beyond serving when greater responsibility is received. The greater the responsibility, the greater the opportunity to serve.

In this first Study Guide of the module Servant Leadership, we will establish this foundation. We will consider the servant life of Jesus Christ, the meaning of greatness in the Kingdom of God, self-denial, service to others and the calling of every believer to serve.

Before we learn how to lead, we must understand the fundamental truth that will govern everything that follows: In the Kingdom of God, leadership must always stand upon the foundation of servanthood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that servanthood must govern every part of Christian leadership?

Personal Reflection

When responsibility comes your way, do you think first about being recognised or about whom you can serve? Explain what this reveals about your attitude.

Action Step

Identify one responsibility you already have. Choose a way to use it for another person's benefit without seeking a position or recognition.

INTRODUCTION: JESUS CHRIST REDEFINED GREATNESS

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The world often measures greatness by position, influence, recognition, wealth or authority. Those who occupy the highest places are commonly regarded as the most successful, while those who serve are often considered less important.

Jesus Christ taught something entirely different. When His disciples began thinking about position and greatness, He directed their attention away from ruling over others and towards serving them.

Mark recorded the words of Jesus in **Mark 10:42-45**:

> *"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

Jesus drew a clear distinction between the way authority is commonly exercised in the world and the way greatness is understood in the Kingdom of God. His words *"But so shall it not be among you"* establish an important principle.

Among the people of God, greatness is not determined by how many people are beneath us, how much authority we possess or how much recognition we receive. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is revealed through service.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this principle. He possessed authority, yet He did not use that authority to exalt Himself or demand that others serve Him. He ministered to people, cared for those in need and gave Himself for others.

The disciples did not immediately understand this principle. On another occasion, they disputed concerning which of them should be considered the greatest.

Luke recorded in **Luke 22:24-27**:

> *"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."*

The words *"I am among you as he that serveth"* bring us directly to the foundation of servant leadership. Jesus did not simply give His disciples instructions about serving because His own life demonstrated what true servanthood means.

Yet the born-again believer is not called to reproduce His life through outward imitation or human effort. Jesus Christ dwells within His people, and His servant life is to be expressed through them. His life within changes the way we view position, responsibility and the needs of others.

Before we consider positions, responsibility or leadership, we must therefore establish this foundation. Every believer is first called to serve, and greater responsibility never removes that calling.

Christian leadership begins with servanthood, continues through servanthood, and must never rise above servanthood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Jesus measures greatness by service rather than status?

Personal Reflection

Recall a time when you wanted others to notice your contribution. How does Jesus' measure of greatness challenge that desire?

Action Step

Where you might normally seek credit, deliberately give another person the help they need. Explain how Christ's servant life should govern your motive.

SERVANTHOOD AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

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The Gospel reveals Jesus Christ not only as the One who saves, but also as the One who willingly gave Himself for others. His earthly life was not centred upon seeking honour, recognition or personal advantage. He came with a clear purpose: to minister and to give Himself for others.

Jesus said in **Mark 10:45**:

> *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

These words bring servanthood directly into the heart of the Gospel. Jesus did not simply perform occasional acts of service because His giving of Himself demonstrated the character

of His entire earthly ministry. He came to minister, and His service ultimately led to the giving of His life.

The word translated *"minister"* in this verse comes from the Greek word DIAKONEO, which carries the thought of serving or attending to the needs of another. Jesus used this word to describe His own purpose. He did not come demanding that others attend to Him, but came to give Himself in service.

This helps us understand that biblical servanthood is much more than carrying out particular tasks. Servanthood is an attitude of heart that places the needs of others before selfish ambition. A person may perform an act of service while still seeking recognition, praise or position, but true Christian service flows from love and a willingness to give without making self the centre.

Called to Liberty and Called to Serve

The Gospel brings liberty in Jesus Christ, but that liberty is not given so that believers may live for themselves. Paul showed that Christian liberty creates an opportunity to serve others through love.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

> *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."*

Notice the connection between liberty and service. The believer has been made free in Jesus Christ, but that freedom is not to become an excuse for selfishness. Paul directs the believer towards something very different: *"by love serve one another."*

This service is not produced by religious pressure. Neither is it a means of earning salvation, proving spiritual worth or obtaining acceptance before God. The born-again believer is already complete in Jesus Christ, and service flows from the new life that has been received in Him.

Jesus Christ dwells within the believer, and His love within changes the way we look at other people. Instead of continually asking what others can do for us, His life within teaches us to recognise what we can do for them.

Love Is Expressed Through Service

The Gospel reveals love through action. God did not simply speak about love from a distance because His love was demonstrated through what He did for humanity.

John wrote in **1 John 3:16-18**:

> *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."*

John connects the giving of Christ with the way believers respond to the needs of others. Love must become visible because it cannot remain only in our words.

This does not mean that every believer will be called to make the same sacrifice or perform the same kind of service. Opportunities, abilities and circumstances differ, but every believer can allow the love of Jesus Christ within to be expressed through practical concern for others.

Sometimes service may involve a great sacrifice. At other times, it may be something that appears very small: giving time, listening carefully, helping someone with a practical need, encouraging a discouraged person or quietly doing work that receives no recognition.

The size of the task does not determine the value of the service. What matters is the love and faithfulness from which it flows.

Servanthood Is Not Optional

Christian servanthood must therefore never be regarded as a specialised ministry for a few unusually dedicated believers. It belongs to the life of every person who has been born again.

Some believers may preach, while others may teach, help, give, encourage, organise or care for practical needs. The forms of service are different, but the principle remains the same: The life received from Jesus Christ is not a self-centred life.

When Christ dwells within us, His love turns our attention towards others. His life produces a willingness to give, help and serve without continually demanding recognition in return.

Servanthood is therefore at the heart of the Gospel because the Gospel brings us into Jesus Christ Himself. The One who came *"not to be ministered unto, but to minister"* now dwells within His people.

Christian service is not an attempt to imitate His servant life from the outside. It is the servant life of Jesus Christ being expressed through those in whom He dwells.

This gives us the foundation upon which everything else in this module must stand. We do not serve in order to become complete in Christ. We serve because we are complete in Him, and His life within moves us to love and serve others.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Christ's life within moves believers to serve because they already belong to Him?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever treated serving others as a way to gain God's approval? What changes when you recognise that the born-again believer is already complete in Christ?

Action Step

Examine the reason behind one act of service. Put aside the desire to prove your worth and respond to someone from the love of Christ within.

JESUS CHRIST: THE SERVANT

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The clearest understanding of servanthood is found in Jesus Christ Himself. Throughout His earthly life, He demonstrated that genuine authority and humble service are not opposites. He

possessed authority, yet willingly served others. He cared for the needy, drew near to those who were rejected, fed the hungry and gave Himself for humanity.

Paul described the servant life of Jesus in **Philippians 2:5-8**:

> *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

Jesus possessed genuine humanity. In that humanity, He *"took upon him the form of a servant."* His life demonstrates that servanthood does not indicate weakness or lack of authority. It reveals humility, obedience and a willingness to give oneself for others.

Moved With Compassion

The servant life of Jesus can be seen repeatedly throughout the Gospels. He did not look upon suffering people with indifference because He was moved with compassion and acted upon that compassion.

Mark records the occasion when a leper came to Jesus.

Mark wrote in **Mark 1:40-42**:

> *"And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."*

The words *"moved with compassion"* are important. Jesus did not serve people simply because a duty had to be performed. His service flowed from genuine care.

The leper was someone whom others would naturally avoid, yet Jesus reached towards him. He was willing to draw near to a person whom society had separated and rejected.

This teaches us an important principle of servanthood: True service sees the person, not simply the inconvenience associated with helping them. The servant life is willing to notice those whom others overlook.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Jesus noticed and approached a person whom others avoided?

Personal Reflection

Is there someone you tend to overlook because helping them would be inconvenient? What does Jesus' compassion reveal about your response?

Action Step

Identify a person you might ordinarily pass by. Give them appropriate attention or practical help, and consider what needed to change in your heart.

No Act of Genuine Service Is Beneath Us

One of the clearest demonstrations of humble service occurred when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples.

John wrote in **John 13:4-5**:

> *"He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."*

Jesus willingly performed a lowly task for His disciples. The lesson was particularly powerful because He was their Lord and Master.

Jesus later said in **John 13:14-17**:

> *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."*

The spiritual lesson demonstrated by Jesus was humble service. He showed His disciples that they were never to consider themselves too important to serve another person.

These verses are not establishing literal feet washing as a continuing New Covenant ordinance. The outward action demonstrated the servant principle that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand and live.

No genuine act of loving service is beneath the servant of Jesus Christ. A title, office or responsibility must never produce the attitude that certain tasks belong only to people considered less important.

His Love Became Visible

The servant life of Jesus was also expressed through practical concern for people's needs. When a great multitude followed Him into a desert place, Jesus did not treat them simply as a crowd because He saw people who needed care.

Mark wrote in **Mark 6:34**:

> *"And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things."*

His compassion led Him to minister spiritually to them. Later, when they needed food, He also cared for their physical need.

Mark wrote in **Mark 6:41**:

> *"And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all."*

Jesus cared for the whole situation before Him. He taught the people, but He also recognised their practical need.

Christian service should therefore never become so concerned with positions, programmes or responsibilities that it stops seeing people. Servanthood is concerned with people because the love of Christ is concerned with people.

He Loved Them Unto the End

John gives us an important description of the heart behind the actions of Jesus.

John wrote in **John 13:1**:

> *"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."*

His service flowed from love. The towel and basin were not empty demonstrations because they expressed something that was already within His heart.

The same must be true of Christian service. A person can perform many tasks and still be motivated by pride, recognition, obligation or the desire to be noticed. Genuine Christian service must flow from love.

For the born-again believer, that love does not have to be manufactured through human effort. Jesus Christ dwells within His people, and His love within us is the source from which genuine service is to flow.

He Gave Himself

The earthly ministry of Jesus ultimately demonstrates the greatest principle of servanthood: the servant gives rather than continually demanding to receive.

Jesus said in **Mark 10:45**:

> *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

His servant life reached far beyond individual acts of kindness because He gave Himself. This is why servanthood cannot be reduced to occasionally helping someone when it is convenient.

True service involves a willingness to give our time, attention, ability and strength for the good of others. The form of service may differ, but the servant heart remains willing to give.

Jesus Christ remains the foundation of this understanding. Yet believers are not trying to copy His servant life from a distance because the One who served now dwells within those who are born again.

His compassion within us causes us to notice people. His love within us moves us to care. His humility within governs the way we use responsibility. His servant life is expressed through us as we yield ourselves to Him.

Jesus came *"not to be ministered unto, but to minister."* That same servant life must remain at the heart of everyone who would serve in His Kingdom.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Jesus showed humble love through lowly service and the giving of Himself?

Personal Reflection

Which task have you considered beneath you because of your role, age or experience? Why does Jesus washing the disciples' feet challenge that attitude?

Action Step

Choose an ordinary, humble task that benefits someone else. Carry it out without treating it as beneath you, and examine your attitude while serving.

SERVANTHOOD IS THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

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When the disciples thought about greatness, Jesus directed them towards servanthood. He showed them that life in the Kingdom of God operates according to a very different principle from the pursuit of position and recognition that is common in the world.

Matthew recorded the words of Jesus in **Matthew 20:26-27**:

> *"But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:"*

The word translated *"minister"* comes from the Greek word DIAKONOS, which refers to one who serves or attends to the needs of another. The word translated *"servant"* is DOULOS, which carries the thought of one who is given to the service of another.

Jesus was teaching His disciples that servanthood is not restricted to a particular group within the Church. It is foundational to Christian life. Before a person is entrusted with responsibility for others, there should already be a willingness to serve them.

Faithfulness Begins With Small Things

People sometimes desire greater responsibility while overlooking the opportunities for service already before them. Jesus taught that faithfulness is first demonstrated in what appears small.

Jesus said in **Luke 16:10**:

> *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

The principle is straightforward. A person who cannot be trusted with a small responsibility is not prepared simply by receiving a larger one. Character is revealed through the way we handle what has already been placed before us.

This applies directly to servanthood. There may be tasks that receive little attention or recognition, and there may be opportunities to help that no one else notices. Yet faithfulness is not measured by how visible the task is.

The servant is faithful because the service matters, not because people are watching. This becomes particularly important when we later consider leadership. Responsibility should not

create a servant heart because a servant heart should already be evident before greater responsibility is received.

Leadership Grows From Servanthood

Jesus again taught this principle when the disciples disputed about greatness.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 22:26**:

> *"But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

Notice that Jesus did not remove the possibility that someone might carry responsibility. He spoke of *"he that is chief,"* but He completely changed the manner in which that responsibility was to be understood.

The one entrusted with responsibility was still to serve. This means that Christian leadership cannot be built upon the desire to control people, receive honour or occupy an important position.

Leadership in the Church must grow from proven servanthood. Greater responsibility does not lift someone above service because it increases the responsibility to serve wisely, faithfully and lovingly.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that greater responsibility increases the duty to serve?

Personal Reflection

When you are entrusted with responsibility, are you more concerned with being obeyed or with meeting people's needs? Explain.

Action Step

Review one responsibility you carry and identify whom it should benefit. Change one aspect of how you carry it so that service, not status, comes first.

Servanthood Is Not Inferiority

The world can regard serving as belonging to those of lower rank, but Scripture does not present servanthood that way.

Paul wrote concerning Jesus in **Philippians 2:7**:

> *"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:"*

Jesus taking the form of a servant did not make Him insignificant. Servanthood revealed humility and a willingness to give Himself for others.

We should therefore never consider service beneath us. Neither should believers who perform quiet or practical work be regarded as less important than those whose ministry is more visible.

Service is not weakness. It often requires strength to put aside pride, personal preference and the desire for recognition in order to meet the needs of another person.

Faithful Servants in Scripture

Scripture gives many examples of people who served faithfully before receiving greater responsibility. Joseph served in very difficult circumstances, and although he had been sold into slavery, he remained faithful in Potiphar's house.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 39:4**:

> *"And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand."*

Joseph did not begin as overseer. He served faithfully, and responsibility was entrusted to him.

Moses also became known as *"the servant of the LORD."* Although God used him to lead Israel, Scripture remembered him as a servant.

Moses recorded in **Exodus 14:31**:

> *"And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses."*

Joshua provides another important example. Before he led Israel, he served alongside Moses.

Joshua wrote in **Joshua 1:1**:

> *"Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,"*

Joshua's years of service came before the responsibility of leading Israel. Joseph, Moses and Joshua therefore demonstrate the same important principle: faithful service prepares a person to carry greater responsibility.

Their responsibility did not remove their identity as servants. Service remained part of the character required to carry what had been entrusted to them.

Free to Serve

Christian liberty also strengthens this principle. Freedom in Jesus Christ is not freedom to become self-centred.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

> *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."*

The believer has been made free in Jesus Christ so that life is no longer governed by the selfish demands of the flesh. Through the life of Christ within, love can now be expressed in service towards others.

We therefore do not serve in an attempt to earn spiritual standing or to make ourselves worthy before God. Neither do we serve simply because we are trying to imitate Jesus from the outside.

Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His servant life is expressed through us as we yield ourselves to Him. Servanthood must therefore remain foundational whether a believer is given little responsibility or much.

Before leadership comes service. During leadership there must still be service. The servant never graduates beyond servanthood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that serving others is a calling of free believers, not a sign of inferiority?

Personal Reflection

Have you mistaken quiet service for a lower position in God's people? How does liberty in Christ change that view?

Action Step

Notice a useful task that receives little attention. Serve willingly in that place, recognising that service flows from the life of Christ, not spiritual inferiority.

SELF-DENIAL AND DAILY SERVICE

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Servanthood requires more than a willingness to help when it is convenient. Jesus taught that discipleship involves a daily surrender of self. The servant cannot be governed continually by personal ambition, comfort, recognition or preference. There must be a willingness to place the will of God and the needs of others before selfish desires.

Jesus stated this clearly when He described the cost of following Him.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 9:23**:

> *"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

Notice that Jesus said, *"deny himself."* Self-denial does not mean that a person has no value, personality or legitimate needs, and neither does it mean deliberately seeking hardship. It means that self is no longer to occupy the controlling place in our lives.

The question is no longer simply, What do I want? The believer learns to ask, What does Jesus Christ desire to express through my life?

The Principle of the Seed

Jesus illustrated self-denial through the simple picture of a seed.

John recorded the words of Jesus in **John 12:24-26**:

> *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."*

A seed kept entirely to itself remains alone, but when it is planted, life produces fruit. Jesus connected this principle directly with service when He said, *"If any man serve me, let him follow me."*

The servant cannot cling tightly to every personal preference and at the same time remain available to serve others. Service will sometimes require time that we had intended to use differently. It may require inconvenience, patience, effort or sacrifice.

This is not loss without purpose. Self-denial makes room for a life that can be used in the service of God and others.

The Cross Is a Daily Matter

Jesus spoke of taking up the cross *"daily."* Servanthood therefore cannot be reduced to one great act of surrender made sometime in the past. Every day brings situations in which selfishness and service stand before us as different choices.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:1**:

> *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

A living sacrifice is available to God. Our time, abilities, strength and opportunities are placed at His disposal.

This does not mean that believers earn favour with God through sacrifice. We do not surrender ourselves in order to become accepted by Him because we belong to Jesus Christ already, and our service flows from the life He has given us.

Daily surrender allows His life within to govern our choices rather than allowing selfish desire to control them. The emphasis remains upon yielding to the Christ who already dwells within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that daily self-denial makes room for Christ's life to govern our choices?

Personal Reflection

Which personal preference is most likely to prevent you from meeting another person's need? What does self-denial require of your attitude?

Action Step

Choose one genuine need and identify the preference you must set aside to meet it. Respond through Christ's love rather than through resentment or pressure.

Looking Beyond Our Own Interests

Self-denial becomes particularly practical in the way we respond to other people.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:3-4**:

> *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*

Paul does not say that we should neglect every responsibility of our own. He teaches that we must not look only upon our own things because the servant also notices the needs of other people.

We notice when someone needs encouragement and recognise when a burden can be shared. We become willing to give time when someone needs to be heard, and we help with practical needs even when the work brings no recognition.

Many important acts of service will never be seen publicly. Daily servanthood is often expressed through ordinary choices that place love before convenience.

Self-Denial Is Not Self-Produced Righteousness

There is an important distinction to maintain. Self-denial can itself become a form of religious performance if a person begins to measure spirituality by how much hardship they can endure. That is not the New Covenant life.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

The controlling truth is not simply *"I am crucified."* Paul continues, *"Christ liveth in me."*

The Christian life is therefore not a continual human effort to suppress ourselves so that we might become better servants. Jesus Christ lives within the born-again believer. Self-denial means allowing His life rather than selfish desire to govern us.

The source of Christian service remains Christ within. We do not produce His servant life through our own determination because we yield ourselves so that the life already received in Him can be expressed.

Self-Denial Can Require Real Sacrifice

Scripture gives examples of people whose obedience required them to surrender comfort or advantage. Moses made such a choice.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 11:24-26**:

> *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward."*

Moses chose the purpose of God above the advantages available to him in Egypt. The lesson is not that possessions, comfort or position are automatically wrong, but whether these things become more important than obedience to God.

There will be times when faithful service costs something. It may cost time, require changing our plans or involve giving when we would prefer to keep. It may require patience with someone who is difficult or mean serving faithfully when nobody thanks us.

The servant life is often tested most clearly when service becomes inconvenient. At those times, self-denial moves from a teaching we understand to a principle expressed through our choices.

By Love Serve One Another

Self-denial must never become cold duty because its proper expression is love.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

> *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."*

The believer is free in Jesus Christ, yet that liberty is not used to protect selfish independence. Love turns liberty towards service.

This brings self-denial into its proper New Covenant setting. We do not spend our lives trying to destroy ourselves. We allow the life and love of Jesus Christ within to govern what we do.

His love causes us to look beyond ourselves, His life makes us available to others, and His servant heart changes the way we use our time, abilities and opportunities. Self-denial therefore becomes practical in the ordinary choices of daily life.

We say no to selfishness so that the life of Jesus Christ within us can say yes to love, service and the needs of others.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Christ's love turns self-denial into practical care for others?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes protect your time or comfort while someone nearby needs help? What might the love of Christ lead you to reconsider?

Action Step

Give an appropriate amount of time to one person whose need you have noticed. Afterwards, examine whether convenience or compassion governed your decision.

THE SERVANT LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST WITHIN

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The Christian life is not an attempt to reproduce the character of Jesus Christ through human effort. A believer is not standing outside Christ, studying His life and then trying to copy what He did. The New Covenant gives us something far greater: Jesus Christ Himself dwells within the born-again believer.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Paul did not simply say that he had learned to behave more like Jesus. He said, *"Christ liveth in me."* This is the foundation of Christian character and Christian service.

The servant life of Jesus Christ is therefore not something that we must manufacture. His life is already within every person who has been born again. As we yield ourselves to Him, that life is expressed through the way we think, speak, respond and serve.

Christ in You

Paul described this indwelling reality when writing to the Colossians.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The words *"Christ in you"* are central to understanding Christian servanthood. Jesus Christ is not simply an example from history whom we admire from a distance. He is the living Christ who dwells within His people.

This changes the way we understand humility, compassion, patience and service. We are not being asked to produce these things independently of Him. The One who humbled Himself, served others and gave Himself now lives within us.

His life within is the source of genuine Christian service.

God Works Within

A person can discipline outward behaviour for a time. Someone may learn to speak politely, perform helpful tasks or appear humble before others, yet outward behaviour alone does not necessarily reveal what is happening in the heart.

True Christian service must come from within.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:13**:

> *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

Notice that God works *"in you."* He works not only in what we do, but also in the willingness from which our actions come.

This is important because a person can serve for many different reasons. Someone may seek recognition, another may feel pressured, while someone else may hope that service will bring position or influence.

Christian service should flow from something deeper. The life of Jesus Christ within produces both the desire and the ability to serve according to His will.

We do not serve in order to obtain spiritual standing, nor do we serve to prove that we are worthy. The born-again believer is already complete in Jesus Christ. Service is the expression of the life already received in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that the desire and strength to serve come from Christ within?

Personal Reflection

When you help someone, do you rely mainly on your ability or recognise the life of Christ within as the source of genuine service?

Action Step

Before carrying out one act of service, examine your motive and acknowledge your dependence on Christ within. Explain how this changes your approach.

The Branch Draws Life From the Vine

Jesus used the relationship between a vine and its branches to explain spiritual life.

John recorded the words of Jesus in **John 15:4-5**:

> *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."*

A branch does not produce fruit by studying another branch and trying harder. It produces fruit because it possesses the life of the vine. The same principle applies spiritually: The believer bears spiritual fruit because the life of Jesus Christ is within.

Humility, patience, love, compassion and service must therefore be understood as expressions of His life working within His people. We are not trying to appear humble or manufacture compassion because His life within teaches us to humble ourselves and His compassion moves us towards people in need.

Neither are we trying to prove that we are servants. His servant life within produces a willingness to serve.

His Love Within Is Expressed Through Us

John connects love directly with God's dwelling within His people.

John wrote in **1 John 4:12-13**:

> *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."*

Christian love is therefore more than natural affection because it flows from divine life within. This becomes particularly important when serving people who may be difficult, demanding or unable to give anything in return.

Human affection can quickly weaken when service becomes inconvenient. The love of Christ within enables us to respond according to something greater than personal preference.

His love moves us to listen and produces patience. It teaches us to care and enables us to keep serving when recognition is absent.

This does not mean that wisdom, correction or proper boundaries are unnecessary. Genuine love does not approve everything another person does. However, even correction should be governed by the life of Christ within rather than pride, anger or personal offence.

Our Abilities Become Opportunities to Serve

The indwelling life of Christ also changes the way we view our abilities and responsibilities.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:3**:

> *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."*

Humility does not mean pretending that we have no abilities. Neither does it mean refusing responsibility when God has equipped us to carry it. Humility means that our abilities are not used to exalt ourselves.

Knowledge becomes an opportunity to help, while experience becomes an opportunity to encourage. A spiritual gift becomes an opportunity to strengthen the body, and leadership becomes an opportunity to serve those who have been entrusted to our care.

What God places within our hands should become an opportunity for service rather than self-exaltation.

The Life Within Must Be Lived

The indwelling Christ does not make the believer passive. Scripture calls us to love, serve, obey, give and act. The difference is the source from which those actions proceed.

We are not producing spiritual life independently and then asking God to approve our effort. We are learning to yield ourselves to the One who already dwells within.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:12-13**:

> *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

The believer acts because God works within. The believer serves from the life of Christ within, and the believer loves because that love flows from His life.

This is the foundation of Christian servanthood. We are not trying to become servants by copying Jesus Christ from the outside. Jesus Christ dwells within us, and His servant life is expressed through us as we yield ourselves to Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that the believer serves as Christ's life within is expressed outwardly?

Personal Reflection

What ability or experience do you have that you have treated mainly as your own achievement? How could it become useful to another person?

Action Step

Select an ability that could help someone else. Use it in humble service and consider how giving credit to Christ changes your attitude.

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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The world has its own measures of greatness. Wealth, position, influence, recognition and authority are often treated as evidence that a person has succeeded. Those who rise to prominent positions may be admired, while quiet service can easily be overlooked.

Jesus Christ completely changed this measure. In the Kingdom of God, greatness is not determined by how many people serve us, but by our willingness to serve others.

Matthew recorded the words of Jesus in **Matthew 20:27-28**:

> *"And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

Jesus did not simply give His disciples a new method of leadership. He revealed an entirely different understanding of greatness. The one who desires to be chief must first understand what it means to serve.

The World's Measure of Greatness

Human society often measures greatness according to what a person possesses, controls or achieves. Recognition can become more important than character, and position can become more important than service.

Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 1:14**:

> *"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."*

Earthly success is temporary. Wealth can disappear, influence can be lost and positions eventually pass to someone else. None of these things can provide the lasting measure of a person's life before God.

This does not mean that responsibility, influence or possessions are necessarily wrong. The question is what place they occupy in our hearts and how they are used. Position becomes dangerous when it causes us to believe that others exist to serve us.

The Kingdom of God turns that thinking around. Responsibility becomes an opportunity to serve rather than a reason to expect service from others.

The Kingdom Measure of Greatness

Jesus spoke directly about this difference.

Luke recorded His words in **Luke 22:26**:

> *"But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

The words *"But ye shall not be so"* draw a clear line between worldly authority and the life Jesus expected among His people. A person may carry genuine responsibility, but that responsibility must never become an excuse for pride or domination.

The greater the responsibility, the greater the opportunity to care for and serve others. True greatness is therefore revealed through humility, love, faithfulness and sacrifice.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this perfectly. He possessed authority, yet He willingly gave Himself for others.

Jesus said in **John 15:13**:

> *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."*

The highest expression of greatness is not self-exaltation but self-giving love. Jesus Christ demonstrated that love through the giving of Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that the Kingdom measures greatness by self-giving love?

Personal Reflection

Which matters more to you when helping someone: the good they receive or the acknowledgement you receive? Why?

Action Step

Choose a way to meet someone's need without drawing attention to yourself. Record what this choice reveals about your understanding of greatness.

Greatness May Go Unnoticed by People

Much genuine service receives little public recognition. Some of the most valuable things done for others may never be seen by a congregation, recorded in a report or praised publicly.

Yet God sees service that people overlook.

Jesus said in **Matthew 25:40**:

> *"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

This gives value to acts of service that may appear small. Caring for someone who is struggling, giving practical help, encouraging the discouraged or quietly meeting a need may never bring public honour, but such service matters before God.

The servant therefore does not depend upon recognition for motivation. The life of Christ within produces a desire to serve because people matter, not because service will be noticed.

The Good Samaritan

Jesus illustrated this principle through the account of the Good Samaritan.

Luke wrote in **Luke 10:33-34**:

> *"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."*

The Samaritan was not presented as great because of position or reputation. His greatness was revealed through compassion expressed in practical service.

He saw someone in need and responded. He gave his time, interrupted his journey, used his own resources and cared for someone from whom he could expect nothing in return.

This is the kind of greatness Jesus placed before His disciples. The Samaritan did not simply recognise the need because compassion moved him to act.

The Widow's Offering

Jesus also drew attention to a poor widow whose offering appeared insignificant when compared with the gifts of others.

Mark recorded in **Mark 12:43-44**:

> *"And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."*

Jesus measured her gift differently from those who looked only at the amount. What appeared small outwardly represented great sacrifice.

This teaches us that God does not evaluate service according to visibility, size or public recognition. He sees the heart from which the service is given.

The value of service therefore cannot always be measured by what others can see. A quiet act of faithfulness may express greater sacrifice than something much more visible.

Paul Made Himself a Servant

Paul understood the same principle.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:19**:

> *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more."*

Paul possessed liberty, yet he willingly used that liberty in service to others. His freedom did not produce independence from people because it increased his willingness to give himself for their spiritual good.

The same principle must govern us. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within changes what we value and how we measure success.

Instead of continually asking how high we can rise, we begin to ask how faithfully we can serve. Position, influence and responsibility become opportunities to express the servant life of Jesus Christ rather than opportunities for self-exaltation.

Greatness in the Kingdom of God is therefore not found in titles, recognition or the number of people under our authority. True greatness is found when the life of Jesus Christ within moves us to humble ourselves, love others and faithfully serve them.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that unnoticed service can be great in God's Kingdom?

Personal Reflection

How do you feel when someone else's service is praised while your own work goes unnoticed? What does this reveal about your motives?

Action Step

Carry out one necessary but unnoticed act of service. Rather than seeking praise, consider how Christ's love gives the work its value.

SERVING GOD BY SERVING OTHERS

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It is possible to think of serving God as something separate from serving people. We may associate service to God primarily with prayer, preaching, teaching or other recognised areas of ministry. Yet Scripture shows that service to God is also expressed through the way we care for people.

Jesus made this principle clear when He spoke about serving those in need.

Matthew recorded the words of Jesus in **Matthew 25:40**:

> *"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

Jesus connected service towards others directly with service towards Him. When we care for people in His name, our service reaches beyond the immediate action. Serving others becomes an expression of our love for Jesus Christ.

No Act of Service Is Too Small

People may easily notice large achievements while overlooking small acts of kindness. Jesus taught that God does not measure service that way.

Jesus said in **Mark 9:41**:

> *"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."*

A cup of water appears to be a very small thing, yet Jesus used this simple action to show that no act of genuine service should be considered insignificant.

Service may involve helping someone with a practical need, encouraging a person who is struggling, providing a meal, visiting someone who is alone or quietly helping with work that needs to be done. The importance of service is not determined by how impressive the task appears.

What matters is the love and faithfulness from which it flows. A small act performed with genuine concern may express the servant life of Jesus Christ just as truly as something much more visible.

Service Must Flow From Love

Christian service must never become a collection of duties performed without genuine concern for people.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

> *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."*

Paul does not simply say to serve one another. He says, *"by love serve one another."* Love gives meaning to service.

A person may perform many tasks and still be motivated by pride, obligation, recognition or the desire to be noticed. The life of Jesus Christ within produces something different because

His love causes us to care about the person we are serving, not simply the task we are completing.

True Christian service is love expressed through action. The task may change according to the need, but love remains the motive from which genuine service flows.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that genuine service is love for a person, not only completion of a task?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever completed a task efficiently but failed to show care for the person involved? What needs to change?

Action Step

During a responsibility this week, give attention to the person as well as the task. Listen to their need and adjust your manner of serving accordingly.

God Does Not Overlook Faithful Service

Some forms of service are highly visible, while others may be known by only a few people. Scripture assures us that faithful service is not forgotten by God.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 6:10**:

> *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."*

Notice again the connection between work, love and ministry to others. God sees the quiet work that people may overlook, which means that our willingness to serve must not depend upon receiving recognition.

The servant does not need to ask whether anyone will notice what has been done. The more important question is, Was there a need that I could faithfully meet?

Dorcas: Love Expressed Through Good Works

The New Testament gives practical examples of believers whose service was expressed through caring for others.

Luke wrote concerning Dorcas in **Acts 9:36**:

> *"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."*

Dorcas is remembered for what she did for others. Her ministry was practical, and her good works demonstrated a life that was concerned with people's needs.

This reminds us that Christian ministry is much broader than public speaking. A believer can minister through giving, helping, preparing, visiting, encouraging, supporting and caring.

These forms of service may not always receive public attention, but they strengthen people and make the love of Christ visible in practical ways.

The Philippians: Serving Through Generosity

The believers at Philippi served God by supporting Paul in his ministry.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 4:18**:

> *"But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."*

Their gift met Paul's practical need, but Paul described it as *"a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."* Their service towards another person was also service offered to God.

This teaches us that practical generosity can become an important part of Christian ministry. We may not personally perform every work, but we can help those who are carrying responsibilities that God has placed before them.

Serving may therefore involve using what God has placed within our hands to strengthen another person's work. The service is practical, but its value reaches beyond the material gift itself.

Onesiphorus: Serving the Forgotten

Paul also remembered the kindness of Onesiphorus while he was imprisoned.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 1:16**:

> *"The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:"*

Onesiphorus was willing to stand beside Paul when doing so may not have brought him honour or advantage. Paul says that he *"oft refreshed"* him, showing that his care was not simply a single act.

Sometimes one of the greatest services we can give another person is to remain present, encourage them and refuse to abandon them when circumstances become difficult. Service does not always require solving someone's problem because sometimes it means faithfully standing beside them.

Service Makes Love Visible

Serving God cannot be separated from the way we treat people. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His love within must find expression in practical life.

Sometimes that service will be visible, while often it will be quiet. At times it will require considerable sacrifice, while at other times it may be as simple as giving a cup of water.

Every genuine act of Christian service shares the same foundation: The love of Jesus Christ within us moves us to see the needs of others and respond.

Serving people is therefore not separate from serving God. As we faithfully care for others in love, our service becomes an expression of our devotion to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that care for people is an expression of devotion to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Is there someone whose practical burden you know about but have not yet responded to? What has held you back?

Action Step

Identify one appropriate need you can genuinely help meet. Offer specific assistance and consider what that response expresses about your love for Christ.

EVERY BELIEVER IS CALLED TO SERVE

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Some people associate Christian service mainly with pastors, teachers, missionaries or those who hold recognised responsibilities in the Church. Scripture presents a much broader picture. Every born-again believer has a place in the body of Christ, and every believer is called to serve.

Service may take different forms because God has given different abilities, opportunities and responsibilities. Yet no member of the body should conclude that their contribution is unnecessary simply because it is less visible than that of another person.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:10-11**:

> *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."*

Notice Peter's words, *"As every man hath received the gift."* What God has placed within our hands is not intended simply for our own benefit because we are to *"minister the same one to another."*

A gift therefore becomes an opportunity to serve. What we have received can be used to strengthen someone else and bring glory to Jesus Christ.

Different Gifts, One Purpose

Believers do not all serve in the same way. God has placed different abilities and functions within the body.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:6-8**:

> *"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."*

Some teach, while others encourage. Some give, others show mercy, and some carry responsibility while others serve through practical ministry.

These differences do not make one believer spiritually important and another unimportant. They show that the body needs different members carrying different responsibilities.

The purpose is not personal recognition. The purpose is that the needs of the body may be met, others may be strengthened and Jesus Christ may be glorified.

Service Is More Than Public Ministry

The early Church gives us a practical picture of believers caring for one another.

Luke wrote in **Acts 2:44-45**:

> *"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."*

Their service was not limited to preaching. They recognised practical needs and responded to them.

This is important because visible ministry can easily receive more attention than quiet service. Yet much of the life of the Church depends upon believers faithfully doing things that may never be seen publicly.

One person may prepare while another gives. Someone may visit, encourage, provide practical assistance or pray. Another believer may notice a need before anyone else does and quietly respond to it.

All of these can become expressions of the servant life of Jesus Christ within His people. The visibility of the service does not determine its value.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that every believer can serve through visible or quiet gifts?

Personal Reflection

Do you compare your gifts with more visible ministries and conclude that your contribution is unimportant? Explain why that thinking needs correction.

Action Step

Name one useful way Christ can work through you, whether visible or quiet. Use that opportunity to strengthen another person without comparison.

Aquila and Priscilla: Serving Through Helping Others Understand

Aquila and Priscilla provide an example of believers serving through the understanding God had given them. When Apollos preached at Ephesus, he possessed knowledge of Scripture but needed greater understanding.

Luke wrote in **Acts 18:26**:

> *"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."*

They did not need a public platform to serve him. They recognised where they could help and used what they understood for his benefit.

Service often happens in this way. God may give us knowledge, experience or understanding that can strengthen someone else. What we have received can become something through which another person is helped.

The purpose is not to demonstrate how much we know. Knowledge becomes useful when it is used humbly to strengthen another person.

Epaphras: Serving Through Prayer

Epaphras demonstrates another form of service. His ministry included earnest prayer for other believers.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:12**:

> *"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."*

Paul described Epaphras as *"a servant of Christ."* Part of that service was performed in prayer where very few people would ever see it.

This reminds us that valuable service does not have to be public. A believer who faithfully prays for others, encourages someone privately or meets an unnoticed need is serving.

The value of the service is not determined by how many people know about it. What matters is whether we are faithfully using the opportunities God has placed before us.

Every Member Has a Place

The Church is the body of Christ. Every born-again believer belongs to that body, and every member has a place.

This means we should never compare our service with someone else's and conclude that our part does not matter. Neither should someone with a visible responsibility consider their service more valuable than that of another believer.

Different members have different functions, but all belong to the same body. Jesus Christ is the Head, and His life is within His people.

The abilities He has given us are therefore not possessions to be used for self-exaltation. They are opportunities to strengthen others.

Service begins when we stop asking whether our part is impressive and begin asking whether we are faithfully using what God has placed within our hands. Every believer may not preach, teach publicly or hold an office, but every believer can serve.

The life of Jesus Christ within gives each member a reason to care, a place to contribute and opportunities to help others. No faithful act of service is unimportant simply because it is quiet or unseen.

Servanthood is not the calling of a few. It is the life of the whole body as Jesus Christ expresses His love through every willing member.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that every member of Christ's body has a place in serving others?

Personal Reflection

Whose contribution to Christ's body have you underestimated because it is quiet or ordinary? How does this affect fellowship?

Action Step

Encourage a believer whose service is often unnoticed, and offer practical help where needed. Consider how your view of their place in the body has changed.

FAITHFUL IN THE LEAST: PREPARED TO LEAD

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Servant leadership does not begin when someone receives a title, office or recognised responsibility. It begins much earlier, in the ordinary opportunities to serve that God places before us.

Jesus taught that faithfulness in small responsibilities reveals whether a person can be trusted with greater ones.

Jesus said in **Luke 16:10**:

> *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

This principle is important when considering leadership. A person does not suddenly become faithful because greater responsibility has been received. Faithfulness should already be evident in the way smaller responsibilities are handled.

Service Comes Before Position

The desire to lead must never become greater than the willingness to serve.

Jesus said in **Mark 10:43-44**:

> *"But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."*

Jesus placed service before greatness. The person who desires responsibility must first understand what it means to minister to others.

Leadership should therefore not be pursued simply because someone wants recognition, authority or influence. A person may sincerely desire to serve God, but the evidence of that desire should already be visible through faithfulness in the opportunities presently available.

The servant does not wait for a position before beginning to serve. Service is already part of the believer's life before any recognised responsibility is received.

Character Is Tested Before Responsibility

The New Testament also shows that responsibility within the Church should not be given without evidence of faithfulness.

Paul wrote concerning those who would serve as deacons in **1 Timothy 3:10**:

> *"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless."*

The words *"first be proved"* are important. Character and faithfulness should be demonstrated before greater responsibility is entrusted.

This does not mean that a person must be perfect before serving. Every believer continues to grow in understanding and maturity. However, leadership places responsibility upon a person for the welfare of others, so proven faithfulness matters.

How we respond to smaller responsibilities can reveal much about our character. We should therefore ask:

- Do we complete what we have agreed to do?
- Can others depend upon us?
- Are we willing to serve when no recognition is involved?
- Do we remain faithful when a task is inconvenient?
- Do we care about people, or only about positions?

These questions help reveal whether servanthood is already present. Greater responsibility does not create character because it reveals and tests the character that is already developing.

Greater Responsibility Means Greater Service

When a person is entrusted with leadership, servanthood does not end.

Jesus said in **Luke 22:26**:

> *"But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

Notice that Jesus speaks of *"he that is chief,"* yet still says that such a person should serve. Responsibility therefore does not elevate someone beyond servanthood because it increases the responsibility to serve.

A leader may have to make decisions, give direction, teach, correct or organise. Yet these responsibilities should always be exercised for the good of those being served rather than for personal advantage.

Leadership in the Kingdom of God is responsibility expressed through service. The responsibility may increase, but the servant foundation must remain unchanged.

Ready for Greater Responsibility

Faithfulness in small things prepares a believer for greater opportunities because it develops habits of reliability, humility and service. The way a person serves before receiving recognition can prepare them for the responsibilities that may come later.

The person who learns to serve faithfully without recognition is less likely to depend upon recognition when greater responsibility comes. The person who learns to care faithfully for individuals is better prepared to care for many, while the person who completes small responsibilities faithfully is better prepared when larger responsibilities are entrusted.

This prepares us for the next Study Guide in this module. We have established that servanthood is the foundation, and we now move towards the question of leadership itself.

The order must never be reversed. Service does not begin when leadership begins. Leadership should grow from a life in which the servant life of Jesus Christ is already being expressed.

The servant may eventually be entrusted with greater responsibility, but the foundation remains unchanged: The servant never graduates beyond servanthood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that faithfulness in small tasks prepares a person for greater responsibility?

Personal Reflection

Which small commitment do you tend to neglect because it seems unimportant? What does this reveal about faithfulness?

Action Step

Identify one small responsibility that is already yours. Complete it carefully and on time, without waiting for a larger or more visible task.

CONCLUSION: SERVANTHOOD IS THE FOUNDATION

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Throughout this Study Guide, we have seen that servanthood is foundational to Christian life and leadership. Jesus Christ did not measure greatness according to position, recognition or authority over others. He taught that the one who would be greatest must learn to serve.

Jesus said in **Mark 10:43-45**:

> *"But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

Jesus demonstrated this principle throughout His earthly life. He ministered to people, showed compassion towards those in need and willingly gave Himself for others. His life revealed that genuine greatness and humble service belong together.

The born-again believer is not called to reproduce His servant life through outward imitation. Jesus Christ dwells within His people, and His servant life is to be expressed through them. Christian service therefore flows from the life already received in Him.

This means that every believer has opportunities to serve. Some service will be visible, while much of it will take place quietly. Some believers will teach, lead or carry recognised responsibilities, while others will serve through giving, helping, encouraging, praying and meeting practical needs.

These different forms of service should not be measured simply by how much attention they receive. Faithfulness matters more than recognition. What matters is whether we are faithfully using what God has placed within our hands for the good of others.

We have also seen that leadership does not begin with a title. Faithfulness in small responsibilities prepares a person for greater responsibility, and the servant does not wait until receiving a position before beginning to serve.

Neither does servanthood end when leadership begins.

Jesus said in **Luke 22:26**:

> *"But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

Greater responsibility therefore brings greater opportunity to serve. Leadership does not lift a believer above servanthood because responsibility must continue to be exercised for the good of those being served.

This is the foundation upon which the remainder of this module will build. We will consider leadership, character, discipline and faithfulness, but none of these can be separated from the principle established here.

Before leadership comes servanthood. Within leadership there must remain servanthood. The servant never graduates beyond serving.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that servanthood remains the foundation before and during leadership?

Personal Reflection

After studying servanthood, what attitude towards responsibility most needs correcting in your life? Give a specific example.

Action Step

Choose one responsibility in which you can put another person's good first. Explain the change you will make as Christ's servant life governs your conduct.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How did Jesus change the meaning of greatness by serving others? Explain why His example makes servanthood the foundation of every Christian leader's responsibility.

2. Understanding

Why does service flow from Christ's life within a born-again believer? Explain how this differs from serving to earn acceptance with God, and use a verse to support your answer.

3. Personal Reflection

Think of someone whose needs you have overlooked because helping them would be inconvenient. What has the servant life of Jesus shown you about your attitude towards that person?

4. Response to Truth

When an act of service receives little recognition, what does your response reveal about your motives? Explain how Christ's indwelling life should govern that response.

5. Action Step

Identify one person you can genuinely help this week. What need have you noticed, what practical response will you make, and how will you keep the focus on serving rather than recognition?

6. Early Response

Have you begun helping the person you identified in Question 5? If so, what did you do and what did you notice about your attitude? If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you continue serving when the work is small or unseen? Describe what will help you remain faithful without seeking a position or praise.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How can Christian liberty, self-denial and service belong together without making service a way to earn salvation? Use a verse to explain where the desire and strength to serve come from.

9. Living the Truth

In a responsibility you now carry, how can you use your time or ability for another person's good rather than your own recognition? Describe one choice you will make.

10. Final Response

Bring together Jesus' servant example, His life within believers and the call of every believer to serve. What has this corrected or strengthened in your understanding, and how will it guide your life?