

A Spirit of Service

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Introduction

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, thus stressing the importance of humble service (John 13:3-17). In this lesson, let us consider how cultivating such a spirit of service helps overcome an assortment of self-destructive attitudes.

John 13:3-17 (NASB95) — 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." 8 Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10 Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Key to Overcoming Poverty

A spirit of service is key to overcoming poverty. Sometimes physical privation is purely circumstantial; sometimes it is rooted in pathological behavior (Prov. 13:4; 21:25-26; 26:13-16). Regarding the former, we should be sympathetic and supportive; regarding the latter, Holy Scripture stresses the need for changes in lifestyle. Diligence must replace a spirit of slothfulness; exertion must replace a spirit of entitlement; self-control must replace a spirit of self-indulgence. Heeding the inspired apostolic admonition, let us serve others, in sincerity of heart, with good will rendering service, as to the Lord, and not to men (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25).

Proverbs 13:4 (NASB95) — 4 The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat.

Proverbs 21:25-26 (NASB95) — 25 The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, For his hands refuse to work; 26 All day long he is craving, While the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Proverbs 26:13-16 (NASB95) — 13 The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!” 14 As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed. 15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

Ephesians 6:5-8 (NASB95) — 5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Colossians 3:22-25 (NASB95) — 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Key to Overcoming Pride

A spirit of service is key to overcoming pride. Evidencing an inordinate degree of self-confidence, individuals often become arrogant and egotistical (Prov. 16:18; 21:24; 29:23). Deeming themselves superior to others, they become both conceited and condescending. They strive for positions of power, seeking dominance and dominion. Responding to the request of James and John, Jesus condemned such haughtiness, and emphasized that humble service is the path to true greatness (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27).

Proverbs 16:18 (NASB95) — 18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

Proverbs 21:24 (NASB95) — 24 “Proud,” “Haughty,” “Scoffer,” are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

Proverbs 29:23 (NASB95) — 23 A man’s pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor.

Matthew 20:20-28 (NASB95) — 20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.” 22 But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They

said to Him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." 24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:35-45 (NASB95) — 35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Luke 22:24-27 (NASB95) — 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Key to Overcoming Pettiness

A spirit of service is key to overcoming pettiness. Sometimes people are small-minded and spiteful, restricted in their sympathies, resentful, limiting the assistance they render to others (Deut. 15:1-11; Prov. 23:6-8). In contrast, Christianity cultivates a spirit of compassion, wherein selfishness is displaced by service (Phil. 2:1-8; Rom. 12:6-8).

Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (NASB95) — 1 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. 2 "This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. 3 "From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother. 4 "However, there

will be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, 5 if only you listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. 6 “For the Lord your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. 7 “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; 8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. 9 “Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. 10 “You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. 11 “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’

Proverbs 23:6-8 (NASB95) — 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies; 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, “Eat and drink!” But his heart is not with you. 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.

Philippians 2:1-8 (NASB95) — 1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Romans 12:6-8 (NASB95) — 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Key to Overcoming Pessimism

A spirit of service is key to overcoming pessimism. Overwhelmed by our sins and shortcomings, we may sometimes be tempted to give up. Remorseful rather than repentant, Judas acted thus (Matt. 27:1-5). Expressing a similar despair, Paul spoke of the spiritually hopeless condition of man apart from Christ (Rom. 7:14-25), with a subsequent acknowledgement that the Lord can set

us free from the sentence of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-13). After thrice denying Christ, Peter wept bitterly, and afterwards, returning to his old life, said, "I go fishing." Yet, on the shores of Galilee, Jesus restored Peter to his apostleship, commanding him: Feed and tend my sheep (John 21:1-17).

Matthew 27:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; 2 and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. 3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

Romans 7:14-25 (NASB95) — 14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8:1-13 (NASB95) — 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to

the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

John 21:1-17 (NASB95) — 1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” 6 And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.

Conclusion

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Isa. 53:4-6). Will we benefit from His example? Will we follow His example? Acknowledging Him as Teacher and Lord, may we walk in His footsteps, evidencing a spirit of service in every area of life (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Isaiah 53:4-6 (NASB95) — 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All

of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NASB95) — 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.