

BA

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Kingdom Service





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2025: Kingdom People



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Jason Overman: Editor, Co-Director

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Co-Director, graphics

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Which Son are You?

Inspiration is a strange thing. As I mulled over the “Kingdom Service” theme of this BA, my mind went oddly to Jesus’ parable of the two sons. You remember it.

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first” (Matthew 21:28-31).

The answer seems obvious. But a more difficult question — and the one I think Jesus is really asking — is “Which son are you?” Now I am not pointing fingers; I take the question personally. Which son am I? I simply ask that you take it personally too. It may be the most important question we can ask ourselves.

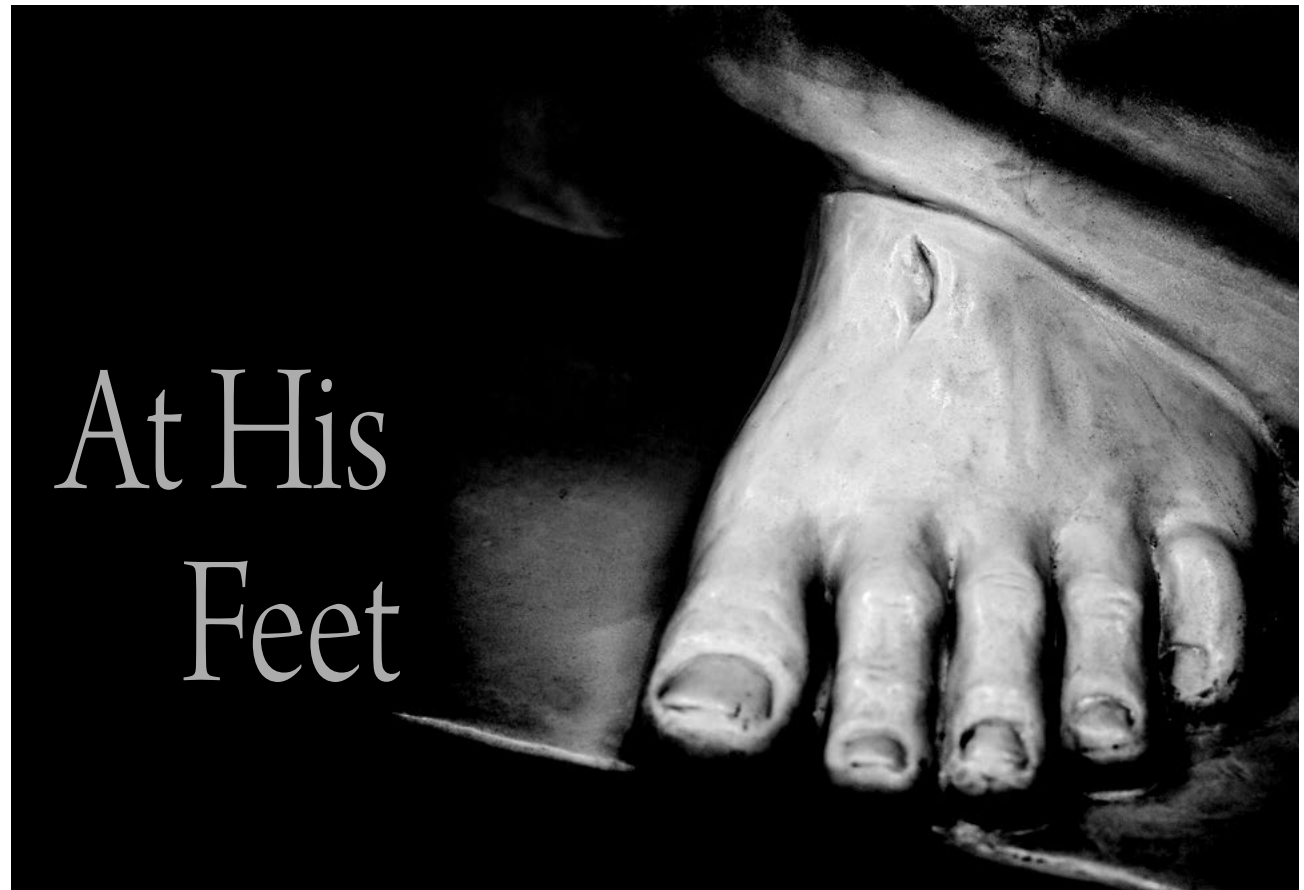
I say inspiration is a strange thing because I do not think my own mind would have considered this passage for my First Word. There are so many good ones, like Luke 22:24-27, which several writers address in this issue. Yet I was led to this parable, and now I see why.

Elsewhere, Jesus said, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Why few, when the need is great? The two sons show us. Both indicate that the work of service is not necessarily desirable. Neither seems to want to, yet one accepts and obeys the Father’s will.

Jesus tells us, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (v. 38). This is our prayer. But the parable leaves us with a challenge — and a choice. Which son of the King are we? One who gives lip service to the call to serve? One who gives the appearance of service? Or are we one who goes and does, not for ourselves but for the need, and for the Father. Though it may not be human nature, may we all be inspired to serve.

— *Jason Overman*





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At His Feet

Learning the meaning
of true service.

by **Dr. David R. Downey**

Speaking to a class recently while discussing the office of deacon in the church, I said, “This is a very high calling, as the deacon responsibility is rooted in service to the church and, in this, imitates the Savior who revealed Himself in exactly the same way.”

When I was a young man, my father reminded me on occasion that it did not matter how much money a person made in their career or what accolades they received in doing so. Such a person would never be fulfilled

if they were not serving others. Many people in high positions today need to hear this emphasis again. If we are alert, we will see some — even in the highest positions in our churches and government — who seem more intent on advancing themselves than showing a heartfelt love for those they serve.

Jesus gave us an example of what He wanted for us when He knelt, took up the towel, and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:3-16). Before this, everyone in the room sat there with dirty feet. I can imagine them averting their eyes, as no one was taking care of what was an obvious problem. They might have been unsure how it was to be done.

Jesus then filled the basin and showed them.

Notice that this event was just before they took the Lord’s Supper, Jesus’ last Passover on earth. After Jesus had signified that there was a betrayer among them, Luke reported an important event that John did not include:

And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ 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. 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" (22:24-27).

It is a surprise to us all that immediately after Jesus spoke of a betrayer (and according to the Gospel of John, Judas left to do his evil work), the disciples fell into a discussion of their greatness. The disciples never cease to amaze us in their thickness, just as we must amaze the Master at times for the same reason.

Nevertheless, I hope that we are not quite as obvious as the disciples. They were jockeying for position just moments after Jesus spoke of His death and had symbolized it by taking the Last Supper.

We should heed what Jesus is saying to us today.

Worldly vs. godly leaders

In verse 25 of the passage, worldly leaders (an appropriate translation for "of the Gentiles") see their position as one of power. They feel they can lord it over those they lead. This word *lordship* is from the same root used for Jesus' title, *Kurios*. In the case before us, however, context suggests it means to take mastery over another — to dominate. Furthermore, when leaders do this, they consider themselves benefactors. They assume that those they are dominating are benefited by their lordship!

In verse 26, Jesus said it should be different for Christian workers. Whether clergy or laity, they choose to upend their roles. The one in the highest position considers himself as without position — one who serves. Jesus is saying that there is an inverse

logic in Christian leadership: The one who thinks least of their position is suited to be respected by God and His children.

As I write these words, I am thinking of a dear friend who is now one hundred years old. I was his student at the seminary. He is a highly respected theologian, has written many books and commentaries, and was on the translation team of both the NIV and the NASB translations. I visit this man occasionally and find him as he always was: humble, unassuming, and welcoming. I do not mention his name here because he would be offended if

Jesus: our example

In verse 27, Jesus again challenged the disciples' thinking. They were still reeling from His previous comments and were distracted. They were likely mulling over the fact that they had been considering themselves lords and were aware that they did not want to take the youngest position.

While the disciples were still smarting from His words, Jesus asked them a question they thought they could answer. Who is greater: the one who is eating or the one serving him? If Jesus had given them time to answer,

“The one who thinks least of their position is suited to be respected by God and His children.”

I did. On occasion I have praised him for various reasons, and although he wisely does not push it away, he signals that he wants to move on after graciously acknowledging the praise.

Such people enrich my life. Although my aim is to be like the Savior, I do not think the Lord is offended when I think of this friend anytime I lean toward pride, then adjust my behavior. God gives us such examples, partly so that we might pay it forward.

one of them (probably Peter) would have blurted out, "Well, certainly the person sitting and eating!" It was customary for the master of the house to eat while the servants attended to his needs. In fact, it almost never happened that the servant ate before the master, as even Jesus attested in another place (Luke 17:7, 8).

Jesus said it is true that the master eats first, but He had chosen not to. He wanted to serve.

You might have heard a pin drop.

What does this say to us today — that the one who was the true

Master of the universe said He wished to be a servant?


It should tell us, first, that the distance between our position and last place is quite small when compared to the Lord Jesus' position and last place. How could we find service difficult when the Master found it so easy?

Second, we would notice that Jesus' service took Him to the cross. He who is the Author of life submitted to the jeering death offered by those He created. The incongruity of this is overwhelming. In contrast, our service seems small.

Certainly, a service mindset does not preclude needing to be strong. The Savior was pointed when necessary. We will occasionally have to take the authority of whatever position God has given us and use it to right what is wrong or defend the defenseless. Otherwise, we will be sinful in subverting our responsibility.

Nonetheless, the overall calling of each follower of Christ is service, and we should interpret all thought and action through that metric. We can remind ourselves of the willing sacrifice of Jesus and His command that he who is chief among you is the one who serves. **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

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FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2025



CHURCH OF GOD



Pastors Without a Temple

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by Oscar Mata

Several weeks ago, someone asked me to visit one of their friends who was hospitalized. The patient was a man over seventy years old, English speaking, with the distant demeanor of someone who hadn't set foot in a church for decades. He received me only because I came at his friend's request.

He was a man of strong character, estranged from his family, with a deep aversion to churches. Yet he agreed to speak with this Hispanic pastor whose heavily accented English was our only common ground. We talked about life, his passions, his wounds — about everything except religion. I visited him once a week, though he wished I could come more often. I explained that my time was limited, but each week I returned to his side.

I work as a hospital chaplain, and these visits are common for me. However, this visit was as a pastor, not in my role as a chaplain. It turned out to be a fascinating way for the Creator to teach me about people who live outside of churches, yet have a thirst to be heard and understood. People who don't seek sermons or impositions but rather seek a sincere ear, a presence that loves them without pressure. In those visits, I learned that, in the end, it's God who touches hearts. We, imperfect as we are, are merely His instruments.

The man's hospitalization continued, and, little by little, his resistance began to break down. Over the weeks, he brought up a conversation about God

and the reasons he had distanced himself from faith. I didn't judge him or speak of creeds; I simply listened. He confessed that he regretted his life away from God and sought His forgiveness. He asked me if I would be his pastor once he left the hospital.

I missed visiting the man for more than a week while I attended the Ministerial Council in October. The very same day I came back, I received an urgent message from the person who had asked for that first visit: My patient was dying.

I hurried to his side and found him fragile, barely able to speak. I held his hand, we prayed together, and in that shared silence, he took his last breath.

The man never visited my church, and I was never his pastor in an official capacity. But I hope, with all my faith, that God accepted his repentance.

By divine design, I am a pastor. But you don't need a title to do something similar for someone. Sometimes God calls us to be pastors without a temple. You could be that shepherd for a person in need. You could be the channel of blessing God uses to heal and listen. We all have the power to walk beside someone, to extend a hand without judgment, and to be the silent answer to their cry, for love is the most powerful force in the universe. **BA**

Oscar Mata and his wife, Nancy, live in Sioux Falls, SD, where he is a pastor and works as a hospital chaplain.





Serving in Obscurity

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Not always glamorous but
always God glorifying.
by Denise Kohlmeier

Not all of us can be upfront pastors, worship leaders, or talented musicians — those who seemingly hold more exciting and engaging ministry positions. Their service is noticed and often rewarded with public recognition like compliments and even applause.

Quite frankly, most believers serve in unglamorous ministries. Some change dirty diapers, wash crusty dishes, or clean filthy toilets. Some set up tables and chairs for church events. Some

pray or write encouraging notes from home. Some drive the elderly to doctors' appointments or to the grocery store. Some are patient caretakers for an ailing relative. Some listen compassionately to a grieving friend over coffee.

For many, serving others is not always fun or welcomed or acknowledged publicly. But it *is* noticed. It *is* appreciated. It *is* rewarded and honored — by the One whose favor and good opinion truly matters.

God's recognition

Take heart. Jesus himself led an unglamorous life in Judea as the earthly son of a carpenter, someone we would today call a blue-collar worker. In fact, Jesus grew up in an ordinary Nazarene

family. He went to synagogue every Sabbath. He played with His half-siblings. He did chores around the house for His mother, Mary. He worked alongside Joseph in his business.

Only when Jesus turned thirty did He begin to serve, but still in obscurity. In fact, the world at large never heard about Him until after His death when Paul took his missionary trips, and *decades* later when four of His followers thought to write His biography (AD 55-100; Jesus died in AD 33). They did not want His memory and miracles to be forgotten, and they wanted others to know about and believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Yet even before Jesus started serving, He was recognized and rewarded. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well

pleased,” said His Father from heaven on the day of Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:17). God was pleased with Jesus simply because Jesus was His Son, not because He had done any ministry.

But when Jesus did begin serving, His focus was not on fame or fortune or on being an upfront man. Rather, He served quietly, to the lowliest in society and oftentimes in the lowliest manner. He rescued the life of an adulterous woman (John 8:10, 11). He invited the religious rejects to become His followers (Mark 1:19-21; Matthew 9:9-13). He healed ten leprosy, unclean men (Luke 17:11-19). He washed the soiled feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17).

Our recognition from God is the same. He loves us simply as His redeemed children. He is pleased with us even before we’ve performed any active service on His behalf.

God’s perspective

Yet we know that God calls us to surrender our lives in service to Him and to others with our time, our tithes, and our talents (1 Peter 4:10). We do so out of gratitude to the One who did not spare His own Son’s life for our forgiveness and salvation. We see serving, therefore, as a way of honoring God, by offering up our bodies, minds, and souls in service to Him.

God’s view of service is counter-intuitive to the world’s. Where the world sees serving others as lowly, demeaning, and undesirable, God considers it our greatness (Matthew 23:11). Jesus even said as much to His glory-seeking disciples in Luke 22:24-27:

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And [Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

Who is considered the greatest? The one who serves, with Jesus being the quintessential

— from the pastor in the pulpit to the custodian of the church building. Every believer, regardless of their appointment, is great in God’s eyes. *All glorify God!*

Faithfulness and perseverance

Just as Jesus is the quintessential servant, He also is the greatest demonstrator of faithful service. Even greater than the revered Moses, who was lauded as “faithful in all God’s house” (Hebrews 3:1, 2). We, therefore, look to Jesus as our role model in exercising our own service.

Faithfulness is a requirement of all God’s servants (1 Corinthians 4:2). He does not neces-

“Jesus served quietly, to the lowliest in society and oftentimes in the lowliest manner.”

specimen and example of servanthood.

Servant in Greek (*doulos*) translates as “slave, bondsman, man of servile condition.” Metaphorically it is “one who gives himself up to another’s will; those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing his cause among men.”

Simply put, *all* redeemed believers are in a servile condition, appointed by God to further His mission and message on earth

sarily require success, nor is He dismayed by failure. He asks only that we be committed to our assigned ministries and leave the results to Him.

Faithfulness (*pistis*, “steadfastness, reliability”) is also an attribute we are required to grow in. It is a spiritual fruit listed in Galatians 5:22, 23. Our growth, or sanctification, is empowered by the Spirit. As with all spiritual fruit, faithfulness is a defining Christian characteristic. It is one of many attestations of a

changed and spiritually productive life.

We can easily get discouraged when serving without receiving any earthly encouragement or recognition. Sometimes we feel like giving up in a ministry that operates in obscurity. We may think, *What's the point? Who even cares?*

But these are the wrong questions to ask, because we know what the point is: to glorify God and do good to others. And who cares? God!

Faithfulness, therefore, becomes a matter of persevering

good gifts to His children, including their areas of service. So we must accept with good grace where God has placed us.

Yes, we will struggle at times with contentment in serving. We may desire a more important or visible role. We may crave recognition. We may compare our ministry with another's, thinking ours is inferior, lesser than.

The way to combat this is by being content where we are, but it doesn't come naturally. Contentment is a learned attitude (Philippians 4:12). How, then, can we learn contentment?

dissatisfaction, anxiety, jealousy, pride, inadequacy, resentment, selfish ambition, greed, self-aggrandizement, or comparison.

Living legacy

Still not convinced that your ministry matters? Consider Tychicus of Epaphras, mentioned in Ephesians 6:21.

Who? *Exactly!* This little-known person was described by the apostle Paul as a "faithful minister in the Lord." What did Tychicus do? No one knows. Paul did not think it important to mention his specific services, only that he was faithful.

Yet Tychicus' legacy stands as an example for all who serve in obscurity. God is grateful for people such as Tychicus and for you — quiet individuals who labor faithfully but inconspicuously. Your seemingly insignificant serving and sacrifice are accomplishing God's will. And it brings Him untold glory!

No service is too small for God. He sees it all and will reward you in the end. For on the day of your blessed Homecoming, you will hear these words from God, in full recognition of your service: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:23). **BA**

“No service is too small for God. He sees it all and will reward you in the end.”

(*hupomoné*, "to remain under, endure, steadfast"), despite our discouragement. We persevere in being faithful because we know that our service has a higher purpose and a lasting reward. True faithfulness perseveres regardless.

Contentment

Contentment is another characteristic of Christianity. It applies to our lives regarding our socioeconomic status, careers, marital status (single, married, divorced, widowed), and popularity (or lack of). It also applies to our ministries. God is good and gives

- By valuing and celebrating our current ministry as God's perfect appointment for us.
- By engaging our entire heart, mind, and soul in our ministry.
- By surrendering our will to God's.
- By trusting God when (and if) He chooses to increase our ministry or give us another ministry appointment.
- By asking the Holy Spirit to satisfy our hearts with how He has gifted us.
- By repenting of any sinful attitudes that we may be harboring regarding serving — i.e.,

Denise Kohl-meyer writes from St. Charles, IL. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



Questions & Answers



John 6:53-55 says we must eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus. Isn't this transubstantiation of the bread and wine, instead of only a symbolic representation?

No. Transubstantiation is unbiblical and unreasonable. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the doctrine states that the bread and wine's substance changes, but their appearance remains the same. Very few doctrines so strongly separate Catholics and other Christians as this one. It was not part of Christian dogma until adopted in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council. It is unbiblical because the emblems of the Lord's Supper are symbolic. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." It's a metaphorical remembrance, not the literal body and blood of our Lord. Transubstantiation requires ignoring this clear teaching for the harmony of Scripture.

The proofs for this teaching depend on a literal interpretation of John 6:48-66. This dogma creates biblical contradictions: 1) invalidating God's law in drinking blood (Leviticus 3:17; 17:14; Deuteronomy 12:23); 2) ignoring salvation by grace with faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 9:11; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5); and 3) ignoring the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 3:18).

In the first contradiction, those defending transubstantiation explain it as a mystery of God. But God does not contradict His own law. God cannot sin, and sin is transgression of the law. In other words, God will not do those things that defy Himself.

In the second contradiction, those defending the doctrine explain the necessity of consuming Jesus Christ for life, but they fail to embrace the

truth that consuming Christ results in living forever. Instead, according to devotees to transubstantiation, some may eat and still reach hell.

The third contradiction disavows the biblical precept of the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ and requires the repeated sacrifice of His body each time communion is taken.

At least annually, every member in the Church of God (Seventh Day) should commemorate Jesus' death in remembrance, not crucify Him afresh.

The Church of God's position on this is stated in *This We Believe* (p. 83):

The significance of the Lord's Supper memorial is found in the meaning assigned to its emblems. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all agree that the bread is a symbol of Jesus' body and that the cup is a symbol of His blood (see John 6:53-58). "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup," Jesus instructed them, "you will proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Do this in remembrance of Me" (paraphrase of Luke 22:19, 20 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

Obedience to symbolic ordinances pleases God. Among those are the Lord's Supper and baptism. Does it seem consistent with Holy Writ to exhort that one's salvation is secured by water baptism or taking communion with the bread and fruit of the vine? Some teach it is, but we think such teaching is inconsistent with Scripture.

In the context of the passage that some believe teaches transubstantiation, Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Jesus' words are not literal, nor is our eating of His flesh material. Both are to be spiritually understood.

— Elder Chip Hinds



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Serving Others or Self?

Being the visible hands and feet of Jesus.
by Jamin Teran

When someone is asked at church, “What is your gift?” ninety percent of the time they answer, “Service.” Most people consider themselves able to help those in need.

This response fits the biblical model for believers. The words *servant*, *service*, and *serve* appear in the Bible (NIV) over one thousand times. Service is the nature of the King himself. Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

In this attitude the church

must continue making an impact today. Jesus wanted to make His kingdom known to others. But in a broken world, absent of God, we need to provide opportunities for people to sense the presence of God. We do this through service. We are the visible hands and feet of Jesus — those who make His will and ways known from generation to generation.

Self-service

As simple as this sounds, many Christians have lost the sense of service, pleasing themselves instead.

Though we consider ourselves modern, the human race continues to portray what history has always known: We are in constant conflict with “self.” As social media continues to mold today’s society, we see millions

serving themselves by satisfying their need of validation and a sense of belonging. They make Jesus’ words a reality: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Luke 16:13).

Serving God and others cannot be overshadowed by serving our own needs. That endless ambition of being recognized distorts Jesus’ calling on our lives. Making a name for ourselves (Genesis 11), we stray from our relationship with God and miss the opportunity to minister in God’s plan.

Biblical traits

A group of women in the Gospels shows us a different way. Luke 8:2, 3 says they ministered

and served alongside Jesus. After encountering Him as Lord and Savior, they responded to His call. Through their example, we see three important traits that inspire service.

Gratitude. Luke tells us that these women were grateful for what Jesus had done for them. Each one had a great deal of brokenness, physically and spiritually. Verse 2 highlights Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus called out seven demons. Having been saved by Jesus, she and other women became His loyal disciples, serving Him and others.

Jesus has done the same for us. We were restored from our own brokenness with the joy of salvation. Jesus removed the bondage of sin that corrupted our hearts and minds. When we are grateful, we find ways to serve Him with our time and gifts.

Giving. Jesus' ministry required His disciples to travel with Him for three years, so they left everything behind (family, income) and followed Him. We don't have a record of a thousand miraculous meals in the Bible to feed these men every day, but we do have a record of these women meeting the needs of the group. Each of them gave from their own resources and abilities to make God's kingdom available to others. This set the example for what we see later in Acts 4, as believers shared their resources among themselves. When we give, as these women did, we serve the needs of others.

Among the women mentioned in Luke 8 was Joanna, whose name means "God is gracious." Her husband, Chuza,

held a position of authority in Herod's household, and Joanna likely belonged to a prominent Jewish family that served Herod as well. Her willingness to participate in God's kingdom service by supporting Jesus' ministry is something to highlight. We don't know how much she provided for Jesus and His disciples, but her consistency in doing something with what she had speaks highly of her.

Faithfulness. Aside from Mary Magdalene, you do not find women like Joanna, Susanna, or others in this group mentioned very many times in the Gospels. They followed Jesus without any fanfare, even when it was incon-

venient and dangerous. They were engaged with Him until the end. They knew that they were kingdom servants and were prepared to minister in any way their Master required, awaiting these words at His return: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23).

We see now why the Lord used these women to announce His resurrection to His disciples (Luke 24:9-12).

May we all be willing to serve the true Master, as these women did, to make His kingdom calling a reality in our lives and an ex-



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venient and dangerous. They never left Him, not even after His death. These women knew that service was a response to their genuine love for their Lord and Savior. Even when the disciples deserted Jesus, they remained with Him until the end. Faithfulness, though not easy, is a fruit of the Spirit. These women were not eager to be seen or heard; they were eager to remain true to their Lord and serve.

Obeying the call

As soon as Jesus transformed the lives of these women, they

tension of His kingdom on earth. When we serve the Lord with gratitude, giving, and faithfulness, He will do great things through us. **BA**

Jamin Teran

is director of Communications for the Church of God (Seventh Day). She writes from Laredo, TX. Scripture



quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

It's Time!

Through the *Bible Advocate*, *Churchright*, and GC Facebook page, you've seen the information about what is in store at Convention '25 (June 30 - July 5). Don't worry. If you missed it, you can check the archives or find it at

cog7.org/convention. (Keep checking the site; more info will continue being added!) Engaging workshops, exciting children/youth/young adult programs, important business sessions, inspiring worship services, tourist attractions, and more. However, all of this won't be meaningful unless the seats are filled with people. That includes YOU!

Convention is not about the event; it's about the memories. Memories you will make with friends, old and new. Experiences with your family. Collectively growing together as the body of Christ. Appreciating a new part of God's creation in the beauty of Utah.

What else can we tell you about what Convention '25 will be? We can't. It will be up to you what you make it. So come "engage" with us in a week full of opportunities that you will turn into special memories. The stage is set. Come play your part!

Register now by going to cog7.org/convention. Hotel, meal, and event registration is available on the website.

Already registered? You can edit your own information through the same link. Signing up for at least one meal per person and registering for one of the convention hotels through the online link helps us save meeting room costs. The early registration discount ends **April 30**, so don't miss your opportunity to save!

Important Convention Dates

April 30 - early bird convention registration ends

June 9 - deadline for hotel reservations; after this date, reservations made are not guaranteed to receive our convention rate

June 24 - deadline for meal tickets to be purchased



Membership Notice

All members of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) who will be at least 18 years of age as of July 1, 2025, and who wish to vote during our 2025 convention, should register for convention no later than **April 30, 2025**. They must indicate on the convention registration form their intention to vote. Because of the time it may take to validate some memberships, we cannot guarantee that those who register later will be able to vote.

Additionally, because of the time it takes to process membership applications, this deadline also applies to anyone wishing to become a member before our 2025 convention. No new memberships will be issued the week of convention.

David Discovers

Servanthood



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by **Marcia Sanders**

“Hey, David! You need to put the sports equipment away!” Peter yelled. “Oh, and don’t forget to clean each piece before you store it.”

“That Peter is so bossy!” David muttered.

“How come he can’t take a turn at cleaning stuff for a change? He treats me like I’m his servant or something.”

“Well,” Jason replied, “he is the team leader and has a lot of other responsibilities. Is cleaning the equipment so bad? I’ll help you.”

“No, cleaning isn’t hard, but I get tired of being treated like his slave.”

“You know who didn’t mind serving others?” Jason asked.

“Nobody ever?” David answered sarcastically.

“No, Jesus.”

“What makes you say that? Jesus is our Lord and King, not our servant.”

“Sure He is. But remember what we read in Luke 22 last week? The disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest, and Jesus said the greatest had to become the least and that He himself was with them like a servant. In fact, in Philippians 2:7, Paul said Jesus made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Doesn’t sound like being a servant is a bad thing in Jesus’ eyes.”

“I’ve never thought of it like that,” David mused. “By serving others, I’m kinda serving Jesus, huh? That puts it all in a completely different light. Rather than resenting the work I’m asked to do, I can think of it as another way to serve my Lord. It feels almost

like an honor. I’ve heard Pastor Dan talk about being called, and I always wondered about that. I mean, we don’t have a message board where He can post jobs. Maybe being available to serve others is one way we respond to His call.”

David began to whistle as he and Jason meticulously cleaned the sports equipment, making each piece look like new. The boys were so absorbed in their work, they didn’t hear the door to the equipment room open.

“Wow!” exclaimed Coach Bryan. “I don’t think I have ever seen the equipment look so good, and I know I’ve never seen anyone enjoy cleaning it. I love your attitude and how seriously you’re taking your work. That’s the very kind of player I’m looking for. When you guys finish, come find me and we’ll go grab some ice cream and talk about your roles on the team.”

Jason looked at David. “Did you hear that? Coach was really impressed with our work.”

“I bet he came in to see if we were really doing what we’re supposed to be doing,” David laughed. “Boy, did he get a surprise! I wonder what he meant about talking about our roles on the team.”

“We’ll find out soon enough.” Jason smiled. “For now, let’s get this job finished so we can have that ice cream and hear what the coach has to say.” **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.





Minister

Learning about a life of service from a model believer.

by **Caroline S. Cooper**

The book of Acts, Luke's historical narrative, details the mission and ministry of Christ's church. In Acts 2:44, 45 we read that the believers came together, had all things in common, sold their possessions and goods, and shared with those in need. Responding to Jesus' call for unity and servanthood, the early church emphasized fellowship, prayer, compassion, and giving.

One of those believers was Barnabas. Our first introduction to him in Acts 4 reveals his commitment to the growing Christian community in Jerusalem. In the dozen or so passages in the Bible where Barnabas is mentioned, we discover how we can do ministry like him.

Be an encourager

And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the

apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet (vv. 36, 37).

The name the apostles bestowed on Joses (or Joseph) reveals they recognized him as an encourager. Barnabas demonstrated this in a number of ways.

Scholars believe that Barnabas possessed great wealth, since he owned land. He gave generously with an attitude of humility, represented by laying the money at the apostles' feet. His kind and thoughtful gift encouraged the church and the individuals who would benefit from his donation.

In addition to his humble generosity, Barnabas demonstrated a welcoming and discerning spirit as an advocate of Saul, turned Paul. Barnabas had witnessed Paul speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus in Damascus and when Paul came to Jerusalem three years later. With encouragement from Barnabas, the apostles recognized Paul's commission from the Lord and saved Paul's life by sending him to his hometown of Tarsus (9:26-30).

Later in Acts, after Barnabas accepted an assignment to serve the church in Antioch, Luke again highlights his encouraging nature: "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (11:23).

The Bible is filled with verses that instruct us to encourage others. We can follow Barnabas' example when we remember 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (NASB).

Serve the church

Barnabas played a vital role in reaching the Gentiles when the apostles sent him to minister in Antioch (Acts 11:22). His ministry inside and outside the church flourished because of his faith in the Lord, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and knowledge of the Word.

Many years later, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and invited Paul to join him in Antioch. Scripture does not reveal how long Barnabas had served at this point, but we do know that Paul

Like Barnabas

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had been in Tarsus for fourteen years (Galatians 2:1). Barnabas and Paul taught together in Antioch for a year, building a relationship that would carry them through Paul's first missionary journey. Among their acts of service to the church, they assisted in delivering a contribution to their brothers and sisters in Judea. Due to their dedication to the Lord, the disciples in Antioch were the first to be called Christians (Acts 11:25-30).

As with Barnabas, effective ministry in the church pours out of our intimate relationship with God and spreads to other believers for their good and His glory.

Go on a missions trip

Most Christians are familiar with Paul's three missionary journeys, but Paul did not travel alone. In fact, Luke places Barnabas' name before Paul's when the church in Antioch commissioned them to the mission field.

As they [the church leaders in Antioch] ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called

them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away (13:2, 3).

Throughout their trip, Barnabas and Saul (referred to as Paul after v. 9) traveled together, preached together, suffered together, and persevered together. Although Paul served as the primary teacher, Barnabas drew from his years of ministry experience in Antioch. He stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Paul in speaking boldly for the Lord. After returning from the mission field, they reported all that God had done by opening the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27).

While most of us may not be called to foreign countries to serve, our mission field is all around us. Family members, friends, neighbors, and social acquaintances need to hear the good news. Barnabas fulfilled the Great Commission to go and make disciples. So can we.

Pursue unity in the body

As Christianity spread outward, churches attracted a diverse group of individuals and families with backgrounds

representing multiple nationalities. Maintaining unity proved challenging, and the leaders in Jerusalem wrestled with issues that impacted the inclusion of Gentile believers.

In the early days of the church, the Jewish Christians still clung to the law and traditions. The debate over whether Gentile believers should be circumcised came to Antioch when Peter (also referred to as Cephas) came for a visit. Paul found himself face-to-face and toe-to-toe with Peter when he did not eat with the Gentile believers but "withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:12). As they discussed the matter, other Jews in attendance took sides with Peter, and "even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (v. 13).

By the time the Jerusalem Council gathered to resolve the circumcision issue, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas had worked through their disagreements and presented a unified front. Paul and Barnabas came from Antioch to participate in the discussion. "Then all the multitude kept

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■ [Leadership]

Necessary

by Whaid Rose

The history of the world has turned on ideas. From those of ancient philosophy to modern science, and from the American experiment to global politics, ideas have shaped the course of world history — with intended and unintended consequences.

Yet none has more positively impacted human history than the idea of the kingdom, introduced by Jesus some two thousand years ago!

Upside-down kingdom

It was radically different from the kind of kingdom that the Jewish people had long waited for. Its king would reign from David's throne in Jerusalem and bring about an end to Rome's tyranny and domination over them.

Jewish history records various attempts to bring this about, including revolt and diplomacy. Some even tried religious piety, believing that if they lived righteously enough, God would grant them the kingdom as a reward.

It was to this kingdom-zealous people that Jesus announced the arrival of a kingdom unlike any the world has ever seen, before or since. In it, the king has no throne, the poor are rich, the weak are strong, and the truly blessed ones are reviled and persecuted. It is an upside-down kingdom where to lose all is to find everything and to be great is to become the servant of all.

It makes sense, then, that Jesus' followers found this idea so difficult to grasp. It was not only counter-cultural but also counter-intuitive, and therefore required regular reorientations. This explains the call to repentance in the announcement of the kingdom: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). To repent is to change one's mind, to adopt a whole new way of thinking and living.

Throughout the Gospels, we find repeated reorientations to one aspect of the kingdom: service. For example, as the disciples argued among themselves about which of them was the greatest, Jesus called time-out to teach the following:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it

over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (20:25-28).

Notice that Jesus not only contrasted the way earthly rulers treat their subjects with the way kingdom people should treat each other, but also defined His mission in terms of service.

We derive from this that when Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6), He was pointing to Himself as the way to salvation and to His way of life as the model for how His followers are to live.

Humble act

Following Jesus, therefore, ushers us into a life of service. Time spent with Him was time spent serving others, for Jesus was always moved with compassion for those around Him. This makes sense because His ultimate mission was to give His life

Reorientations

as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

This calls to mind another reorientation, this time just before His crucifixion. At the end of the Passover meal in John 13, Jesus took a basin with water, girded Himself with a towel, and proceeded to wash the disciples’ feet. Peter’s objection is understandable, for by Jewish custom, foot washing was reserved for the lowest of servants.

That’s why in the context of the kingdom, foot washing is called the “act of humility” and why Jesus was using it as an object lesson. He explained:

“You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:13-17).

Connecting what Jesus did in this account with what He would soon do on the cross is

important. His act of humility was the precursor to His ultimate act of service. We don’t always think of the Crucifixion as a humble service, but it is. Paul captures it in Philippians 2:5-8 where he says that Jesus took the form of a bondservant, “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus became a servant to redeem us. We are to become servants to live out the life of Jesus’ upside-down kingdom, which begins by cultivating the same mindset as Jesus’ (v. 5).

This requires reorienting the way we think about ourselves to match the way Jesus thought of Himself. In His relationship with those around Him, Jesus selflessly abandoned rank and reputation, preferring a towel over a title — all for love’s sake.

Practicing the call

This is especially important for church leaders, though it applies to all believers. Paul admonishes, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

If Jesus’ radical call to love our

enemies and bless those who persecute us is the zenith of the call to discipleship, service is how we practice it. Persecution isn’t a daily occurrence (for most of us), but service opportunities present themselves every day.

Seizing them, we discover that this upside-down way of Jesus’ kingdom is actually the right-side up way to true joy! **BA**

Whaid Rose, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He lives in Denver, NC.



Want to read more articles on leadership from Artios writers? Read the Lead Up section (under Partners) at baonline.org.

Gifted and Called to Serve



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Every believer has a role in
the kingdom of God.

by **Stephen R. Clark**

When God instructed Moses and the Israelites to build the tabernacle, He didn't just stand back and watch them try to figure it out. God instilled in various individuals all the skills and giftings needed to complete the work. For example, Bezalel, a designated craftsman, was filled "with God's Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and ability in every kind of craft to design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut

gemstones for mounting, and to carve wood for work in every kind of artistic craft" (Exodus 35:31-33).

When it comes to building up the church today, followers of Christ are also given spiritual gifts.

Basics of equipping

These gifts enable each of us, as various functioning parts of the body of Christ, to share in the work of the church. Paul talks about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Other references are scattered throughout the New Testament.

Spiritual gifts, while similar to natural abilities and learned skills,

are from and empowered by the Holy Spirit. They are specifically aimed at building up the body of Christ to be effective in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).

These gifts include teaching, healing, hospitality, serving, administration, prophecy, giving, exhortation, mercy, wisdom, discernment, and more. Some people may say there are only six, seven, nine, or twelve (or more!) gifts, based on lists in the Bible. However most generally agree that these biblical lists are not exhaustive and allow for several other gifts.

The primary points to grasp are

- there are many gifts;
- they all come from God;

- every believer is gifted in some way;
- how a believer is gifted plays into how they serve in the church.

God does not call someone to something that He doesn't also gift them to do.

You may receive a gift that lasts a lifetime. You may receive one or more gifts that help you to deal with a special circumstance. But you will always be endowed with at least one spiritual gift. No believer ever goes giftless!

Fitting people to ministry

While gifts are given through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the job of pastors and other leaders is to work with you to discern your giftings and tap into them. The gifting and the work are holy, and when the worker is gifted for the work, amazing things can happen.

A number of tools are available to help you discover your spiritual gifts. Below are three simple steps that can at least get you started in the right direction.

Introvert or extrovert? When seeking to connect to ministry needs in the church, the basic consideration is personality type. Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Recognizing this characteristic can go a long way in avoiding burnout by being misplaced in a ministry that grates against who you are. For example, an introvert is probably not a good fit for being a greeter, while an extrovert could be discouraged by having to perform a quiet, passive task.

What have you enjoyed doing and succeeded at? Think of the responsibilities you've had in

the past that you truly enjoyed, as well as those you hated. God isn't a mean taskmaster who will make you do what you hate. He created you to enjoy how you were created. Doing a simple inventory of likes and dislikes can help point you to how God is calling you to serve.

Is there a need matching your perceived giftings? Just because you like to ski doesn't mean you are spiritually gifted in skiing and called to a skiing ministry! Considering your personality type and your likes/dislikes, look around at the needs in your church to see if anything matches up.

theology and the Bible. And faith simply means believing in God and His Word.

Putting all these together points to another gift that appeared in one test I took: writing. This involves all four gifts listed above, and it's something I enjoy and do well. In my church, I use this composite gifting to develop discussion guides for each sermon. These are used in several small groups to help participants more deeply explore the messages.

Gifts can work together to produce the results God desires.

“God does not call someone to something that He doesn't also gift them to do.”

Putting it all together

There may not be a straight line from a perceived gift to a specific need, so you may need to get a little creative.

I've taken several spiritual gifts tests and surveys. Gifts that consistently rank at the top of my list include administration, teaching, knowledge, and faith. In part, administration includes the ability to organize and manage processes. Teaching is sharing the Word of God with others. Knowledge means having a good grasp of

Resources and observations

Many good books explore spiritual gifts. One is *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide*, by Sam Storms — a good place to start. Ask your pastor for other recommendations. Additionally, online tests can help you. None of these are definitive, but they can help point you in the right direction. To find them, simply do an Internet search for “spiritual gifts tests” or “spiritual gifts survey.”

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Secret Serving

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by **Anonymous**

Jesus taught the disciples about serving through His words and actions. In the Sermon on the Mount, He explained that public displays of good works did not please God: “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matthew 6:3, 4).

For me, serving in secret is a challenge due to the public nature of my ministry. But God provided a special assignment to teach me humility and the value of secret serving.

One day while my husband

and I were engaged in fellowship near the ministry board at church, I noticed a small, typed note that seemed out of place among the colorful flyers promoting ministry opportunities. When I scanned the words, I learned a family needed assistance with their disabled adult daughter. The early morning hours they required did not intimidate me.

I knew in an instant this could be for me. Helping this family would allow me to serve my Lord without distractions of applause and accolades, as in my more visible ministry. I had a great desire to serve the Lord, and Him alone. When I accepted God’s assignment, I knew it had to be done in secret.

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus demonstrated that serving the Lord does not require an audience. He performed His first miracle at the request of His

mother at a wedding in Cana. After stating His time had not yet come, Jesus gave in to His mother’s request to rescue the wedding party from humiliation when the wine ran out prematurely. Jesus turned water to wine in a quiet room where only the servants could observe the miracle. The guests were not aware that the amazing wine stood in waterpots moments before (John 2:1-11).

Jesus continued His ministry in the countryside of Galilee where He could minister without attracting the attention of the Jewish leaders or the Roman authorities. Many times Jesus told those He had healed to keep quiet about the miracle. After healing a man with leprosy, He told him, “See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded,

as a testimony to them” (Matthew 8:4).

Jesus warned the disciples against public displays of service: “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (6:1). Unlike the hypocrites (Pharisees and teachers of the law), Jesus expected His followers to avoid sounding the trumpet to call attention to their good deeds (see v. 2).

However, some of the disciples found it challenging to understand Jesus’ teaching. They recognized Jesus as the Messiah and looked forward to the public praise that would come when He reigned as King. After the brothers, James and John, asked to be seated next to Him in His kingdom, Jesus admonished them that to be great, one had to be a servant. To be recognized first, one had to be a slave. Jesus wanted them to follow His example: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (20:28).

After contacting the family with the disabled daughter, I joyfully accepted God’s assignment to serve. I have been their part-time caregiver for a year now. Only my husband and a couple of close friends know that I’m serving in this way.

God placed this young lady in my life to help me stay humble and experience the blessings of serving in secret. I look forward to hearing Jesus say one day, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (25:40). **BA**



Don't miss this issue's Online Extra
“Finding God's Purpose for You”
by Shirley Brosius
baonline.org



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Gifted and Called to Serve

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Some charge a fee, but several free ones are available. Try more than one!

Also talk to those who know you well. Gifts will always be validated by believers around us. It's unlikely that you have the gift of teaching if no one who knows you thinks of you as a teacher. And if you always sing off-key or are rhythmically challenged, the choir or worship team is likely not for you.

Another way to determine your gifts is to try using them. If you sense you are gifted to heal, pray for people to be healed and see what happens. If you feel drawn to helping in the nursery (serving), try it out. As you take steps of faith, you'll get a feel for what God is calling you to do, and others can provide feedback to help guide you.

If you're still unsure as to how you are gifted, don't fret! Pray and ask for clarity. Talk to your pastor or an elder. God isn't going to keep you in the dark as to how He has gifted and called you. The Holy Spirit will eventually give you eyes to see and the power to serve others. **BA**



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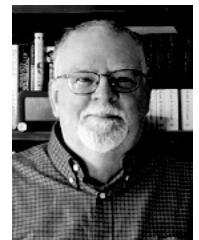
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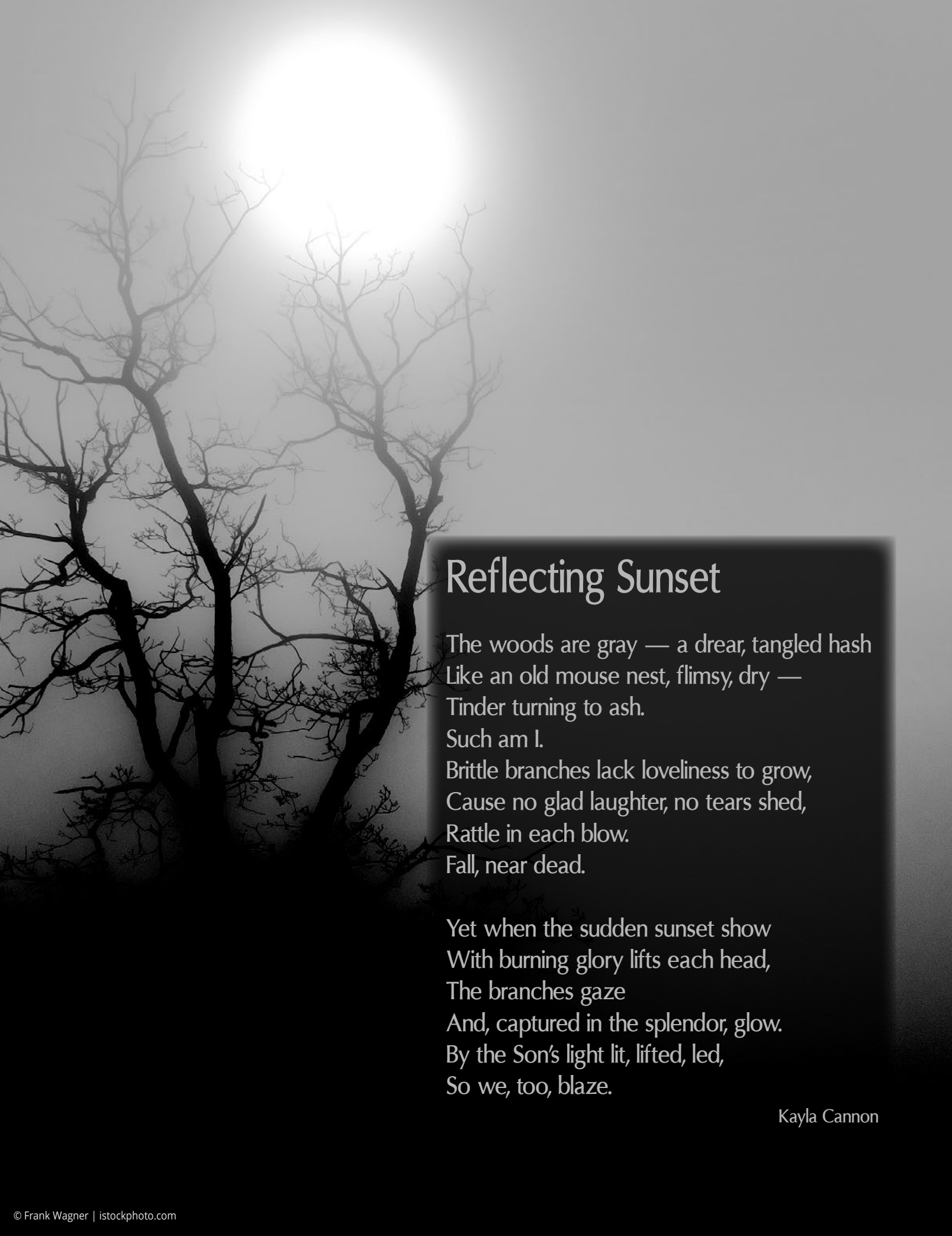
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Stephen R. Clark

writes from Lansdale, PA. Scripture quotations are taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*.





Reflecting Sunset

The woods are gray — a drear, tangled hash
Like an old mouse nest, flimsy, dry —
Tinder turning to ash.

Such am I.

Brittle branches lack loveliness to grow,
Cause no glad laughter, no tears shed,
Rattle in each blow.

Fall, near dead.

Yet when the sudden sunset show
With burning glory lifts each head,
The branches gaze
And, captured in the splendor, glow.
By the Son's light lit, lifted, led,
So we, too, blaze.

Kayla Cannon

Minister Like Barnabas

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silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12).

Recognizing the validity of their remarks, the council made a landmark decision that cleared the way for Gentiles to be welcomed into the body of Christ without the added burden of being circumcised.

To celebrate their newfound unity, leaders in Jerusalem sent

Extend grace to fellow believers

Barnabas did amazing work for the Lord, but he had to fight against his human nature like the rest of us. Scripture highlights his great achievements but also reveals the reality of his challenges with fellow human beings.

When preparing to embark on the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement. Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, had accompanied them on the first missionary journey but chose to leave the trip before they had completed the

a decade later, he referenced Barnabas and John Mark in his closing remarks: "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)" (Colossians 4:10).

As human beings, we do not always agree with fellow believers, but we can be gracious to one another. We may find it challenging to serve beside people who have different perspectives and ideas. But despite our differences, we can learn to respect and honor each other in our unique acts of service to the Lord.

“Effective ministry in the church pours out of our intimate relationship with God.”

“leading men among the brethren” (v. 22) to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to demonstrate their commitment to the Gentiles.

Diversity in the body of Christ is something to be celebrated. God commands us to pursue unity despite our unique personalities, backgrounds, and preferences. Barnabas' efforts were rewarded by a thriving community of believers in Antioch and seeing the gospel spread to nearby nations. Keeping all eyes on Jesus brings about the unity God desires.

mission. Paul did not appreciate that fact.

When Barnabas suggested taking Mark with them again, “Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work” (v. 38). They could not reach a resolution, so Barnabas went with Mark to Cyprus while Paul took Silas with him.

Barnabas and Paul continued to serve the Lord despite their differences. From clues in Scripture, they may have reconciled later. When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae about

Natural response

Like Barnabas, we need to extend ourselves in ministry to others. When individuals exhibit Christlike qualities of humility, generosity, kindness, and confidence, as Barnabas did, ministry becomes a natural response to the love of God. Barnabas' heart for encouragement, service, missions, unity, and grace reveals his passion for the Lord and commitment to remain true to Him (Acts 11:23).

We can follow Barnabas' example in ministry, knowing that we will bring glory to God both inside and outside the church. **BA**

Caroline S. Cooper writes from Harrisonville, MO.





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The Solution

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The church must face today's challenges by returning to the original plan.
by Mike Apodaca

Has the church lost her way? Some church leaders are looking to AI to help them grow their congregations because their churches are stalled or failing. And why is this? Perhaps because many Christians are living a fleshly life based on an inferior understanding of conversion and what the Bible says about what it means to walk in Christ. Most churches have no

real process to help new Christians move from the old life to the new.

The apostle Paul argued with those promoting the superiority of Judaism (see sidebar, p. 29).

Paul calls the Jews dogs (the real Gentiles), evil workers, and the false circumcision. He then explains “the flesh” as *everything* he was outside of Christ — inside the cultural context of Judaism.

Paul was the best possible Jew in his day. By distilling the categories Paul uses here and applying each of them to our own lives, we can find the liberation Paul enjoyed.

Analysis

Consider this analysis.

Circumcised on the eighth day. This is the biblical initiation into

the world of Judaism. Category: Initiation.

Of the nation of Israel. Paul belonged to Israel. Category: Nationality.

Of the tribe of Benjamin. Within Israel were twelve tribes. Category: Tribe.

A Hebrew of Hebrews. Paul was thoroughly Jewish. Category: Culture.

As to the Law, a Pharisee. Paul had done well as a Jew and arrived at the pinnacle: a Pharisee. Category: Position.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. Paul demonstrated his zeal by attacking the church. Category: Faithfulness.

As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. Jewish perfection means obeying the Law. Category: Performance.

We can apply these categories

to ourselves. My own fleshly identity includes the following:

Initiation: Born an American citizen

Nationality: American

Tribe: Californian (but tribe can also relate to family or race)

Culture: American

Position: A husband, father, teacher, professor, pastor

Faithfulness: A patriotic citizen, always active socially

Performance: Various achievements

It's important that we acquire a clear view of everything we were outside of Christ — our old self, our flesh (Romans 8:6-8). In his book *Grace: The Glorious Theme*, Lewis Sperry Chafer says that growth takes place only in spiritual Christians, while carnal Christians remain as spiritual babes.

Let this sink in. By failing to identify the person we were outside of Christ, we continue to walk in all the insufficiency inherent in that earthly identity. We experience psychological problems. Our relationships suffer. Our marriages fail because we and our spouses walk in our old selves, using fleshly means to feel worthwhile and validated and to solve our problems. We don't experience the blessings and joy described in the Scriptures. Our churches are often lifeless, propped up by gags and gimmicks, trying to generate excitement because our members walk in the flesh. It is *the* problem.

Loss

So what's to be done? Paul answers this also. In Philippians 2, he outlines a pattern shown by Christ himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus: emptying self to

be exalted by God. Paul tells the Philippians in the third chapter that he counts the flesh as loss, even as dung (something we all consider odious). He needs to discard and avoid, at all costs, his old life with all its acclaim.

This reckoning of the flesh as worthless is a daily exercise (1 Corinthians 15:31). We, like Paul, are fighting against both the programming we were given from birth and the influence we experience each moment from our environment (reinforced by family, friends, and society — especially the media). To stand apart from all of this, we must die to it — to consciously put that identity to death.

This is the picture baptism gives us. In baptism we die and are raised to new life. It is not only a symbol but also an outward expression of an inward reality. The best baptistries would be coffins (Galatians 2:20).

Paul's is the true circumcision. In circumcision, the foreskin is cut away and discarded. In the same way, our flesh has been cut away and discarded by God in Christ. True Christian life is remembering daily that our flesh was cut off in Christ. We must consciously put aside the residue of that old man and put on the new man, who is made like Christ.

Imagine how much of a

Philippians 3:2-11

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (NASB).

pastor's schedule would be cleared up if his flock genuinely died to their flesh with all its inadequacy and scars. Most Christian counseling should be directed at helping believers die to their flesh and walk in the Spirit.

Gain

Christianity is not just about loss but also gain. There is death, but there is also resurrection. Paul counts his old life in the flesh as loss in order that he might gain Christ and be found in Him with a righteousness (perfection) that is a gift received through faith.

Christians have a new identity, one that far supersedes what we had in ourselves. Let's consider this new life, using Paul's categories:

Initiation: Faith and baptism are the demarcation marks of my new life. I am a different person now, a member of the humanity initiated by Christ. I have truly been born again.

Nationality: I am of the new Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), part of a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) and of a new kingdom where Christ is King (Philippians 3:20).

My allegiance is first and foremost to the heavenly kingdom of Christ, not to any earthly nation or political party.

Tribe: My tribe now is my local assembly of believers, my church family, my true brothers and sisters in the family of God. In Christ, I have no other family. I relate to my former family as I relate to all things: as a new person in Christ.

Culture: I develop the mind of Christ through Bible study, discovering how to think and act in this new reality. I live out the kingdom with new dynamics and actions.

Position: In Christ, I am a child of God, born by His seed, with an inheritance befitting God's own child waiting for me in eternity. Peter calls us royal priests (1 Peter 2:9), two of the highest positions in God's economy. I shall rule with Christ and am now an ambassador for Him (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Faithfulness: I am faithful to the kingdom. I learn much about this faithfulness from the Old Testament examples in Hebrews 11.

Performance: This last element is unique. Whereas I could

claim some ownership in my accomplishments in the flesh, everything I do of any merit in Christ is done by the strength and power of the Spirit within me (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:13).

Old vs. new

Having the mind of Christ takes work. It's the culmination of discipline and study. We are reshaping our minds, our understandings, our thoughts, and our choices around a new reality. We are letting go of the old (and everything it has ever meant to us) so that we can live in the new. This should be the core of the church's teaching and the purpose of all discipleship, just as it is in the New Testament.

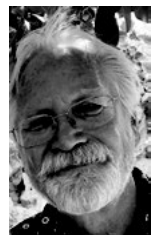
Go through each category we've reviewed, and list what is the flesh that you need to die to and who you are in Christ.

The best part is that we have a partner in this lifelong enterprise. The Spirit is in us to help us become more like Jesus (Galatians 5:16, 17). Use the chart on this page to identify your own fleshly identity, and begin your quest for liberation in Christ.

This is the solution planned by God the Father, paid by Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, and taught by the apostle Paul. We don't need anything else. **BA**

Category	Flesh (Die to these)	In Christ (Reckon these)
Initiation		Baptism
Nationality		Heavenly citizen
Tribe		Church
Culture		Kingdom
Position		Royal priest
Faithfulness		Kingdom
Performance		Spirit powered

Mike Apodaca writes from Hesperia, CA.





Called to Obey and Serve

In his insightful book *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni offers Six Critical Questions that every organization needs to answer to achieve clarity of thought and purpose, allowing it to succeed: Why do we exist? How do we behave? What do we do? How do we succeed? What is most important right now? Who must do what? These are questions that each Christian would do well to consider and answer as well. May I offer the following brief responses to get you started?

Why do I exist? I exist to love God and to express God's love to people.

In Matthew 22:37, 38, Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. When a man quoted those two commands, Jesus told him, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). In John 13, Jesus expanded the second greatest command: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (v. 34, emphasis added). We exist to love God and to love people as Jesus did.

How should I behave? I should practice love.

Physicians practice medicine. Attorneys practice law. Believers in Jesus must practice love. It's the example of Jesus. It's the command of Jesus. It's the heart of the two greatest commandments. So how should I behave? I should practice Christ-like love.

What should I do? I should obey Jesus and follow His example.

Jesus told us how to show our love for God: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (John 14:21). And "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"

(v. 23). What did Jesus command and teach? The Great Commandments: love God and love people. Also the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20). And what was Christ's example? "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

How do I succeed? I obey Christ's commands and follow Christ's example.

That's the biblical metric. That's the evidence that I have been saved by God's grace through a true faith in Jesus Christ. As I obey Christ and follow His example, I can leave the results to God's providence and rest assured that I am succeeding as Christ's disciple.

What is most important right now? Obedience and service.

A more specific answer to this question will differ from person to person. Where in my life, right now, am I resisting full obedience or sacrificial service, or both? What intentional changes must I, with God's help, make in my attitudes and behaviors? Questions like these will reveal what is most important right now.

Who must do what? I must do these things.

I must obey. I must follow Christ's example. I must serve. Each believer is called to Christ-like obedience and service.

— Loren Stacy



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