

# The Heart of a Servant

By David Phillips

**M**ost Christians have a clear understanding of what Jesus did on the cross in offering Himself for our sins. We breathe a sigh of relief at knowing that because Jesus died for our sins we do not have to be eternally lost. But as we ponder the blessings delivered to us at the cross we must not fail to also see the enduring example Jesus left for us to follow. Peter reminds us of this in 1 Pet. 2:18-25. *“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

At first glance this passage seems to be talking about suffering, and to some extent it is. But more than suffering, the subject being dealt with here is submission; suffering as a servant. *“Servants, be submissive...”* Why was Jesus willing to suffer for us? Why was He willing to be reviled and threatened seeing that He was the Son of God? Because He was being submissive; He was being a true servant. Looking ahead to this suffering Jesus said to His disciples, *“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). Jesus was willing to suffer such horrible treatment because, even though He was the Son of God most High, He had in Him the heart of a servant. He had the kind of heart that every Christian must have if we truly want to be called His disciples. Therefore Paul wrote in Phil. 2:5, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

## Putting on the Heart of a Servant

The Bible heart is the mind. It is the inward man. It is where our desires, our longings, and our motivations begin which are then manifest in our actions. If we are to truly *“follow His steps”* we must learn to do more than act the way Jesus acted. We must learn to change who we are, transforming our attitude to resemble that of a servant. We must put on the heart of a servant just as Jesus did. *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rom. 12:2). This is what Paul meant when He wrote, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* But how do we do this? How do we change our heart into that of a servant? Knowledge! By studying the scriptures and knowing what the heart of a servant looks like, we can begin imitate those characteristics in our own lives.

## Characteristics of a Servant

What makes a cake different from bread? They feel similar and look similar, but they are two very different things. What is the difference? The ingredients from which they are made. Many people are servants in this world. But the difference between one who acts like a servant and one who has the heart of a servant is in the ingredients of the heart. If we want to be accepted by God we must do more than look like servants. We must have the right ingredients or the right characteristics in our hearts.

LOVE: Paul wrote, *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”* (1 Cor. 13:3). A person can serve in as many ways as possible, but if there is not love in his heart then his service does nothing for his own soul. As a servant Jesus was willing to give His life for us because He loved us. As He said in John 15:13-14, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”* Let us not confuse this with the love of the world. The love that defines a true servant is not a romantic infatuation. It is an undying love, one that mirrors the love of God. With this love we seek always the best interest of those around us. With this love we devote ourselves to the service of others as parents care for do what is best for their children. With this love we are able even to do what is best for our own enemies, as Jesus commanded, *“...love your enemies...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:43-48). Though this may seem impossible to some, understand that this is the love that God has for each and every one of us, as it is written, *“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...”* (Rom. 5:10). As a servant Jesus died for you and me, not while we were righteous, but while we were in sin, while we were His enemies. Is it any wonder then that we are commanded to serve our enemies out of love by praying for them, blessing them, and doing good to them? If we are able to serve those who hate us, how much more will we be able to serve those who love us; our own brethren? When we put on the love of Christ as servants we will give our lives for one another. *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends”* (John 15:12-13). The heart of a servant is one that serves out of love. We know we have this heart in us when we are able to serve not only those who bless us, but those who revile us as well. For in this manner Jesus also serves us.

HUMILITY: In order for a servant to do what is required of him humility is essential. For in order for one to have the heart of a servant he must see service as his very reason for living. Jesus Himself said, *“For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve...”* (Mark 10:45). Jesus tried several times to get this point across to His apostles. When they were busy discussing which one of them was going to be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus instructed them, *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all”* (Mark 9:35). No doubt each one of us has felt the desire to lift ourselves up, to make ourselves seem important. We like the attention. We like to feel as if we are important. But consider the life of Christ. At what point did He exalt Himself or make Himself seem of great importance? Granted, there were times when, speaking the absolute truth, He stated His relationship with the Father (John 5:16-18). But at no time did Jesus have a haughty spirit. Rather, in all instances He showed great humility. Even though He had the power to deliver Himself from the hands of His enemies He showed humility by allowing Himself to be humiliated and killed.

If we are to have the heart of a servant we must learn to walk with humility in all things. Haughty servants seek the glory of men in the works that they do. They think that they have done

something great when they have merely done their job. But Jesus instructs us saying, *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’”* (Luke 17:7-10). Let us do our works in humility. Let us seek to glorify our Master in what we do, not ourselves. This is the heart of a true servant.

Never let us say that we are too good to perform a necessary service. Never let us exalt ourselves over our brethren. Rather, let us imitate Paul who said, *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1 Cor. 9:19). Let us seek those things which encourage humility, *“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion”* (Rom. 12:16). Only when we have a humble spirit will we be able to serve those who hate us. Only when we have a humble spirit will we be able to serve God acceptably in all that He commands us.

A servant who has a humble heart will not seek to exalt himself, nor will he seek glory for himself. Jesus *“humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross”* (Phil. 2:8). He set His heart to humble Himself, but He trusted in the Father to lift Him up. *“Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name”* (Phil. 2:9). In doing so God shows us that He will do the same for us if we humble ourselves before Him in service, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up”* (James 4:10).

**SUBMISSION:** A humble servant is one who shows submission toward those around him. In the world submission is viewed as a form of weakness, cowardice, or lack of passion. It has been defined by some people, even Christians, as “Doing what other people tell you to do.” But as we read the scriptures true submission is not so shallow, nor is it a form of weakness. Rather, quite the opposite.

Submission requires a tremendous amount of strength, self-control and discipline. As Jesus was being arrested, one of His disciples tried to defend Him. But Jesus pointed out that He had the power to deliver Himself at any moment, *“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels”* (Matt. 26:53)? Jesus had the power, but He chose not to use it. He showed greater strength by submitting Himself to the cruelty of His trial for our sakes. Even so, though we may have the strength to overcome, submission requires that we endure persecution. When we know we are right, sometimes silence is the best response.

It takes submission for strapping young lads to service widows in the congregation. It takes submission for the leaders in the church to be able to serve the needs of the rest of the congregation rather than their own desires. In the world we are taught that with greatness comes privilege and the right to mistreat others. But as servants in the kingdom we must understand that greatness is not freedom from service, it is the increase of service. *“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”* (Matt. 20:25-27).

The apostle Paul is known as a great man, not for storing up riches or exercising great authority, but because he made himself a servant of all and was willing to suffer hardships in order to serve. *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1 Cor. 9:19). *“The strong, mature, and devout must serve by absorbing the pettiness, rudeness and selfishness of others”* (Hitchen, see Rom. 15:1-3). As servants we must seek every opportunity to fulfill the needs of others. When we are used and mistreated we must strive to forebear for the sake of helping one come out of their sins. True servants are willing to suffer wrong without returning evil for evil or seeking recompense. True servants are willing to bless when others curse, do good when others persecute. But for one to submit in such a manner requires more than the outward appearance of submission. It requires a great amount of love. One must have a submissive heart to back up their actions. Many people have broken down saying, *“I can’t take it any more.”* But a true servant is willing and able to submit even to the end because they do so out of love for God and love for their neighbor. *“...submitting to one another in the love of God”* (Eph. 5:21).

**LOYALTY:** A true servant is completely loyal to the one whom he serves. He will allow nothing to prevent him from doing the will of his master. There are many who try to serve two masters, but inevitably find that they have to choose one over the other. Some people want to serve God, but when money is involved they forsake the commands of God for their personal increase. Therefore Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt. 6:24).

Our loyalty to God is tested in every part of our life. Sin tests our loyalty. Our friends and family test our loyalty. Persecution tests our loyalty. The truth is, if God is our master then we will allow nothing to get between us. *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me...He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matt. 10:36, 39). This is not to say that we should not love our families. For God expects His people to take care of their own (1 Tim. 5:8), to honor our father and mother (Eph. 6:1, 2, to honor means to take care of physical needs). But there are times when even our father and mother test our loyalty to God by forcing us to choose between them and God. Some Christians have unbelieving parents who plan family events on Sundays. Some Christians have parents who make them feel bad because of their faith. In such circumstances we must be willing to serve God in spite of what our parents may say or do. Jesus faced this same problem with His brothers and sisters. Consider His response, *“Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, ‘Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.’ But He answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother”* (Mark 3:31-35).

As servants of God we must put Him first in all things. He is our Master. He is the one who saves us from our sins. He is the one who provides for us in all things. He is the one who gives us the hope of eternal life. In return He asks that we serve Him in righteousness. When we are loyal to God then we will do all we can to not allow the things of this life to draw us away: busy schedules, friends, entertainment, money, family, etc. Paul likens our service to God with that of a soldier. *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one*

*engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3, 4). Are you being loyal to your master?*

**READY, WATCHFUL:** In several of His parables Jesus stresses the needed for Christians to be always vigilant as they await the return of their masters. In the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14ff, *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.”* In the parable of the Parable of the Virgins in Matt. 25:1-14, *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”* All of these can be summed up by Mark 13:35, *“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming -- in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning -- lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch.”*

Why is this such an important aspect of being a servant? Because true servants are faithful to their masters whether they be “in a far country” or right next to them. Their loyalty and devotion is such that they are always ready to serve, they are prepared and watching so that when their master comes they may be with him, to serve Him and glorify Him. As Christians we must be watchful as servants, ready and waiting for our Master’s return. But there are many people who call themselves Christians today who are not ready, who are not watching. In fact, they are not acting like servants at all. If we are not striving to serve one another then we are not making ourselves ready. If we are not striving to overcome sin then we are not preparing ourselves for our Master’s arrival. How will the Lord find you when He comes? Will you be sleeping in a spiritual sense? Will He find you going about your life merrily carrying out your own plans without regard to His will? Will He find you enjoying the comforts of this life without regard to your brethren or to fulfilling your spiritual obligations? Those who feel they can get by in this life with half-hearted service the Lord will have a rude awaking when the Lord returns and they find that they have been asleep all this time.

If we are to put on the heart of a servant we need to consider what we must do to make ourselves ready for our Master’s arrival. As Jesus said, we do not know when He will come. It could be morning, mid-day, or night. Whatever the case we must make absolutely sure that we are fulfilling our duties today and that we are treating our fellow servants with kindness and love. This is not a time to be sluggish, thinking that we are good enough or what we are doing is good enough. It is a time for urgency, for diligence. People often double check to make sure everything is put away, surfaces are dust and the floors are vacuumed when they know company is coming over. As servants we must be examining ourselves in this same manner, working to the last minute to make sure that everything is as it should be when our master arrives.

### **Characteristics to Avoid**

Just as a true servant will exemplify certain characteristics there are also things that he will never do, lest he exceed his position.

**SELF-RIGHTEOUS SERVICE:** Everyone has experience the desire to be acknowledged for the things that they do. As little children we want so much for our parents to say that we have done a good job. As students and employees we “need” “positive reinforcement” for the things that we do. When we feel that we have done a quality job we want people to acknowledge us for our accomplishments. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with being praised for our work (Prov. 27:2). But a servant is one who is careful to not over emphasize the praise of men in his/her life. Consider the words of Jesus, *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will*

*say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'' (Luke 17:7-10).*

How can we tell if we have the heart of a servant? When we serve God out of love and a desire to glorify Him rather than out of a desire to receive glory and honor. We know that God will give us honor in the end, for Jesus has said, *"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor"* (John 12:26). But knowing that we will receive this reward, we should seek to glorify God and not ourselves. The person who have this engrained into their heart will be able to serve even when he is reviled and persecuted (1 Pet. 2:18, 19, 21).

The self-righteous servant, on the other hand, appears to be serving God but inwardly he is only concerned with what men are saying about him. His desire is not to do the will of the Father, but to receive praise from men. *"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"* (Matt. 6:1). If our desire truly is to be servants of God then we will not concern ourselves with the praise of men. We will see it as our life's purpose to be servants and therefore serve in righteousness no matter what. Even if men do honor us for our works, we must keep the proper prospective, *"We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do."*

Why is this so important? Once we begin to say, "Yah, I did a pretty good job, didn't I?" we take the first step in removing glory from God and applying it to ourselves. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matt. 6:16). But if we are too busy thinking about what a good job we did or how we did a better job than someone else, then there is no room in our hearts to give glory to God. If we are soaking in the praises of men, what is left for them to glorify our Father in heaven? A true servant, like Jesus, will seek to direct all attention toward God and away from self. Our praise will come from God in due time. But for now our purpose is to glorify Him.

At times we find it difficult to serve some people because we do not feel that they are worthy of our service, for whatever reason. But God removes this objection from us. As servants our purpose is not to pick and choose who we will serve based on our own standards of worthiness. To do so would be to exalt ourselves above those people. This is not the character of a servant. Rather, our goal must be to serve one another out of reverence and love for God. We serve all men, not because they are worthy by our own standards, but because Jesus served all men. He served us even when we were not worthy. Think about how you react the next time someone treats you bad. Will you return evil for evil? Will you refuse to talk to that person out of bitterness? Or will you bless that person, pray for them and strive to do good where they have done evil? Jesus did good to us when we did evil against Him. Remember that we are told to have this mind in us. In this manner Jesus commanded us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44ff).

**HALF-HEARTED SERVICE:** A true servant is one who puts his heart into what he is doing. He serves, not out of necessity, but out of choice. Therefore he does so to the best of his abilities. Thus, it is not hard to tell when a person is not a true servant, because even though they go through the motions, they put little diligence and little sacrifice into what they are doing.

Consider Christians who go to services, but see no need to meet with the saints every time they come together. Or the person who does not think twice about placing worldly activities above of their spiritual service. In the parable of the talents Jesus illustrated this perfectly. Of the three servants in Matt. 25:14ff two of them diligently used the money their master had given them to make a profit. They were truly serving their master. But the third servant took what was given to him and buried it the ground. He then tried to justifying himself saying, *“Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.”* Sounds like an easy excuse for showing little effort and little sacrifice. But sadly, there are many Christians who are walking this same path, trying to get by with as little sacrifice as possible.

This challenge we face as servants is compounded by the fact that in our culture men are praised for getting as much as possible with as little as possible. The real winner is the one who gets something for nothing. For many this is how they approach their salvation as well. But as we read through scriptures, this does not described the character of God’s people. God has never been pleased with half-hearted service. Hebrews chapter eleven alone teaches us that those who attain the promises of God do so through great effort and sacrifice. God is not pleased when we are content to attend a service or to and read a few chapters out of our Bibles each week. Rather, He commands us to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil. 2:12). *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Heb. 6:11-12).

### **Conclusion**

What manner of servant are you? After examine your life, your motivation, and the attitude with which you approach your service to God, can you confidently say that the Lord will declare to you, *“Well done good and faithful servant?”* Is this not the goal of a Christian? Oh, what joy there will be on that day when the Lord comes and He finds us diligently working and faithfully watching. But we have to be ready. We have to be showing Him true devotion and service now while He is away. This endeavor begins now. For some, it may be difficult to give up old habits, busy schedules, or bad attitudes which prevent us from being true servants. But in the end it is all worth it. The praise of God is sweeter than anything this life can offer. Will He find you serving?

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