

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

A STUDY OF SERVANTHOOD

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

MAKE ME A SERVANT

John 12:26

If you look up the word *servant*, you will find the following definitions: “one who ministers or performs duties for others,” “a devoted and helpful follower or supporter,” and “one who is devoted at the disregard of another’s interests.” When reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, it is evident that a servant heart is important and pleasing to God and essential to Christian living. We see this in John 12:26 when Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (ESV). In Romans 6:15–23, Paul talked of how, as Christians, we are slaves to righteousness and proclaimed “thanks be to God” for this bondage! In James 1:27, the service of widows and orphans is described as “pure and undefiled before God the Father.” The tone toward servanthood in the Bible is positive and approached with joy and gratitude—providing a stark contrast to the secular view of servanthood. Isaiah 55:8 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”

A life of servanthood involves more than simply doing and more than simply professing. Faith and action go hand in hand. James 2:26 reads, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” The definition itself implies that both action and certain attitude are to take place. So what does the Bible say are some of the characteristics of a servant heart?

- The heart of a servant is faithful and obedient, “moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Having faith allows us to submit to God’s will rather than our own.
- The heart of a servant is humble. In order to serve, it is often necessary to decrease our own ego and acknowledge the One who is greater as illustrated in John 3:27–30. John had to take his proper place in submission to Jesus. Humility means understanding that our service may not be recognized by others but doing so regardless. Matthew 6:3–4 describes this type of service: “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
- The heart of a servant is compassionate. Service requires attentiveness to the needs of others (Matthew 25:34–40; Philippians 2:4). We must have the mind of Christ (verse 5) to be successful in service. Compassion for others involves pure motives without expectation of anything in return. “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).
- The heart of a servant is willing to work with others and values the gifts that others bring to the table. Individual servants make up the body of Christ, therefore each member is valuable (1 Corinthians 12). Servanthood will look different for each individual. Throughout the Bible, we see a number of individuals with different talents and gifts, yet they are all considered servants of God—each just as important as the other.
- The heart of a servant is willing and sacrificial. The church in Macedonia was noted for their joyful generosity and willing sacrifice (2 Corinthians 8). We also see sacrifice in the example of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2. In verses 29–30, Paul told the Philippians, “So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”

Notice that there is no income, status, or age requirement to be a servant of God. God wants us to have a heart similar to that of David’s, a man after God’s own heart. He has given us the pattern in Christ Jesus. We must imitate Him (1 Corinthians 11:1), the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Throughout this study, we will take a closer look at women in the Bible and the way they lived out these characteristics.

7. Read James 2:26. How do faith and service go hand in hand?

QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of a servant?

8. How does having faith create a desire for servitude?

2. Discuss how the Christian's view of servanthood differs from the world's.

9. What are some barriers to a servant heart that we face?

3. What does it mean to be a "slave to righteousness"?

10. Name someone with a servant heart in the Bible and the ways this person emulated the characteristics listed.

4. Why do you think several places in the Bible (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5) make a point to talk about the importance of serving widows and orphans?

5. After reading John 3:27–30, what does it mean to "decrease" when applied to serving?

6. What made the generosity and service of the Macedonian church (2 Corinthians 8) so pleasing to God?

LESSON 2 NAOMI AND RUTH Ruth 1:16–17

The book of Ruth begins with us learning that Naomi lost her husband and her two sons, leaving her a widow and without any children of her own. In Ruth 1:4, we learn that her sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. It is important to note that these women were not Israelites. Moab was considered a pagan nation. Upon the loss of her sons, Naomi pleaded with both Ruth and Orpah to return to their families, and in verses 9–13, Naomi even expressed her desire to the Lord that they marry again. One can infer from the text that it would not have been unusual for Ruth or Orpah to return to their families and remarry, and it may have been culturally expected.

In Ruth 1:16–17, Ruth showed her loyalty to her mother-in-law, stating, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the

Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you” (ESV). This statement says a great deal about the type of woman Naomi must have been to inspire such loyalty and a desire to serve her God. It is possible to serve and inspire others by the way we conduct ourselves in our home and among our children. The Proverbs 31 description of a godly woman includes, “She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (verses 27–28). Naomi had little to offer Ruth (verses 11–14), but her faithfulness to the Lord and the kindness showed to Ruth, a Moabite woman, was enough. Ruth saw Naomi’s servant heart and devotion to the Lord and was not willing to part from her, even if it meant facing unknown circumstances. A similar sentiment is expressed by Peter in 1 Peter 3:1 when he told wives that they can influence non-believing husbands by their behavior. Our behavior leads people spiritually, either toward Christ or away from Christ, depending on our attitude and behavior.

One definition of *servant* is “one who is devoted to another at the disregard of one’s own interests.” We see that in Ruth. Staying in a foreign land would pose challenges to a young widow and could have been a hindrance to Ruth’s ability to move on with her life. The old law stated that Israelites were forbidden to intermarry, yet Ruth chose to stay, even if it meant she was not accepted by others (Deuteronomy 7:3–4). Had Ruth not had such compassion for her aging mother-in-law, she may have gone back to Moab, found a nice man, had children, and lived out the rest of her life relatively comfortably. However, she chose to disregard that option and stay and care for Naomi in an unfamiliar land.

In chapter 2, Ruth met Boaz, an Israelite and close relative of Naomi (verse 20). Ruth heeded the advice of the older and wiser Naomi in order to find favor with Boaz. (Titus 2:3 establishes a similar pattern in the New Testament church for women today.) Ruth took a stance of humility when meeting Boaz in Ruth 2:10, stating, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” She was clearly not looking for recognition in her service. However, Ruth’s kindness toward Naomi stood out to Boaz (verse 11). Ruth 2:1 describes Boaz as a “worthy man”; we see in other verses of Ruth that Boaz was a protector (verses 8–9), a provider (3:15), and a man of integrity (chapter 4). Toward the end of Ruth, we learn that she and Boaz married and had a son named Obed who fathered

Jesse, who fathered David, all individuals part of the genealogy of Jesus.

God can do extraordinary things with ordinary people when we submit to His will and serve others at the sacrifice of our own will.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of Ruth being a Moabite by descent?
2. Discuss the difficulties that may occur in serving those who are different or have different beliefs than us.
3. How did Ruth and Naomi embody the characteristics of a servant?
4. Discuss ways that fear of the unfamiliar affects our ability to serve.
5. Read Romans 8:28. How did “all things work together for the good” for Ruth and Naomi?
6. How did Naomi serve Ruth?

