# Service

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Remember our tagline:

Simplicity. Service. Peace. Worship. Community. Jesus.

These state, in single word form, the things that we hope our fellowship is about. Last week we discussed simplicity: how we choose to engage on the complex task of focusing on God and other people by simplifying our own lives, and admitting our simple foolishness before God and desiring a simple naivety towards evil. And this week we focus on service. Just at the start, we see that service is connected to simplicity: we choose simplicity because we want to serve God, and to serve others better.

In the Old Testament, the word “serve” is most often used of the priests who served in the temple. Their service, their ministry, was strongly tied up with the religious duties they had. And, in the most natural way possible, just as has happened with the word “ministry” in English, to “serve” began to take on shades of meaning that emphasized these religious duties. They were directly serving God—could others say they were doing so? And you can imagine that they began to see a two-tier system just like we often do today: “ministers” and others who do “full-time Christian service” are in one category, and the rest of us are in another.

But even in the Old Testament, the idea of ministry and service was not limited to priests. This is what Moses is recorded as saying; it is one of the ways that the commandment to love God is said:

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Loving God is expressed in several parallel ways: fear, walking, service, and keeping God’s commandments. I find it interesting that we are told to “serve God with all your heart and all your soul” the way we are told to love God with all of our heart and soul. So, love and service are ways of expressing the same thing.

This connection between service and worship continues into the New Testament times. Much of Jesus’s hard teachings come out of warnings to those, like the scribes, Pharisees, and priests, who put “God-work” ahead of the work of true service. “The Son of Man,” said Jesus, “came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Last week, I read from Paul’s meditation in the letter to the Philippians on Jesus’s humble service, which bears repeating here:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness[[2]](#footnote-2).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the image of service as religious service to call people to wholly give themselves over to God’s work. It becomes one of the climaxes of his letter. He writes (in chapter 12):

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.[[3]](#footnote-3)

That last phrase, “λογικὴν τὴν λατρείαν,” or “spiritual worship,” is translated a number of ways; you may remember that the King James Version translates it as “reasonable service.” When we think hard about all that God has done to bring about our redemption and to create a new people who *can* serve him, it is only reasonable that we follow through on God’s plan to serve him.

What does this look like? Forgive me, but here is another quote from a commentary on this passage in Romans:

The service which Christians are to offer consists in the fashioning of their inner lives and their outward physical conduct in a way which plainly distinguishes them from the world and which corresponds to the will of God. This is the living sacrifice which they have to offer[[4]](#footnote-4).

There is a church community in Washington DC called The Church of the Savior. One of their taglines has been very important to many people in describing this life: “Journey inward, Journey Outward.” As Bess has reminded us, we have seen small groups of people band together around a call and do amazing things, despite age and lack of experience. And perhaps this can be a model for our congregation, too.

Frankly, I feel a bit of a fraud giving this teaching to people such as you, who already serve others in such wonderful ways, in teaching children about the wonders of nature; loving children with special needs; working with kids who are having a very hard time of making it in the world; counseling and consoling the sick, the dying and the grieving; medical work; raising children. So perhaps I can be a cheerleader and say, keep up the good work! Hurrah for you! This is service that, I believe, God approves of.

Let’s be mindful of what God’s call might be to us as a fellowship, too, of the journeys we might take together. If God calls you to call us to specific ministries, do not hesitate to make that call to us. This is the reasonable thing to do; it is for our own well-being. Help us all serve God with all of our soul and strength.

1. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Dt 10:12–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ph 2:3-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ro 12:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)