

LESSON 5

Servanthood in the Local Church and Beyond

Sincere followers of Jesus experience a growing urgency to work for God. This urgency calls for a study of biblical servanthood. Scripture instructs us in the nature and work of biblical servants. Understanding and practicing servanthood is important for many functions of the local church. Practicing biblical servanthood also helps to make us effective witnesses to nonbelievers.

Servanthood is one of the most rewarding experiences for a believer. Loving servants of God develop a growing understanding of the many ways they can help others. This growing awareness of human need leads to a commitment to Christian action. We see the needs of others and move quickly toward these opportunities for ministry.

Compassionate servants can change the world around them. Christians often think that miracles or great healings are the only things that can move others toward God. It is true that miracles can arouse the curiosity of many people, and people often find Jesus as their Savior after witnessing powerful manifestations of God. However, multiplied acts of kindness can also break down a strong wall of resistance. Devoted Christian service is an important part in healing a hurting and broken world.

Compassionate servants cannot be stopped. Those who learn and practice the principles of servanthood advance the kingdom of God. Eventually, compassionate servanthood becomes a natural expression of the Christian life. Spontaneously serving others makes the church a powerful force in the world.

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Foundations for Servanthood
Jesus As God's Servant
Regarding the Servant
The Holy Spirit and Servanthood
The Mature Servant
The Wrong Attitude
Witnessing through Servanthood

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Provide biblical foundations for servanthood.*
2. *Explain how Isaiah 61:1–2 relates to the life of Jesus as God's servant.*
3. *Identify the attitudes, actions, and motivations of a servant.*
4. *Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in servanthood.*
5. *Discuss how servanthood expresses spiritual growth and maturity.*
6. *Identify problematic attitudes that suppress personal servanthood.*
7. *Explain how servanthood is a means of reaching the unsaved.*

Biblical Foundations for Servanthood

Objective 1:

Provide biblical foundations for servanthood.

The call to servanthood is a clear teaching of Scripture. The Hebrew word for servant was first applied to slaves. Over time the word was used for trusted

servants who did important things for their masters. The Hebrew word was also applied to those who served rulers. Kings and prophets were also called servants of the Lord (2 Samuel 3:18; Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 34:23–24). Later, the word was applied to anyone serving God.

The book of Isaiah contains excellent teachings concerning servanthood. Isaiah recognized that the nation of Israel was a servant to God (Isaiah 44:1–5). Isaiah also said God would raise up a Servant, put His Spirit within Him, and use Him to minister to the nations He loved (Isaiah 42:1). This Servant is the subject of four other important passages in Isaiah. These passages, called “Servant Songs,” were prophecies about the coming Messiah (Isaiah 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–3).

The Old Testament has many excellent examples of godly servanthood. For example, Joseph had the opportunity to punish family members that previously tried to harm him. Instead, he forgave them. This allowed him to serve his family and save them from starvation. Moses unselfishly led his people to freedom. Samuel was a true servant in times of national trouble. He faithfully served God’s people as a prophet and priest. He served with wisdom and provided excellent leadership when others failed. Other great servants like Esther, Daniel, and David inspire us to discover our place of servanthood.

Jesus As God’s Servant

Objective 2:

Explain how Isaiah 61:1–2 relates to the life of Jesus as God’s servant.

Isaiah spoke of the ministry of the Great Servant that would bring hope into broken lives. He spoke of Jesus when he said, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner, to proclaim the year of

the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61:1–2). Jesus later read Isaiah's words in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19). He wanted others to understand that He was the Great Servant spoken of by Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Jesus also wanted others to know His message brought hope and deliverance to suffering people.

We follow in Jesus' footsteps by sharing a message that promises freedom from spiritual slavery and inward darkness. Like the Great Servant, we continually share the message of God's love local church ministries and personal interactions. As servants of God, we bring a witness of hope and freedom to our communities. There is great joy when individuals believe the good news and experience God's transforming power.

Jesus knew servanthood is the mark of a true disciple. When His disciples argued about greatness in the kingdom of God, Jesus quickly responded, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). What Jesus said to the disciples was very clear. He wisely used the word servant to describe greatness in God's kingdom. Like Jesus' disciples, we must see serving as a way of life for all Christians. Serving in the local church should come naturally.

Regarding the Servant

Objective 3:

Identify attitudes, actions, and motivations of a servant.

Our attitudes are foundational to who we are. While good attitudes can open ministry doors we never thought possible, wrong attitudes greatly hinder effective service to God. For example, an attitude of pride can lead to failure and discouragement in our work for God. The Bible strongly warns about the harmful nature of pride. Disgrace and destruction follow the prideful. Now would be a good time to read Proverbs 11:2 and 16:5.

Pride must be replaced by humble dependence upon the Lord. Sincere humility is necessary for Christian service. Jesus taught that humility will lift us up in the eyes of others (see Luke 14:11; 18:14). According to Peter, humility helps us submit to one another and imparts God's grace for effective service (see 1 Peter 5:5–7).

Servants also develop attitudes of submission, obedience, and sacrifice. Jesus is again our great example. God required Jesus to come to earth as a servant. As a servant to God and humans, He submitted to God's will and then served humankind. Submission and obedience led to His sacrificial death for our sins. He died sacrificially so we may live sacrificially for others. Therefore, Jesus' example of obedience is our model. The success of our servanthood hinges on deep humility, sincere obedience, and unconditional submission to whatever labor of love is required.

Motivations of a Servant

Motivations are the feelings and beliefs that make us act in a certain manner. Love and compassion for others motivate true servants of God. When our motivations are good, acts of love and kindness are easily accomplished. Properly motivated servants of God are always helping others.

Tragically, if our motivations are not constantly examined, we can easily want the wrong things. Here is an example. On one occasion the disciples of Jesus argued about who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. Some of them wanted a high position next to Jesus. But Jesus was disappointed with their motivations. They were motivated by pride and power. Jesus quickly responded to their poor motivations. He pointed out that humility and a servant's attitude were the keys to greatness in His kingdom (see Matthew 18:1–4; Luke 9:48).

Humility and a servant attitude help assure pure motivations that lead to servant ministry. For example, we know that the motivation to please God leads to

servicing others through an effective prayer life. According to John, people with pure hearts will be very confident before God. Confident servants can receive from God anything they ask, because they obey His command and do what pleases Him (1 John 3:21–22).

Christian servanthood is also motivated by love. Loving God is the highest priority for servants. Loving God is more important than noble acts of servanthood. Naturally, we also love everyone around us, including our enemies (Matthew 5:43–44; Matthew 22:37–40). Loving God is expressed through unconditional servanthood. Consider this: A pastor was chided by his fellow pastors when he accepted a struggling church filled with problems. “Why would you take such a church?” they asked. The pastor explained that his love for God and others led him to pastor a church filled with pain. He felt deep pleasure in obeying the Lord. Many servants of the Lord feel this deep pleasure when love motivates them to accept difficult tasks.

Loving God naturally leads to loving and serving others. James said that loving our neighbors as ourselves is “the royal law found in Scripture” (James 2:8). Love recognizes that every person is made in God’s image and has great value (James 3:9). Our love for those around us encourages our servanthood to them. Our love for God also creates a merciful attitude towards others. Motivated by compassion and love, servants walk toward the pain of others and not away from it. The Lord wants us to look for people needing help with their problems. Love seeks for opportunities that require multiplied acts of kindness.

The Holy Spirit and Servanthood

Objective 4:

Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in servanthood.

Our ability to serve God and others requires the help of the Holy Spirit. Human nature has a tendency toward

selfishness. Even after we become Christians, we may still have self-serving attitudes. The Holy Spirit enables us to overcome selfish thoughts and attitudes that impede servanthood.

Think about the Holy Spirit's influence on the early disciples. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told His followers to return to Jerusalem. There they would receive a special gift from the Father (Luke 24:45–49). The disciples may not have known what all of this meant, but they obeyed. This is a good lesson for us. We may not always know what God desires to accomplish in our lives, but this should not discourage us. Our responsibility is to obey what God has spoken to us. Obedience then leads to marvelous opportunities for service.

The disciples obediently returned to Jerusalem. As they waited and prayed, the power of the Holy Spirit was given to them. Great joy came to them when the Holy Spirit filled their lives. Their exciting story is recorded in Acts 2. The heavenly Father's gracious gift was confirmed through startling miracles. First, the presence of God sounded like a powerful wind blowing through their prayer room. Then what appeared to be tongues of fire rested on each of them. Amazingly, they all began speaking in languages they did not know (Acts 2:1–13).

This excitement drew a large crowd of people. What Peter said to this crowd still encourages us today: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18).

Joel's words promised the Holy Spirit's power to a special group of individuals. In the Old Testament, the power of the Spirit was generally given to great leaders like the prophets. Kings and other important leaders were also given the Spirit in order to serve God and others effectively. But Peter preached that the Holy Spirit would now come to everyone, including humble

servants. These Spirit-filled servants would carry God's message to their villages and cities all over the world.

We still need the Holy Spirit's power for the tasks of servanthood. You will face personal struggles that threaten your servanthood. Faithfully seek the Holy Spirit's presence during these difficult times. He will give you added strength and courage to continue your service to God and others within and outside of the church.

Here are other important ways the Holy Spirit will help you become a better servant. Take time to read the biblical examples given below.

- The Holy Spirit will give you power to speak freely with others who need to know more about God. After the disciples received the power of the Spirit, they spoke God's powerful message of hope to others (Acts 4:23–31).
- He will give you power to pray more effectively for others. The early disciples prayed for many kinds of needs. People were amazed when godly servants prayed and great miracles occurred (Acts 3:1–10; 6:8).
- He will lead you to people who need help from a godly servant. Remember, if God leads you to help someone, He will empower you for the task (Acts 8:26–40).
- He can give you wisdom in difficult situations that require good judgment (Acts 6:1–7).
- He will give you the power to live a holy life that is an example to others (Acts 4:8–22).

The Mature Servant

Objective 5:

Discuss how servanthood expresses spiritual growth and maturity.

Christians discover that spiritual growth and maturity come in many different ways. Christians everywhere recognize that consistent prayer and faithful Bible study

are important to personal spiritual growth. We also know that fasting and prayer are a powerful combination for spiritual growth.

Servanthood is another means for our maturing in the Christian walk. Paul's writings connect important ideas regarding servant ministry and Christian maturity. In Ephesians 4:11–13, Paul writes, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Let us reflect on these ideas:

- God provides certain leaders to minister to those who follow Jesus (v. 11).
- Leaders have the responsibility of training people to be servants (v. 12).
- Servants live and minister in such a way so that others are built up (v. 12).
- When mature servants encourage and help others, those served understand more about Jesus. This encourages others to live like Jesus (vv. 13–16).

Mature, dedicated servants teach and serve new disciples. According to Paul, the goal of biblical leadership is to build healthy servants of God. At some point, the new disciple begins to serve others. Serving becomes a way of living, not just a way of thinking about Christian responsibility. The growing servant sees new ways of serving God and helping others.

Paul helps us understand that developing biblical servants takes time and effort. Paul's key word is translated "built up" (v. 12). This was a term used for building a house. One does not build a house by first building a roof. No, the foundation comes first, then walls are added, and the roof crowns the new house. A house is built in a very systematic way over a period

of time. God-called leaders develop servants through encouragement and instruction over a period of time.

The Wrong Attitude

Objective 6:

Identify problematic attitudes that suppress personal servanthood.

Thinking about servanthood as a personal battle may seem strange at first. Considering this powerful truth about godly servants is helpful: good servants are also good soldiers who protect their call to servanthood (2 Timothy 2:1–4). You must remember that Satan wishes to compromise or destroy every important thing in your life. Since servanthood is important to the church, certain enemies seek to destroy your desire to serve God and His church. Never doubt Satan's determination to destroy good servants and their work. Someone once said that if Christianity can be stopped for only one generation, then it will become extinct. There is a great truth in this statement. Christianity can be stopped when good servants no longer hear and obey God's voice. So, as a good servant, guard yourself against the following enemies:

1. **Pride:** Pride can bring disgrace and the ultimate destruction of a servant of God. Pride can turn a healthy servant into a selfish individual (Proverbs 11:2; 16:5; 29:23).
2. **Laziness:** Laziness keeps the servant inactive. The desire to help others is lost (Proverbs 10:4; 19:15).
3. **Indifference:** Indifference means the servant has lost the desire to serve others. Other things have become more important than serving God's people.
4. **Doubt:** If the servant of God begins to doubt the call to servanthood, this could lead to worrying about God's material provision for his or her life.

A servant of the Lord has many outward enemies also. For example, individuals who hate Christianity

often persecute God's servants. The persecution of God's servants happens in all parts of the world. Naturally, persecution can bring deep discouragement. God has, however, promised His strength to persecuted saints who seek Him. Consider these verses when persecution, hardship, or criticism becomes a part of your life: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Paul offers more encouraging words to those under great hardship: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Paul answered his own question by saying, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37). Prayer brings fellowship with Jesus and added strength for your battle. Remaining in close fellowship with Jesus assures your victory.

Witnessing through Servanthood

Objective 7:

Explain how servanthood is a means of reaching the unsaved.

While preaching the gospel is a primary method for sharing God's plan for salvation, there are many ways to share Jesus with others. We share Jesus through our words and our actions. Sometimes our actions are more powerful than our words. This is particularly true when people resist God's message of salvation. When individuals resist, our words need to connect with servant actions.

Serving the unsaved in creative ways can help break down walls of resistance. For example, Christians can go door-to-door in their community and offer to serve people in a variety of ways. You might be surprised how often people will allow someone to help them in times of great need. Christians can paint houses, mow lawns, repair a car, or help with a chore or errand. Compassionate acts

of kindness often represent Jesus more effectively than hundreds of words in a sermon.

Sometimes servanthood and preaching work together. Our words help people understand God's plan for their lives. Servanthood then reflects our sincere love for them. When we help people in meaningful ways, they listen to our words more carefully.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give us power to witness (Acts 1:8). This power is often expressed through our words. Jesus was also teaching that the Holy Spirit helps in all witnessing, including our servanthood to others. Thousands accepted the message of Jesus because early Christians did more than preach. Their faith was expressed through loving servanthood. They quickly solved problems that threatened their ability to minister to others (see Acts 2–6).

Jesus helped His disciples understand that serving others is true greatness. He taught, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26–28). Like Jesus and His disciples, we must be willing to give our lives in service for others.

Other Ministry Opportunities

Many business leaders teach the principles of servanthood to their employees because servanthood works well in the business world for the same reason it works well in the church. The principles of biblical servanthood give value to the person served. When we serve others in the name of the Lord, we communicate to them that they are important to us and to God.

Jesus taught us that all people—regardless of race or social status—have value to God. Therefore, no one should be neglected by the church. Servanthood is a wonderful way to demonstrate God's deep love to the hurting. Servants offer encouragement and hope for the future.

Conclusion

Serving others also opens doors of opportunity for faithful servants. Never fear that you will lack new opportunities to serve God. Jesus taught us that the world has too few servants (see Matthew 9:35–38). A shortage of Christian workers guarantees new challenges and new responsibilities for faithful servants. When you faithfully do God's will today, tomorrow will offer many wonderful and unexpected opportunities.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Luke 4:18–19

Luke 9:48

Acts 1:8

Acts 2:17–18

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- How does the Old Testament view servanthood?*
 - Servanthood did not seem important in the Old Testament.*
 - Servanthood was applied only to special people in the Old Testament.*
 - Servanthood was a very important topic in the Old Testament.*
- In what way did Jesus teach the importance of servanthood?*
 - He taught that servanthood was the mark of a true disciple.*
 - He spoke about servanthood very little.*
 - He said servanthood is only for leadership in the church.*
- How do good attitudes help us become better servants?*
 - Having a good attitude is not that important for a servant.*
 - Having a good attitude keeps a servant out of trouble.*
 - Good attitudes like humility and submission are at the center of serving others.*
- Why is the motivation of love for others so important for a servant?*
 - A loving servant can make more mistakes with fewer consequences.*
 - Servants motivated by love are willing to serve others at any cost.*
 - Serving others with love gives others a higher opinion of us.*
- Why is the Holy Spirit necessary for biblical servants?*
 - The Holy Spirit does not help the servant that much.*
 - The Holy Spirit empowers servants so they can effectively help others.*
 - The Holy Spirit makes us feel better about ourselves.*

6. *According to the apostle Paul, the goal of biblical leadership is to*
 - a) *take care of the church business.*
 - b) *receive tithes and offerings.*
 - c) *build healthy servants of God.*
7. *According to the lesson, one danger that threatens servanthood is*
 - a) *not memorizing enough Scripture about servanthood.*
 - b) *disappointment that no one is complementing you about your servanthood.*
 - c) *pride that leads to selfish living.*
8. *One of the most effective ways to share Jesus with an unbeliever is to*
 - a) *serve the nonbeliever in a Christlike and compassionate manner.*
 - b) *preach to the nonbeliever every chance you get.*
 - c) *give the nonbeliever a lot of Christian literature.*
9. *What did Jesus say was the path to true greatness in the kingdom of God?*
 - a) *Studying the Bible for many hours a day*
 - b) *Telling others that you are a great servant of God*
 - c) *Serving others humbly*
10. *When we serve others in the name of the Lord, we*
 - a) *spoil them and teach them bad principles.*
 - b) *communicate their importance to us and to God.*
 - c) *do not help them to become better people.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (5.1)
2. *a* (5.2)
3. *c* (5.3)
4. *b* (5.3)
5. *b* (5.4)
6. *c* (5.5)
7. *c* (5.6)
8. *a* (5.7)
9. *c* (5.7)
10. *b* (5.7)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

Howard Young has served as a senior pastor in Oregon and Wisconsin and as a missionary in Alaska. He also presided over Trinity Bible College in North Dakota and was an associate professor with North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Dr. Young holds two doctoral degrees, one in leadership and the other in education.