

**THE FELLOWSHIP OF SERVING**  
(FROM CHAPTER 11)

**INTRODUCTION**

*Galatians 5:13* — “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

**Illustration:** Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, was visiting Taiwan on one of his overseas trips. During the visit, he hiked with a Taiwanese pastor back into one of the mountain villages to meet with some of the national Christians. The trails were wet and their shoes became caked with mud. Much later, someone asked this Taiwanese pastor what he remembered most about Dawson Trotman. Without hesitation the man replied, “He cleaned my shoes.”

See, when they arrived home the next day, they removed their shoes at the doorway, and the Taiwanese pastor retreated into the kitchen to make some tea. How surprised this humble national pastor was a few minutes later to return with the tea and find Trotman sitting on the floor with a small stick, a piece of cloth, and some water, cleaning his shoes. Such a spirit of servanthood marked Dawson Trotman throughout his Christian life. He died as he lived, actually giving his life to rescue someone else from drowning.

“The concept of servanthood is basic to the biblical practice of *koinonia*.” (JB)

- “Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others...[and] one of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, talents, and energies in serving one another in the body of Christ.” (JB)
- We’ve seen that competition has no place in the true community of God’s people (Romans 12:10). Serving both undermines a spirit of competition and cultivates a spirit of honoring.
- The greatest model and teacher of servanthood was the Lord Jesus Christ. *Philippians 2:7* — “[He] emptied himself, by taking

the form of a servant.” *Matthew 20:28* — “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The most notable example of Jesus’ servanthood is found in John 13:1-17 when He washed His disciples feet. The text reveals that He understands His true position, He knows He is about to be betrayed, He has every reason to be preoccupied with His imminent suffering, and yet He humbly and mundanely serves others. *John 13:3-5* — “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” (NIV—“Jesus knew \_\_\_\_\_, so He \_\_\_\_\_.”)

- **Principle:** “It was not in spite of His greatness but because of His greatness that Jesus served His disciples....***True greatness in the kingdom of heaven involves serving one another***....In the mind of Jesus, acts of mundane service were not inconsistent with authority and greatness but rather were an integral part of it.” (JB) *Matthew 20:26* — “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” This isn’t pragmatic, but positional—in other words, the lesson is not, “Hey, if you want people and Christ to consider you great, you had better serve,” but rather, “You are not great in the eyes of your Lord unless, like Him, you are serving others.” So, true greatness (as evaluated and commended by God) equals service. Whatever we may think of ourselves, we are not great (in this real divinely-defined sense of the word) unless we are serving.
- **Problem:** Like the disciples (and their parents), we stumble at this concept of greatness, because it is so counter-cultural in its sense of values. Our world has redefined greatness, from what God originally intended it to mean. It has taken a concept defined by God and illustrated by His Son and broken it, making it the selfish and degraded opposite. True greatness won’t be understood by the world, for it is measured not by what we can

see (i.e., “look at that guy!”), but often by what we can’t see (i.e., serving “in the shadows”). True greatness will not look great and will therefore usually be overlooked and/or spurned. So, to pursue true greatness requires faith, not sight; humility and self-denial, not self-preservation.

- **Pattern:** *John 13:14-15* — “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 also should do just as I have done to you.” Christ, our Sovereign Servant, needs to be our Teacher and Pattern.

**Discussion:** How do we hear the world expressing its sense of greatness? *Self-centered striving for position and recognition*

*A Definition of Serving* — “Doing helpful deeds for one another...being alert to the little things that need to be done and then doing them” (JB)

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT

While both spiritual gifts and talents should be used to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10), those aren’t required in servanthood.

### 1. **A servant attitude**

**Illustration:** A Bible teacher in the Washington, D.C., area noticed a man removing and stacking chairs after the meeting. “Upon inquiring, he learned that the man stacking the chairs was a busy United States senator. It did not take the talent or ability of a senator to stack chairs, but it did take the attitude of a servant.” (JB)

Serving “downward” — The world teaches merely that the lesser serves the greater (i.e., the employee serves his boss—cf. Luke 22:27). It further dichotomizes and pigeonholes people, creating levels, tiers, and castes of people based on financial, occupational, geographical, or personality differences. However, since the gospel completely annuls such a spirit by teaching us of our unity in Christ

(Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11), the Christlike servant breaks out of that worldly mold and serve “downward” (i.e., those who by the world’s standard are beneath him in position or station in life).

Once again, Jesus is our pattern in this “downward” service. *John 13:14-15* — “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 also should do just as I have done to you.”

**Negative Illustration:** King Rehoboam failed to learn this kind of servanthood (cf. 1 Kings 12:7), and it cost him ten of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Positive Illustration:** Paul practiced such “downward” service, for he said in Acts 20:34—“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me” (i.e., his interns).

**Discussion:** What is the difference between these two statements of priority for a business executive—priority “to serve my employees” versus “to serve my customers”? *open discussion*

### 2. **An observant eye**

We need to develop an observant eye and mind to see what needs to be done. On the one hand, this will happen if we have cultivated a servant’s attitude. On the other hand, “the reason we don’t see opportunities to serve is that we are continually thinking about ourselves instead of other.” (JB)

*Philippians 2:3-4* — “[Servant attitude] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [Observant eye] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” From our Philippians study, we considered the following together from these verses:

- Paul exhorts us to “look...to the interests of others.” The KJV appropriately translates this phrase, “Look...on the things of others,” for Paul is being purposefully general

here. There is really no limit to the others-centered attitude we should have. This kind of others-focus (a) meditates upon the good qualities of other believers (cf. I Corinthians 13:4-8, esp. “thinks no evil” and “believes/hopes all things”); (b) shares the burdens and interests of others (cf. Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 10:24, 33-11:1); and (c) looks out for the needs of other believers.

- A beautiful illustration of this kind of others-focus is discovered in Christ in Matthew 14:16. When His disciples wanted to send away the hungry crowd, Jesus’ immediate response was, “You give them to eat.” Jesus refused to let them meet their own needs. He knew their needs, and He was focused on meeting their needs. Such [an observant, others-focused perspective] must characterize His followers, as well.

### 3. ***A faithful character***

“Few things are more distressing to a person in a position of responsibility for the work of others than to not be able to count on those people to do their job.”

*Proverbs 25:19* — “Trusting in a [unreliable] man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips.”

*Jerry Bridges* — “My observation after years of serving in both a Christian organization and a local church is that the lack of a serious commitment to faithfulness in assigned or agreed-on tasks is a major problem among Christians. We somehow feel that if we are serving in a voluntary capacity, commitment to faithfulness is not important. But God is the One who requires that we be faithful.”

- *1 Corinthians 4:2* — “Moreover, it is required of stewards [NIV—‘those who have been given a trust’] that they be found [NIV—‘prove’] faithful.”
- *Luke 16:12* — “And if you have not been faithful in that [responsibility] which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”

**Discussion:** What do those verses suggest about the person who is constantly clamoring that no one trusts or tests him? *open discussion*

## THE CHALLENGES OF A SERVANT

***“The true test of whether we are a servant is that we don’t mind being treated like one.”*** (i.e., “carpet-mindedness”).

*Luke 17:7-10* — “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

### 1. ***Inconsiderateness (vv. 7-8)***

“We tend to resent the inconsiderate actions of others, but if we want to be true servants, we must learn to bear with them.” (JB)

**Illustration:** “Mothers, even in Christian homes, are typical victims of the inconsiderateness of others.”

### 2. ***Ingratitude (v. 9)***

“If we are to accept the challenge of being a servant, we must be prepared to accept ingratitude, to accept being taken for granted by thoughtless members of the body.” (JB)

**Illustration:** Again, mothers [watch video, [youtu.be/HB3xM93rXbY](https://youtu.be/HB3xM93rXbY)]

### 3. ***Lack of congratulations (v. 10)***

“When we have done our job as a servant and have borne up under inconsiderateness and ingratitude, we are not to congratulate ourselves for our heroic role; rather, we are to humbly say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’ If we aspire to be servants, we must accept the role of a servant.” (JB)

**Illustration:** “Mothers, even in Christian homes, are typical victims of the inconsiderateness of others.”

**Application:** “All of us are constantly changing roles from serving to being served. [1] When we are being served, we need to be sensitive to the demands we make and careful to express gratitude when someone else serves us. [2] But when we are serving, we need to accept our role and serve as unto the Lord, whether or not considerateness and gratitude are shown.” (JB)

## THE REWARD OF A SERVANT

*Luke 12:37* — “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”

- “Jesus appears to be telling us that in some way, He will serve His faithful servants when He comes.” (JB) Jesus continues His “downward” service well beyond His first coming.
- “Servanthood is part of the eternal character of God. The reward of servanthood is to be like our Master for all eternity.” (JB)

## THE CULTIVATION OF A SERVANT

“God must give us a servant attitude. We cannot change our own hearts.” (JB)

### 1. ***Renew your mind with Scripture.***

Fill your mind with Scriptures that teach servanthood, especially with passages that show Christ as our model.

### 2. ***Ask God for a servant’s heart.***

Earnestly pray for God to give you the “mind of Christ” (cf. *Philippians 2:5-8*).

### 3. ***Obediently take every opportunity to serve.***

Don’t pick and choose occasions to serve, but consistently obey God’s provision of opportunities to serve.

**Application:**

- *SF Service Projects:* Church Workday — Saturday, April 26, 8-noon
- *SF Needs:* groceries, meals, Helps Fund
- *SF Summer Ministry Opportunities:* posted soon!

## CONCLUSION

**Discussion:** What struck you or stood out to you about this consideration of the fellowship of serving? *open discussion*