

HOW TO BE A SERVANT

Romans 12:6-7

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Romans 12:6-7 (NIV)

[We read verse 6 to get the context of verse 7, which is our theme today.] “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach.”

We need to exercise real care when we’re looking at these seven motivational gifts that are spoken of in Romans 12, lest we think some are special—and others, we may neglect. There’s a certain kind of common denominator that runs through the expression of all the gifts, just as the Scripture desires that we should all prophesy. There are occasions—even in our interpersonal relationship, even on a small level—where we can speak the word of God. Maybe not on the church level, but other kinds of levels. We’re all called to prophesy. So within the Church, all of us, as members of the body of Christ, we’re all called to serve. And within that calling, there are special callings of service within the Body.

When I was in the country of Turkey this past summer, I saw what happens in a nation which, by and large, looks down upon service—especially that of the menial kind. I couldn’t believe, as I went to different places, the contrast between ancient Turkey and modern Turkey. Standing, for example, in Saint Sophia’s, which was built by Justinian, I believe in the sixth century when he completed it. One of the most important of all Christian churches for a thousand years. He said, when the finishing touches were placed on it, at the dedication, “Oh Solomon, I have outstripped thee!” And indeed, it was a fabulous building standing these thirteen centuries or so. Yet on the other hand, going through Turkey you saw so much that was in ruin and decay. And modern buildings that a few years ago had been built and now were just in bad deterioration. I was asking someone in Turkey who has knowledge about of the culture, “What is the reason for these

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structures that are such a mess?” He said, “You’re familiar with the Ottoman Empire. For centuries, Turkey was an important military power. They had, from other countries, people who did the maintenance work, the servant work, so they could design the great buildings and the great schemes. And they had subjected people who could keep them up. But because this was bred into the culture over a period of time, they no longer had the servants from other cultures to work for them. They had such an attitude towards service that many of the Turkish people themselves did not like to do the menial kinds of tasks. Thus, the society is in the shape that it’s in—its buildings, its streets, and its dirt, and the like.”

I don’t know if that is an accurate assessment of Turkish culture. It, at least to me, sounded like a reasonable explanation. That if, within a society, even within a church, there aren’t a great deal of people that work with their hands rather than speak with their mouth—if there isn’t a great proportion of being servants, then things indeed are going to crumble.

In the first century, the model that was held up for Christians was the model of being a servant. Two key words describe this: one that means “slave,” and the other which means “serve.” In a culture, in the Roman world of the first century, where to be a slave was a despicable sort of standing.

It is in that kind of context that Jesus came as a slave and a servant. And Jesus elevated the role of the servant to being that of supreme importance in the community, in the kingdom of God which He was bringing into earth. “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:11, NIV). Jesus would say of He, the Son of Man, came not to be served, but to serve. He would say to the disciples, when they were arguing with one another over the question of greatness: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but not so with you. Rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest. And the leader as one who serves. For which is

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greater? One who sits at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves” (see Luke 22:25-27).

We come, therefore, to this passage of Romans 12:7. We already see, just as the backdrop of the New Testament, how important this understanding of Christian ministry was. We are all called to serve. If we link Romans 12:7 with 1 Corinthians 12:5, we find Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 12:5 that there are varieties of service, but the same Lord. The word which is used here for service in Romans 12:7 is the word from which we derive the term “deacon.” It is an all-embracing kind of a term. Whereas, here Paul, in 12:7, may mean something very specific by it, we need to explore for just a moment the fact that all of Christian ministry is, in effect, service.

This word “serving” can be used of the apostles and their ministry. It can be used to describe in Acts 6:1 “serving widows.” And in the same passage, the apostles say, “Let others serve tables, but we will give ourselves to prayer and serving the Word.” In the English translation, it comes across as ministry. They say, “We’re going to give ourselves to deaconing the Word.” It is used as ministry to the saints. And it’s used of all ministry in general in Ephesians 4:11: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” The saints do the ministry, and there’s a full-faceted idea associated with ministry.

So given the fact that this term “ministry” or “service” is so wide and broad, and taking into account that Paul says there are varieties of service, I thought it would be wise today to reckon with a view that there is a variety of needs present within our church family, and among our people individually. And we need to look at what callings God has place in our life to help minister to the needs that are present.

One church has based its success of ministry to people on this phrase: “Find a need and meet it.” I think that is very wise. In the bulletin today, the blue insert, you’ll find a little diagram called

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“Meeting Human Needs.” I’ll speak for some moments today on this subject: “How to be a Servant.” It is taken from the psychology of Abraham Maslow, a modern humanist, a Jewish psychologist who describes mankind as a wanting being. A being that had needs that needed to be fulfilled. Maslow arranged these needs in a hierarchy of priority and potency. He started out by trying to describe the most basic and fundamental needs. And once they’re met, one can move up the ladder to another level of needs. When they’re met, move up another level of needs in life. I want to look at these five levels of need and relate them to the gospel. It impinges on this fact of serving the Lord.

I. At the basic level, we see physiological needs.

These are needs which are related to food, drink, oxygen. I need something to eat. I need something to drink. I need to breathe air. I need sleep. I need protection from extreme temperatures and the like—my physiological needs.

It is absolutely impossible, if I’m worried, if I don’t know where my next meal is coming from, to devote myself to being a self-actualizer—all I want to be, I can be. I’m not worried about being a musician at that moment if my whole task of life is to struggle for the next bit of grub that’s going to come my way. The fundamental need. We see servants in the New Testament arising which address themselves to meeting physiological needs. For example, Mark 1:31, Peter’s mother-in-law. The Scriptures say that when Jesus came into her room and healed her, the fever left her and she arose and served them. What was she doing? She was meeting the physiological needs of Jesus and her son-in-law, Peter, and the other disciples.

In Luke 8:3, there was a group of women who traveled with the apostolic company as they journeyed through Galilee and Jesus was preaching the kingdom of God. These women, Luke says, “served them out of the abundance of their property.” What were they doing? Again, they were meeting the physiological needs of Jesus and the crowd. It’d be rough for Jesus to stand up

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and preach to the multitudes if His disciples were trying to scrounge around wondering where the next meal is going to come from, and going days on end without eating. Jesus could do this himself in the wilderness, perhaps, but when He's in active ministry, the physiological needs must be met.

In John 12:2, Jesus is preparing for the coming week, His last week in Jerusalem. The text of John says, "There they made him a supper. Martha served." Again, meeting physiological needs. Jesus, at times, recognized that a crowd had to have their physiological needs met. So He took five loaves and two fishes and made enough so that it was passed out to all. There is a recognition that this is a fundamental need as we look at the pages of the New Testament. The believers, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, sold all that they had, and had everything in common. Pretty soon, a problem arose that there were some people that were being neglected in the daily distribution of food—some of the widows. This was a need that needed to be taken care of because there could be no peace in the Church. How can people feel that their needs are being met in terms of belongingness and love if they're being discriminated against in their physiological needs and not having enough food to eat? There arose the need for the deacons who would distribute the food and meet the practical, temporal needs of the saints.

Paul is concerned with the physiological needs of the saints. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, he spends a great deal of time talking about the offering that he is taking for the Jerusalem saints. Agabus, in Acts 11, has the same concern for the saints.

James 2:15–16 talks about meeting physiological needs of the saints. "If a brother or a sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" So at the basis, the Lord is calling the Church to be aware of those within its own midst who may not have enough to eat, who may be unprotected in terms of temperature.

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Jesus says, “I was naked and you clothed Me. I was hungry and you fed Me. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink” (Matthew 25). We can talk about being a spiritual blessing to people, but that is really meaningless if there are those within our midst who have needs physiologically and we’re not meeting them.

That’s why the Early Church set up the whole system of deacons and deaconesses, that there might be some administration of needs practically within the Church, on the physiological level. It does no good, when a person is in need of food and drink, to prophesy over them. There’s a time for the different gifts to be in focus. Here is the need for serving.

It is striking when we relate this physiological need to a spiritual principle—the need for the maintenance of spiritual life itself. Here we would leave off from Maslow and go into something which he didn’t see. In the gospel, we can recognize terms which meet our basic spiritual needs—which Jesus can sometimes relate to physiological principles. Jesus would say, for example, “I am the light” (John 8). He would say, “I am the bread of life” (John 6). And He would say, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (John 7). The basic needs for entry into the kingdom of God—into spiritual and eternal life—are provided for in Jesus.

God is calling those within our congregation to have a special awareness of physiological needs. Those within our church family, for example, who take food to the hungry and who are aware of those without clothing and minister to them.

II. There’s a second level of needs: safety needs or security needs.

When the person has enough to eat, the next thing that they’re aware of needing is a certain degree of protection, or certainty, or order, or structure, or predictability in life.

I can never forget the time I was about ten years of age and my parents had returned from the mission field. They had been home some two or three years. My brother and sister were in Bible school, and I, being the youngest child, was left with my parents. My parents were going through

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a very difficult time of not knowing where their next income was coming from. They were between churches. Every opportunity for ministry had closed down on them. We were in Indiana, and Dad felt that maybe the last thing for him to do was possibly pioneer a new church. He was feeling he should go to Indianapolis, Indiana. I can remember my mom and dad talking about running out of money. That's a scary thing. They were driving at night, trying to save the motel bill. But along in the evening, my father became violently ill. I was in the backseat pretending to be asleep, but it was the most traumatizing time of my childhood. I began to wonder if, at that time, my dad was going to die. He was that sick. I knew my mother couldn't drive. We didn't have money to do anything. What were we going to do at that moment? It's striking how God used that incident in my dad's life. Because instead of going on to Indianapolis, he turned around and went to a nearer place, Jefferson, where God had him plant a new church. That feeling of need for personal security was there. I had enough to eat that day, but in terms of talking about self-actualization—esteem, belongingness, and all those kinds of things—I wasn't worried about that at that moment. I was just concerned that our family unit would stay together and survive. What would happen to me if my father died?

Children can get this emotionally—this feeling of terrible insecurity from parental quarreling and seeing physical assault or watching separation or divorce or death. These things can be extremely harmful to a child. We know as adults the terrible insecurity we can face in employment and in jobs. Or the insecurity that age or ill health can bring. It is again, in this kind of area, that Jesus is calling the body of Christ to be aware and sensitive to the needs of others for safety or security. Sometimes, that need for safety and security can be met by financial resolve. At other times, it involves the physical and emotional and spiritual presence of believers to other believers who are in the midst of stress and wondering whether or not their security and comfort and safety needs are going to be met.

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I think again as I relate this to the gospel how Jesus was concerned for our security needs. How He went out and searched for the lost sheep. How He ministered to the disciples when they were in the storm at sea and they had anything but safety and security. How Jesus said to all of us, “I am the good shepherd” (John10), and He has a fold in which He encompasses us.

James talks about the security and safety needs of a special group within the Church that the Early Church was concerned about, and we should be concerned with as well. James says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.” Who is it within the community whose needs for security and safety has been most violently affected? Is it not the orphan and the widow? Is it not the child who has been affected by a death or a separation in the family? So that the Lord calls us as a Body, acting as individuals, or sometimes acting in concert together, to be aware of persons within our midst with needs for security.

One of the great blessings of the marriage vows is to pledge security to one another, “for better or for worse, in sickness and in health.” Acknowledgement that unless there’s that fidelity and trust in our security of relationships with one another, a lot of the other needs can never be met. I remember one guy who went in and began talking to his minister about some problems he was having in his marriage. His minister reminded him, “But you took her for better or for worse.” He said, “Yes, but she’s worse than I took her for.” No excuse.

III. A third need which we have is the need for belongingness and love.

We begin to sense this need when needs one and two have been met, when we have enough to eat and we have a tent over our heads, enough security. We begin to reckon with this need to feel part of other people. To feel like we fit. To feel that we’re not an island, alone. Indeed, one of the greatest traumas, I think, a person can go through is loneliness—being in a strange place, with strange faces, and all the connections with the past have been cut off.

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The time this most potently happened in my own life was the time I came from Springfield, Missouri, in 1962—out from the security of the Christian college that I had been a part of for four years—to go to school in Los Angeles at Fuller Seminary. I came out in the summer to find a job before school started. I arrived the end of May, the beginning of June. I was to be a part-time youth pastor at a church in Los Angeles. I didn't know anybody in the church. I'd gotten the job through the recommendation of a third party. When I arrived, I knew no one in that community at all. I began to feel very alone. In fact, I didn't have anything to set up house with, so the church had some apartments that they owned within the block that they had bought years before, and I got one of them. It was a place painted purple. It had very meager furnishings—no television or anything like that. I'd ride the bus downtown to look for a job, come home about five at night, and what was there to do? I didn't know anybody. I'd look at the purple walls. I'm the kind of person who can't eat alone. I have to go out to a restaurant. I just can't take eating alone. But there was a kindly older couple in the church in their eighties, the Wells. They had concern for this young minister that had come to their church. I remember Mrs. Wells cooked a lamb and gave me a dish of lamb. Two strikes against that. One, I don't like to eat alone. And two, I, as a kid, saw my dad butcher lambs on the mission fields. I've never liked to eat lamb. And I didn't have a refrigerator either. I said, "I'm going to get around to the lamb, but I just can't eat it now." I sat it down by the sink. It stayed there. One day, two days, three days. Then I realized I should go back to Mrs. Wells and tell her how good her lamb was. Obviously, if they've given you something, you should reciprocate. I knew I should eat it so I could go back and say thanks but I couldn't bring myself to eat it. Finally, after a couple weeks, that lamb in the condition it was in, symbolized to me this whole thing of belongingness and need. It was symptomatic of my terrible loneliness.

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One thing about the Church. In the body of Christ, we're not to follow the Lord as lonely people, as individuals existing here and there. But through *koinonia*, or through fellowship, God interconnects us with one another, that we might minister to the needs that God has built within our own personality of knowing and being known, of loving and being loved.

We serve that need—that fundamental human need—when, as a church family, we really exercise love one toward another. It's especially difficult in our community because of the high rate of mobility, the moving. We're used to shallowness of human relationships, barely knowing people. That's all the more reason why, as a church family, we need to be sensitive to the need of belongingness and love.

Jesus was described as the "Friend of sinners" because He was aware of people who had need for belonging and love and had always been rejected. Jesus didn't reject. He went in their midst and ate and drank. And got a bad reputation for it. But there was ministering to a fundamental human need.

A way in which we minister—especially to the stranger, to the lonely person within the church family—a way that we serve them, if you want to be a servant, is to minister along the lines of hospitality. To be hospitable is literally, in the original word, to be a lover of strangers. To love strangers. Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. For thereby some have entertained angels unaware."

I want to say very seriously, as a church family we really owe it to one another to meet a fundamental need. To open our lives and our hearts and our homes as much as possible with one another. It is impossible for me, as a pastor—with just as many people in this room, let only coming to the eleven o'clock service, and all the people that are part of this church that weren't in the services today—to minister personally to the need for belongingness and love of every person in this congregation. The Lord knows that one of my greatest guilt trips is when I

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recognize that I am not doing it well enough. But God never called just one person to minister within the church. Thank God, He calls us all to minister and take it upon your heart to meet that need within others for loving and for being loved, for belongingness and concern.

IV. Another need which we have is the need for self-esteem.

That the gospel basically provides. We find in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.” You have been made someone in Christ through the free gift of grace. Whereas, in sin you did not have self-respect and esteem because of guilt. Now, through Christ, you truly have self-respect and esteem. You can feel competent and confident, adequate. You are worthwhile. We need to affirm one another, and we don’t do this by pointing out each other’s weaknesses. We do not serve each other through simply saying, “Look at all the shortcomings in that person.” Maybe, from time to time, the person needs to be reminded they have some things there. But we affirm one another through loving the good points that are there as well. Just like Jesus did with Simon. He served him by creating in him a sense of self-respect. “I don’t see you any more as Sloppy Simon or Shifting-Sands Simon. I see you as Peter, the Rock. The person that is strong. The person on whom I can build something. You are worthwhile.” We serve one another by helping one another realize that, in God’s sight, we’re very precious.”

Look at how Jesus did this with the woman in John 8 who was taken in adultery. He met so many needs of that woman that day. When she came to Him, she had the need for security—level number two. She was about to be snuffed out. So He met that need. Then He met her need for belongingness and love. Everyone left. He alone was there with her, and she saw that here was a person who loved and trusted her. Then He met her need for self-respect by saying, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” And she was set free to go on to the fifth

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stage: to be whatever she wanted to be that was right and proper and good, because the Lord had set her free to be that.

If you're working up this level Maslow says, for example, if a person is working on self-esteem and self-respect and they're in a marriage, and all of a sudden one of the marriage partners becomes unfaithful, then the fourth level of needs, the need for self-respect all of a sudden gives way to the third level—belongingness and love. The person cannot really get back on another level until they've come to grips with the fact that "I am loved" and gotten healing and closure on that circumstance of their life.

The Lord calls us, as people of God who ourselves are being healed, to serve other people who are not healed and not well—whether it is on the physiological level, the safety level, the belongingness and need level, or the self-esteem and respect level.

There's another level. We won't take but a moment with this.

V. This is self-actualizing.

That is the desire to become all that you're capable of. The full use of your talent, your creative potential, the recognition that, "I am doing in life what I want to do, what I'm uniquely-equipped to do. I'm not locked in a job that I don't want. I am where I want to be, doing what I want to be doing. I'm actualizing. I'm developing all my creative potential and talent." Maslow says there are few people who ever come to this, and generally they are over fifty by the time they get there. But I think the kingdom of God brings a seed and plants it even at an early age. Because Jesus said, "Whom the son sets free shall be free indeed" (John 8). You're an actualizer if you're a child of God. You have indeed been called a son or daughter of God. You have been taught by Jesus, "All things are possible if you only believe" (Mark 9). We serve one another by helping one another be all that we can be.

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The higher we go on this scale of meeting human needs, as we go up to level number five, self-actualization, the higher we go, the less structure is needed to provide for that need. Because the need is more complicated, and there are many things that feed into it. But the lower we go on the level of need, down to the physiological level, the easier it is to provide structure. That's why the Early Church, for example, provided deacons and deaconesses. You can organize people for meeting human needs as it relates to physiological or safety needs. It's kind of hard to organize people to meet belongingness and love needs, although you can organize committees on hospitality, I guess. But you can be hospitable and still not be loving. It's hard to organize service at the self-respect or self-actualizing level.

We would expect that the lower on the structure you go, the more easy it is to organize and meet those needs, and the more easily those needs appear. We can very easily see when a person doesn't have enough food. Maybe, in our culture, we try to hide it too much. But we should be more sensitive to this, when a person doesn't have any place to stay.

Also, and I think this is intriguing, the lower the person is on the level of need at times, I believe—and I think the majority of cases would bear this out—the more open that person is to the gospel. At that lower level, at that physiological level, if there's not enough to eat, or at the safety level, there is a recognition of being terribly vulnerable. Why is it, for example, that in war, people turn to God? Because the safety factor is removed. And all of sudden, what seemed to be a very secure life—where people were marching on toward the belongingness and love level, or the esteem-level, or the self actualizing level—kingdoms come tottering, financial empires come crashing down. The pleasure philosophy just can't exist in the midst of a wartime atmosphere. People are brought back on that basic level of safety and become more open to God. That's why tragedy often opens people to God. And security and success may not. Because the

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need at that level is a far more sophisticated level. Sometimes, our defenses need to be stripped away so we can recognize in this universe how truly vulnerable and temporary we are.

The Scripture says, in relationship to this hierarchy of needs, “My God shall supply all your needs in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4). All your needs. That embraces everything which you have. God has called us as a church family to be aware of serving one another through all these needs of life which we have.

There are some principles I want to relate in the Scripture, by using four words as you look at meeting these needs and how to be a servant yourself.

You have a real choice in life between being a giver or a taker, between receiving or giving. At every level of these needs being met in your own life and meeting these same needs in another person’s life, you have a choice as to who to put first. I realize there’s kind of a tension there that we don’t want to denigrate ourselves, and there’s a whole lot of assertiveness training that says, “Disregard others, and put yourself first.” But there is a balance of that in the gospel—that a proper perspective is a right understanding of self. There should be a fundamental loyalty to God, and loyalty to others, and then a finding your place in a giving atmosphere to God and to others.

For example, on the physiological level, if it came down to it, you’d have a choice whether you were going to serve others or serve yourself. Suppose that two of you were alone in a lonely, barren place and there was food for only one of you. What would be your choice as a Christian? Say to the other person, “I’m going to eat, and you’re not.” On the physiological level, as a Christian, I think you would serve the other person. You’re going to get into real problems if you have two Christians on the island. They’ll probably divide up the food, and both of them will starve to death! On that simple level, we exercise a choice. It’s easy to see, on the physiological level, how we would give up something so that someone else would have.

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On the safety level, if you're going down the street and you see a car hurtling toward a child, and you're there as an adult and you can get that child out of the way, you may get hit yourself, but there's hardly a one in this room that would put their own safety ahead of that child. There's something instinctive that rushes out to sweep the child out of the way and, momentarily, we throw away our own need for safety to meet someone else's.

This is what Jesus did, by the way, in going to the cross. He discounted His own needs for safety because He was aware of our needs for safety with God. He had His priorities in line. He came to serve, not to be served. Because He came to serve, He would put others ahead of himself in regard to His own needs for security.

Belongingness and love. Here I think we become more sophisticated in our values. Are we simply looking for love to be given to us, or are we looking to give love? Are we selfishly wanting others to serve us—and thereby love us—or are we indeed putting others first and seeking to give rather than to receive?

The woman who anointed Jesus is, again, the classic example of a person who did not wait to be loved and simply take what they had and spend it on themselves. But she took that alabaster box, which was worth two hundred working days' wages—which, probably in our culture, would be ten to fifteen thousand dollars in Orange County—and she just gave it to Jesus. She poured it out upon Him. She recognized in that moment her need to give love.

Self-esteem is another opportunity where we look at our values and determine whether we're going to put ourselves in first place or seek to advance others. Jesus says, "When you're at a banquet, don't go to the head table, or to the head of the head table. But go to the foot of the table. Take your place as a servant. Let others go ahead first" (see Luke 14:7-11). Paul reiterates this in Romans 12:10, where he says "Honor one another above yourselves."

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Again, this flies so contrary to so much of what is being written today in popular magazines—the idea that you put yourself first, you put your career first. Hang everybody else. Hang the family, hang the church, hang friends. It's you that's important. There's a certain measure of truth in that. You are important. You're especially and uniquely created. But if our need for self-esteem and direction becomes such that it pushes us in a role where we're no longer being a servant, we're no longer concerned about others' self-esteem and meeting needs, then we have indeed gotten out of shape and out of place.

Jesus says the divine Son of God, as a self-actualizer, could have done anything in all the universe that He wanted to do. He had, at the right hand of the Father, the privilege of the Father, had He wanted to make another ten thousand universes, if you will. The thing He wanted to do the most, as a self-actualizer, was to be the Savior of the world and die on the cross and become a servant. The Lord says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23, NIV).

Paul put it so clearly, in this choice of being a servant, when he said earlier in Romans 5: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6–8, NIV). In that one statement, we see how Christ meets every need by putting our needs ahead of His own. Jesus taught, in His last supper with his disciples, the servant is not greater than the Lord.

When we look at the subject of how to be a servant, we have to look at our values in life. What we're reaching for and who we're stepping over to get them. The calling to be a servant is one, if you will, of an inverted triangle. We could say this is the base of the triangle. And the world values, as Jesus says: "The kings of the Gentiles want to exercise lordship..." So here's the base,

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where everyone starts, and people are working their way up the ladder of success in order to get up to the top where everyone else is underneath them and supporting them and their goals and their ambitions. But Jesus simply flips the triangle over, and the point of the triangle is going downward. And everyone starts on this level, and the goal of the Christian is to be a servant. Not to be a doormat, but to be a servant. To gradually work to the place where other people are leaning upon that person for support.

Another thing I think we're called to in regard to being a servant is discernment. A classic example of failure to practice discernment is evidenced in Luke 10, where Mary and Martha are in two different relationships to the Lord. Mary is sitting at His feet, and the Lord is teaching. He's on His way to Jerusalem to die. And Martha is busy serving. In fact, Luke says she was distracted with much serving. What happened was, at that moment, Martha was not discerning Maslow's hierarchy of needs. She thought that the real need at that point was a physiological need. Everybody needs food, and she knew what Jesus liked and what He didn't like. She was busy preparing it. But Jesus, at that point, has some deeper needs. He reckoned that He was going to the cross. He had safety needs. He reckoned that He needed the assurance of those around Him. So He had belongingness and love needs. Here was Martha busy serving the physiological. So Jesus calls us, in the meeting of our need, to concentrate on the person and what the person's needs are rather than simply the task. It's easy to be task-oriented. This needs to be done, and that needs to be done. I know what's good for you, whether you know it or not! Discernment was needed, and the Lord has to kind of gently show Martha that she had put the wrong priority at that moment.

Another factor of being a servant is sensitivity to the Lord in our service. Luke 12:41-48 puts a parable very excellently when Jesus teaches about himself going on a journey and leaving others in charge—leaving a servant in charge, putting him over all the possessions. And the servant,

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instead of taking care of the possessions which the Lord has entrusted to him, begins to beat up the other servants which have been left in his charge. Jesus says, then, the master returned unexpectedly. That's Jesus' way of saying that in His Body, we're called to serve one another. If we begin to abuse other people in the body of Christ, that is something which the Lord abhors. He reserves the right to return instantaneously. We are to so relate to one another that we're prepared for His sudden appearing.

That abusing others by beating up servants is kind of a figure of speech of what can happen verbally and emotionally among households and people who are close to one another. No longer treating one another from the perspective of love, but from the perspective of, "What's in it for me? What's mine is mine, and you can't have it. What's yours is mine, if I can get it." Some of the philosophies that prevail.

A sensitivity to the Lord's people to treat with care and love. If this were a different kind of an audience, a different platform, I would say that this relates also to persons who are in Christian enterprises in employer relationships with other persons who work within that Christian institution. God will hold accountable every Christian administrator who abuses the people that work in that institution, and God will reward every Christian administrator who properly exercises his authority and loves the people who are working within that employ. The same thing goes true for any Christian in a secular field who is in an administrative position where people are working under you. There's the care and the sensitivity to the Lord that makes one sensitive to people.

The final thing about being a servant has to do with appreciation. Servants in the church, I have noticed—and I have this problem myself—often go through great times of discouragement because things which they do may not be appreciated as well as they thought they should be appreciated. You pour yourself out, and nobody ever gets back to you.

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Look at what the Lord said in Luke 17:7–10: “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” (NIV). That’s kind of a hard word, isn’t it? Do it because it was your duty. Don’t do something just because there’s immediate feedback, reward, and appreciation, because you will be a drop-out in being a servant. If your service is based upon people coming to you and thanking you and complementing you, don’t get involved in being a servant. You did it because it was your duty. But there’s another side to that. Luke 12 tells where Jesus teaches, also, on service. He says in verse 37: “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at the table, and he will come and serve them.” The other side of the paradox. Don’t expect anyone to say, “Thanks.” Just do your duty. But the real Master of the house, Jesus, when He comes in His glory, will—like He did in His humanity—gird himself with a towel and serve you.

Have you ever thought of Jesus in His resurrection and His ascension as being Someone who serves? We always picture Him as Someone of great power and glory, before whom all the angels and the elders fall down, for whom we ourselves fall down and worship. But Ephesians says: “He who descended is also He who ascended.” One and the same person. The same motivating, servant spirit of the Lord that dominated His earthly life. Should we not expect that, if He received His self actualization—if the thing in all the world He wanted to be most was the suffering servant, the One who gave himself for our needs—would it surprise us at all if, in eternity, He would want to keep that motif as a part of His nature, He would want to continue to

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serve? So He will serve us yet. It is Jesus' way of saying, "All who serve Me, I will also serve. Don't expect appreciation, on the one hand, but know if you have ministered unto Me, if you have fed Me, if you have given Me drink, if you have clothed Me, if you have visited Me when sick or in prison, then I will say to you, 'Enter in.' And I will serve you."

Is God giving you the heart of a servant? Are you willing to be a servant in the levels of need which you see in the people around you? Then do it. For your sake. And for God's. And for others'.