

How Real Servants Act

*Whoever wants to be great
must become a servant.”*

Mark 10:43 (Msg)

You can tell what they are by what they do.

Matthew 7:16 (CEV)

We serve God by serving others.

The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. If you can demand service from others, you've arrived. In our self-serving culture with its *me-first* mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept.


Jesus, however, measured greatness in terms of service, not status. God determines your greatness by how many people you serve, not how many people serve you. This is so contrary to the world's idea of greatness that we have a hard time understanding it, much less practicing it. The disciples argued about who deserved the most prominent position, and 2,000 years later, Christian leaders still jockey for position and prominence in churches, denominations, and parachurch ministries.

Thousands of books have been written on leadership, but few on servanthood. Everyone wants to lead; no one wants to be a

servant. We would rather be generals than privates. Even Christians want to be “*servant-leaders*,” not just plain servants. But to be like Jesus is to be a servant. That’s what he called himself.

While knowing your shape is important for serving God, having the heart of a servant is even more important. Remember, God shaped you for *service*, not for self-centeredness. Without a servant’s heart, you will be tempted to misuse your shape for personal gain. You will also be tempted to use it as an excuse to exempt yourself from meeting some needs.

God often tests our hearts by asking us to serve in ways we’re *not* shaped. If you see a man fall into a ditch, God expects you to help him out, not say, “I don’t have the gift of mercy or service.” While you may not be gifted for a particular task, you may be called to do it if no one gifted at it is around. Your *primary*



ministry should be in the area of your shape, but your *secondary* service is wherever you’re needed at the moment.

Your shape reveals your ministry, but your servant’s heart will reveal your maturity.

Your shape reveals your ministry, but your servant’s heart will reveal your maturity. No special talent or gift is required to stay after a



meeting to pick up trash or stack chairs. Anyone can be a servant. All it requires is character.

It is possible to serve in church for a lifetime without ever being a *servant*. You must have a servant’s heart. How can you know if you have the heart of a servant? Jesus said, “*You can tell what they are by what they do.*”²¹

Real servants make themselves available to serve. Servants don’t fill up their time with other pursuits that could limit their availability. They want to be ready to jump into service when called on. Much like a soldier, a servant must always be standing by for duty: “*No soldier in active service entangles himself in the*

affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him."² If you only serve when it's convenient for you, you're not a real servant. Real servants do what's needed, even when it's inconvenient.

Are you available to God anytime? Can he mess up your plans without you becoming resentful? As a servant, you don't get to pick and choose when or where you will serve. Being a servant means giving up the right to control your schedule and allowing God to interrupt it whenever he needs to.

If you will remind yourself at the start of every day that you are God's servant, interruptions won't frustrate you as much, because your agenda will be whatever God wants to bring into your life. Servants see interruptions as divine appointments for ministry and are happy for the opportunity to practice serving.

Real servants pay attention to needs. Servants are always on the lookout for ways to help others. When they see a need, they seize the moment to meet it, just as the Bible commands us: *"Whenever we have the opportunity, we have to do what is good for everyone, especially for the family of believers."*³ When God puts someone in need right in front of you, he is giving you the opportunity to grow in servanthood. Notice that God says the needs of your church family are to be given preference, not put at the bottom of your "things to do" list.

We miss many occasions for serving because we lack sensitivity and spontaneity. Great opportunities to serve never last long. They pass quickly, sometimes never to return again. You may only get one chance to serve that person, so take advantage of the moment. *"Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now."*⁴

John Wesley was an incredible servant of God. His motto was "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can." *That* is greatness. You can begin by looking for small tasks that no



one else wants to do. Do these little things as if they were great things, because God is watching.

Real servants do their best with what they have. Servants don't make excuses, procrastinate, or wait for better circumstances. Servants never say, "One of these days" or "When the time is right." They just do what needs to be done. The Bible says, "*If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.*"⁵ God expects you to do what you can, with what you have, wherever you are. Less-than-perfect service is always better than the best intention.

One reason many people never serve is that they fear they are *not good enough* to serve. They have believed the lie that serving God is only for superstars. Some churches have fostered this myth by making "excellence" an idol, which makes people of average talent hesitant to get involved.

You may have heard it said, "If it can't be done with excellence, don't do it." Well, Jesus never said that! The truth is, almost everything we do is done poorly when we first start doing it—that's how we learn. At Saddleback Church, we practice *the "good enough" principle*: It doesn't have to be perfect for God to use and bless it. We would rather involve thousands of regular folks in ministry than have a perfect church run by a few elites.

Real servants do every task with equal dedication. Whatever they do, servants "*do it with all their heart.*"⁶ The size of the task is irrelevant. The only issue is, does it need to be done?

You will never arrive at the state in life where you're too important to help with menial tasks. God will never exempt you from the mundane. It's a vital part of your character curriculum. The Bible says, "*If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody.*"⁷ It is in these small services that we grow like Christ.


Jesus specialized in menial tasks that everyone else tried to avoid: washing feet, helping children, fixing breakfast, and serving lepers. Nothing was *beneath* him, because he came to serve. It

wasn't *in spite of* his greatness that he did these things, but *because of* it, and he expects us to follow his example.⁸

Small tasks often show a big heart. Your servant's heart is revealed in little acts that others don't think of doing, as when Paul gathered brushwood for a fire to warm everyone after a shipwreck.⁹ He was just as exhausted as everyone else, but he did what everyone needed. No task is beneath you when you have a servant's heart.

Great opportunities often disguise themselves in small tasks. The little things in life determine the big things. Don't look for great tasks to do for God. Just do the not-so-great stuff, and God will assign you whatever he wants you to do. But before attempting the extraordinary, try serving in ordinary ways.¹⁰

There will always be more people willing to do "great" things for God than there are people willing to do the little things. The race to be a leader is crowded, but the field is wide open for those willing to be servants. Sometimes you serve *upward* to those in authority, and sometimes you serve *downward* to those in need. Either way, you develop a servant's heart when you're willing to do anything needed.



*Great opportunities often
disguise themselves in small tasks.*

Real servants are faithful to their ministry. Servants finish their tasks, fulfill their responsibilities, keep their promises, and complete their commitments. They don't leave a job half undone, and they don't quit when they get discouraged. They are trustworthy and dependable.



Faithfulness has always been a rare quality.¹¹ Most people don't know the meaning of commitment. They make commitments casually, then break them for the slightest reason without any hesitation, remorse, or regret. Every week, churches and other organizations must improvise because volunteers didn't prepare, didn't show up, or didn't even call to say they weren't coming.

Can you be counted on by others? Are there promises you need to keep, vows you need to fulfill, or commitments you need to honor? This is a test. God is testing your faithfulness. If you pass the test, you're in good company: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, Timothy, and Paul were all called *faithful* servants of God. Even better, God has promised to reward your

faithfulness in eternity. Imagine what it will feel like one day

to have God say to you, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!”*¹²



By the way, faithful servants never retire. They serve faithfully as long as they're alive. You can retire from your career, but you will never retire from serving God.

Real servants maintain a low profile. Servants don't promote or call attention to themselves. Instead of acting to impress and dressing for success, they *“put on the apron of humility, to serve one another.”*¹³ If recognized for their service, they humbly accept it but don't allow notoriety to distract them from their work.

Paul exposed a kind of service that *appears* to be spiritual but is really just a put-on, a show, an act to get attention. He called it *“eyeservice”*¹⁴—serving in order to impress people with how spiritual we are. This was a sin of the Pharisees. They turned helping others, giving, and even prayer into a performance for others. Jesus hated this attitude and warned, *“When you do good deeds, don’t try to show off. If you do, you won’t get a reward from your Father in heaven.”*¹⁵

Self-promotion and servanthood don't mix. Real servants don't serve for the approval or applause of others. They live for an audience of One. As Paul said, *“If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*¹⁶

You won't find many real servants in the limelight; in fact, they avoid it when possible. They are content with quietly serving in the shadows. Joseph is a great example. He didn't draw attention

to himself, but quietly served Potiphar, then his jailer, then Pharaoh's baker and wine taster, and God blessed that attitude. When Pharaoh promoted him to prominence, Joseph still maintained a servant's heart, even with his brothers, who had betrayed him.

Unfortunately, many leaders today start off as servants but end up as celebrities. They become addicted to attention, unaware that always being in the spotlight blinds you.

You may be serving in obscurity in some small place, feeling unknown and unappreciated. Listen: God put you where you are for a purpose! He has every hair on your head numbered, and he knows your address. You had better stay put until he chooses to move you. He will let you know if he wants you somewhere else. Your ministry matters . . . to the kingdom of God. *"When Christ . . . shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity."*¹⁷

There are more than 750 "Halls of Fame" in America and more than 450 "Who's Who" publications, but you won't find many real servants in these places. Notoriety means nothing to real servants because they know the difference between prominence and significance. You have several prominent features on your body that you could live without. It is the hidden parts of your body that are indispensable. The same is true in the Body of Christ. The most significant service is often the service that is unseen.¹⁸

DAY THIRTY-THREE:
HOW REAL
SERVANTS ACT

In heaven God is going to openly reward some of his most obscure and unknown servants—people we have never heard of on earth, who taught emotionally disturbed children, cleaned up after incontinent elderly, nursed AIDS patients, and served in thousands of other unnoticed ways.

Knowing this, don't be discouraged when your service is unnoticed or taken for granted. Keep on serving God! *"Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do*

for him is a waste of time or effort."¹⁹ Even the smallest service is noticed by God and will be rewarded. Remember the words of Jesus: *"If, as my representatives, you give even a cup of cold water to a little child, you will surely be rewarded."*²⁰

DAY THIRTY-THREE
THINKING ABOUT MY PURPOSE

Point to Ponder: I serve God by serving others.

Verse to Remember: *"If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded."* Matthew 10:42 (NLT)

Question to Consider: Which of the six characteristics of real servants offers the greatest challenge to me?