

The Truth About Yielding to Christ

Knowing your areas of giftedness is important, but what matters more to God is your yieldedness.

Finally, the day had come. The servant stood before the door of the manor house with a sense of profound thanksgiving. Long he had hoped and prayed for the opportunity to join the household of the one who rescued him from a life of destruction and then distraction.

Now nothing was more important than using the culinary skills and talents he had honed so sacrificially for the benefactor who had done so much for him. The door opened. Standing before him was the lord of the manor and the opportunity to fulfill the dreams of a lifetime.

“Welcome home,” the master said. “We have your place ready. You are well equipped for the tasks of leading my banquet staff. However, I have great needs in my fields. Will you serve me where I need you most—for as long as necessary—perhaps a lifetime?”

“Yes” was his reply. The servant’s disappointment had disappeared so quickly he almost looked behind to see if someone else had spoken. In that moment, he had learned an even more significant lesson as he prepared for this great house: Serving to meet the needs of the one he loved was more important than serving to meet his own.

The Pathway to Significance This story came to me at a crossroads early in my life of service for Jesus Christ, and remains a secure anchor point as I seek to be a part of God’s kingdom work. Those whose lives are transformed by the Messiah want to use the best of their time, talents and abilities to advance His purposes.

I see a measurable increase in the number of Christians longing to go beyond popular perceptions of success to completeness. Personal fulfillment is among the most treasured core values for those seeking significance within and beyond the church.

However, the way to significance is influenced often by the popular wisdom that we must use the majority of our talents a majority of the time in order to attain personal satisfaction. Media-made and applauded celebrities, who purport to have found themselves by discovering and utilizing their giftedness, frequently become the primary luminaries along the path. As a result, many of today's Christians believe that if they just could find that place of service where their gifts are acknowledged and talents fully utilized they too could be fulfilled and great in the kingdom.

This "be all that you can be by doing all that you can do" formula often stands in stark contrast to and conflict with the servant leadership models honored in Scripture. God took delight in using the foolish and the weak to confound the wise and the strong (see 1 Cor. 1:27). Moses found that his inadequacies were the means for accomplishing God's greatest purposes (see Ex. 3-4).

The psalmist was content to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord (see Ps. 84:10). John the Baptist knew that he had to decrease so that Jesus might increase (see John 3:30). Peter realized that only after his own resources of strength, freedom and determination were exhausted could he travel the highway to his life's ultimate destiny (see John 21:18-19).

Paul, whose résumé begins with a "chief of sinners" confession (see 1 Tim. 1:15), knew that his weakness was perfected in Jesus' strength—that earthen vessels hold life's greatest treasure so others will realize that the power and the glory are God's alone (see 2 Cor 4:7). It was in that discovery that he found contentment in each state and circumstance that

crossed his path (see Phil. 4:11). That contentment empowered the apostle to embrace life's final chapter with purpose and hope.

Like a marathoner achieving a personal best, the apostle keeps the faith and finishes the course (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8). His words echo across the centuries that we too will receive the crown if we will run and complete the race not in our own strength but in that of the One who declared, "'It is finished!'" (John 19:30, NKJV).

Christians know that Jesus is the gold standard for doing the will of the Father. We are challenged by the Master's willingness to wash feet and endure the cross—all because He loved the Father who so loved the world. Servant leadership has its ultimate definition and illustration in the life of our Lord.

Following His Lead I am privileged to have spent much of my life in leadership roles—most of which I never anticipated. As a teacher, pastor, Christian broadcaster and university president I desire to walk worthy of my callings, following hard after the Savior's example. No portion of Scripture has provided me with deeper insights into the mind, heart and will of His servant leadership than Philippians 2:1-11.

While reveling in this Pauline hymn I believe the Holy Spirit asked me a sobering question, "Whose needs are you meeting as you lead—your own or those of these I entrust to you?" I have often returned to this query, asking for the Comforter's help to evaluate my progress in serving like Jesus.

The opening stanzas of Philippians 2 confront the motivations of the heart, emphasizing the "why and who" of serving rather than the "what, when, where and how." Those who desire to serve as Jesus did must unite around a commitment to humility, self-denial and other-centeredness. Actions and attitudes, for those who would be like Jesus, must be without selfish

ambition and prideful arrogance.

The foundation stones of service, as Jesus' life so powerfully illustrates, first must be established in the mind and heart. While much of serving and leading often is motivated and evaluated by what we get from the experience, our Lord was driven by the desire to be what we needed so that our greatest good might be apprehended. Laying aside His essence as Lord of all, He humbly moved from Creator to the created, taking on our state in order to identify with those He came to lead.

Christ came to serve and save and not be served or saved (see Matt. 20:28). Jesus embraced our deepest longings, endured the pain of sin and finally paid the price for liberation and regeneration. The Son gave up what He was, identified with what we were, so that we could become all the Father intended—heirs and joint heirs with Him for eternity (see Rom. 8:17).

The Place of Gifts It is beneficial to understand our strengths and employ them in the work God calls us to perform. To comprehend how the Father has made and equipped us is an important part of knowing both our potential and limitations.

We need to be good stewards of the abilities entrusted to us, utilizing them as the Holy Spirit directs. I become concerned, however, when these assessments become the exclusive means for determining where, how and whom we should serve.

We may be tempted to accept or reject opportunities to serve based on perceptions of fit. The fact that this opportunity “just isn’t me” may be the way God ensures that His Son, rather than you, gets the glory.

Strength and gift assessments inadvertently can be used to set conditions on and criteria for service creating expectations that personal needs should be met, agendas advanced, talents fully utilized and dreams fulfilled as the evidence that we are in the center of God’s will. While He is re-engineering

our motives and priorities so that He can give us the desires of our hearts (see Ps. 37:4), we must be cautious about being driven by how satisfied and fulfilled we feel.

To serve as Jesus served is to be confronted regularly with opportunities to deny the self, take up the cross and follow Him (see Matt. 16:24). I find myself asking more frequently, "David, whose needs drive your decisions about serving and leading—the needs of those entrusted to you and the One you ultimately serve or your own?"

As I thought about the story of the chef I received another insight about serving and leading like Jesus. I was not a strong student. To this day, I do not possess a high school diploma. My guidance counselor told me that I had no natural abilities for the life of the mind. As a result, other endeavors were pursued as the means of establishing self-worth. Music and athletics became the center of my identity.

For young Canadian men, hockey can become the national religion. Every year, I waited expectantly for the first hard freeze when the outdoor rinks would be readied, and I could assume my self-declared identity as the Toronto Maple Leafs' next great goalie.

After the ice was gone, baseball became my substitute passion. However, I did not have the same star qualities and abilities. In baseball, I was a utility player.

Many games I sat on the bench, "riding the pine" as some have called it. When I did play, it was in a position that either needed relief or required only a temporary replacement.

In my spiritual life, I longed to be a star goalie rather than a baseball utility player. So much of my energy was spent on an emotional roller coaster looking for that one specific calling where I could rise to prominence and personal fulfillment for the new first love of my life—the Master Jesus. But I never found that all-consuming call—my one true

vocational destiny of service through which I might someday attain sainthood.

The Utility Player's Destiny As I pondered the chef's lesson of service for the master's needs rather than his own, I was awakened to a life-changing concept: Our Lord has as much need for utility players as He does stars.

Biblical examples such as Barnabus, John the Baptist, Aaron, Hur, Caleb, Esther, the two Marys, and a great cloud of witnesses, including David's mighty men and the unnamed of Hebrews' Faith Hall of Fame became my inspiration. They willingly served another's mission so that those in turn could fulfill God's call on their lives.

I believe an unprecedented spiritual harvest is coming in the 21st century. Many will be asked to use their distinctive gifts to full capacity and beyond in the work they are given. Most will be required to pool their talents and availability with others because the work is too great to be entrusted to a select few. All will be asked at some point in that service to work outside their giftedness and beyond personal resources so Jesus gets all the glory.

Are you willing to be one of those serving whomever and wherever with whatever God entrusts to you? If so, let me suggest some steps that can make you available and willing for such a calling.

- Explore and give thanks for the unique person God is making you. Do not be afraid to uncover your limitations—His strength is made perfect in your weakness.
- Surrender the hurts and disappointments of not being fully utilized or recognized. Use the times of inactivity to celebrate God's work in you, examine your driving motivations and support His work in others.
- Look for opportunities to serve where needs are

greatest, even if you do not possess the skills and talents normally required. Get outside of your cultural and performance comfort zones.

- Soak up the character of Jesus. Spend time in Philippians 2. Study the Beatitudes (see Matt. 5:1-12) and the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:16-26). Jesus helps you understand that God is more interested in who you are becoming rather than just in what you are doing. What we do has its greatest value when it plays a primary role in conforming us into the image of Christ. If Jesus is the gold standard for how to fulfill our calling, then we will serve to meet His needs, and the needs of those entrusted to us, rather than just our own. Often we will deploy fully the gifts He has provided. Like Moses, the skills and experiences symbolized by the shepherd's staff can become the "rod of God" rescuing the lost and delivering the bound (see Ex. 4:1-5,17).

However, we must not be surprised or unprepared when the Master asks us to minister out of frailty and discomfort. Being forced to cast down our rods of ability and stability periodically ensures that we are operating not by our own power and might but by the Spirit's (see Zech. 4:6).

And be prepared to "ride the pine" from time to time. The stops as well as the steps of the righteous are ordered of the Lord (see Is. 40:31; Ps. 37:23-24). For it is primarily when we have nothing left but Jesus, that He becomes everything.

And when Jesus is our only thing, as well as our everything, the excellence of the power is seen by all to be of Him and not of us. In the end, the only star will be Christ Jesus, the Morning Star (see Rev. 22:16). So, embrace the whitened fields, utility players. The Master has something special cooking for you!

Read a companion devotional.

David J. Gyertson, Ph.D., is a Distinguished Professor of Leadership Formation and Renewal at Regent University.