

Crosswalk: How To Live As Followers Of Jesus Christ

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
(Romans 12:1 ESV)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

Serve

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1 Peter 4:10-11

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Introduction:

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 4. We are continuing this morning in our CrossWalk series where we are answering the question: How do I live on this side of the cross?

Two weeks ago, we saw in Scripture that people who have been loved by God respond by loving others. Loved people love people. And as we wrestled through what the Bible had to say about Christian love we came to see that God's word calls for a practical love. When Christians see a need, they are supposed to DO something.

Today, as we turn our attention to the topic of service, it might help for us to consider this as something of an excursus – a deeper look – at practical love. In fact, Peter put these two together. Our text this morning begins in verse 10, but if we look back just two verses Peter tells us:

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8 ESV)

If we're going to show love for the family of God in practical ways, then that will inevitably lead us to serve one another.

That's what Peter says to us in today's text. Let's look together at 1 Peter 4:10-11. Hear now God's living and active word to us:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As we seek to understand Christian service, this text answers two important questions for us. The first is this: What does Christian service look like?

What Does Christian Service Look Like?

Peter divides Christian service into two categories: Speaking and serving.

whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies (1 Peter 4:11a ESV)

Whatever your gift is, it's going to fall into one of these two categories. First, some of you will serve through:

1. Speaking

In this category, Peter would include all word ministry. I worry that we can sometimes misunderstand word ministry as being only that which the pastor does on Sunday morning. Now, of course this IS a type of word ministry. But it's not the only type.

Every person in our church who is leading a Bible study is engaged in word ministry. So is everyone who takes a turn teaching the Bible to our kids in children's ministry. So are all the mentors who are meeting one on one with new believers and helping them to understand the Bible. So are all the evangelists sharing the gospel at the Lighthouse or at their workplaces or in

their homes.

I want you to reflect on this: Do you have a passion for explaining the word of God to other people? Has God used you to help someone to understand the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? If the answer is yes, then you likely have a speaking gift of some sort, and you should use it.

The other category Peter presents is the category of serving.

2. Serving

Perhaps you have a hard time expressing yourself with words.

That's okay, Peter says, because we need people in the church who are able to meet the physical needs that arise. In fact, word ministry couldn't happen if there weren't others stepping up and to meet the everyday, practical needs that arise. In Acts 6 we discover that the early church ran into the same problem:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:1-4 ESV)

The Apostles essentially said: "How are we going to preach and teach if you have us waiting on tables all day?" It's not that they believed themselves to be above the task of serving tables. No, the disciples were upset because they were being kept from the teaching ministry God had gifted them for. There were people in the church who were gifted for service who weren't yet as engaged as they needed to be.

This passage is actually where we first learn about deacon ministry. Our English word "Deacon" comes from the Greek word "Diakonos" which means: One who serves; one who waits on tables. Ever since this episode in Acts 6, the church has recognized deacons as people who have the gift of practical service and who are committed to looking after physical needs in the church. A

thriving word ministry is only possible with a thriving deacon ministry.

Many of you are serving in this way already. We have a team that prepares and delivers meals for the widows and families in need of our church. We have a men's ministry that helps people move and that tackles repair jobs for those who are in need. Our janitorial staff is serving this way. Every children's ministry volunteer who doesn't teach is serving this way. Every time you host someone in your home for a meal you exercise this gift.

Over this coming year we will be formalizing a deacon ministry here at this church. We want to keep doing what we're doing, but as we grow we recognize that we need to work hard to do this well. If you think you might be one of those who are gifted to lead such a ministry, then pray about it and let the pastors and elders know that you'd be willing to serve in this way.

Peter has outlined the two areas of Christian service: Speaking and serving. Now, he follows that up and answers one more important question: Why should Christians serve?

Why Should Christians Serve?

We find a number of answers in this short text. For starters, Peter says, you should serve:

1. Because your gift was meant to bless others

He says this in verse 10:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, (1 Peter 4:10a ESV)

Isn't it great that God gave different gifts to each of us? Wouldn't it be annoying if one or two select people had all the gifts? Instead, God has spread His gifts to this church out to each and every person in this room. He designed the church in such a way that we thrive when we work in unity and we starve when we live in isolation.

Think of it this way.

Imagine we discovered a ship wreck near a deserted island. On that island we proceeded to find ten skeletons. One skeleton was on the North end of the island, clutching a compass. Another was found on the beach next to a firepit and he was holding onto some flint. Still another was found on another patch of the island near some felled trees and he was clutching an axe. Eventually we discover that each of these 10 sailors possessed tools that, if shared with the team, would have made survival possible. But they didn't work together. So now it's a story about skeletons.

Church, we need each other! I need to benefit from your gifts and you need to benefit from mine. God made each of us strategically deficient because we were made to live in relationship with one another.

Secondly, you should serve:

2. Because your gift is not ultimately yours

That's what verse 10 goes on to say:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10 ESV)

Peter is using language like “gift” and “received” because he wants you to understand that you have what you have because GOD GAVE IT TO YOU! That is the nature of a gift.

And, Peter says, God gave it to you so that you would steward it for Him. A steward is one who manages and maintains something that ultimately does not belong to him. Meaning – your gift is not ultimately yours.

Do you have the gift of teaching? Well, actually, the Bible tells us that you're simply borrowing the gift of teaching from Jesus. It's his gift, and he's lending it to you for the SOLE purpose that you will put it to work to further God's kingdom.

Are you full of faith? Do you have the gift of hospitality? Did God give you the ability to earn great wealth? Everything – every single gift you have – is from God, belongs to God and is meant to be used for the glory of God. Everything.

Do you think of your gifts that way? Because Jesus does. Do you remember the parable of the talents? In that parable, the master went away, but he distributed talents to three of his servants. He gave one of the servants 5 talents, another servant 2 talents, and still another servant 1. When he returned, he had this awkward conversation with the last servant:

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. (Matthew 25:24-27 ESV)

What a sad position to be in; To stand before the master holding in your hand the gift that He entrusted into your care only to have to explain why you buried it away and neglected to put it to work. Don’t be that servant.

The next thing we see is that you should serve:

3. Because serving brings glory to God

That’s what Peter tells us in verse 11:

whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11 ESV)

Now, there’s two very practical things that we need to see here. First of all: Your service should bring glory to God – not to you!

Don’t try to soak up glory that belongs to God. Are people impressed with your gift? All glory to

God! That gift is His, not yours, so you pass that glory along to the One to whom it belongs.

Very practically, if you want to encourage a brother or sister in Christ, let's try saying things like this: "Thanks for being faithful with the gift you've received!" That's a good compliment. It essentially says, "God gave you that gift, so I can't give you credit for that, but I just caught you being a good steward of that gift. Well done!" In a culture of fame and rockstars, let's resist the urge to lift people up on pedestals. None of us belong up there. Only God does. Our service should make Him look good.

The second practical thing we should see here is this: Every act of service is a spiritual act.

If you speak, then you need to speak God's words. Don't trust in your own wisdom. When you have the opportunity to exercise your speaking gift, point people to the Bible and away from your wisdom. Pray, and ask for God to speak through you. A word ministry that depends on God, that directs people to God, and that teaches from God's word will bring glory to God.

And, this doesn't apply only to speaking ministry. Hear this: If your serving ministry is going to bring glory to God, then it needs to be surrendered to God too! That's what Peter just said, isn't it? Look at this:

whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies

Do you think of your serving ministry that way? When we prepare meals for folks in our church, do we begin our meal prep with a time of prayer? When we help people move, or when we undertake to do some renovations in their home, do we soak that in prayer? Do you pray before you host people in your home, or before you volunteer in the nursery? Because, Peter says, you should! All ministry needs to be surrendered to and fueled by the living God.

When we have that mindset, I believe it guards us against the pitfall that Peter warns us about in verse 9. There he writes:

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9 ESV)

Because grumbling comes easily – especially in the ministry of serving others. We find ourselves grumbling about how underappreciated we think we are, and about how unfair it is that Suzy has pawned off her nursery duty on us three weeks in a row.

But when we immerse our serving in prayer – when we serve in God’s strength rather than our own – the grumbling tends to disappear. And that’s good, because service with grumbling brings no glory to God. It directs people’s attention to you – how hard YOU serve, how selfless YOU are, how much the church is depending on YOUR gifts. Don’t be that person.

Serve God and His people with the strength that He provides for his glory:

4. Because Christ is coming again

That’s actually how Peter begins the paragraph that we’re looking at this morning. If you look back in your Bibles to verse 7 it says:

The end of all things is at hand (1 Peter 4:7a ESV)

He follows that up with an important Bible word: Therefore.

Peter says: “The end of all things is at hand, therefore – in light of that reality – we need to put the gifts that God has given us to work!” The gifts we have were entrusted to us for the purpose of bringing glory to God as we serve one another so let’s get to it, because Christ is coming again.

No doubt, Peter remembered when Jesus taught the disciples this parable:

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (Matthew 24:45-47 ESV)

Blessed is the servant that is found being a good steward when Christ returns! I hope that, if Christ returns in my lifetime, he finds me using the few gifts he’s entrusted to me in service to the

church. I hope he doesn't return to find me sitting on my couch watching Netflix.

Live like Christ might return tomorrow. Because he might! Or you might be taken home tomorrow. We don't know how many tomorrows we've been given so let's be faithful with the today that we have.

And finally, Christian, you should serve:

5. Because Christ served you

Peter walked and talked with Jesus for three years. Over the course of those years, the disciples had a number of embarrassing episodes where they jockeyed for positions of power. The disciples, like the rest of us, had a deficient view of what power and leadership looked like in the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus flipped their expectations upside down by saying things like this:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45 ESV)

Jesus is amplifying his point here by using the term: "The Son of Man." He's alluding to a prophecy found in Daniel 7. I want to read this for us this morning as we consider these words of Jesus. Daniel 7:13-14 says:

"I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

Even the Son of Man – the one to whom belongs dominion and glory and an everlasting kingdom

that will not be destroyed – even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

The One who will be served by all peoples, nations and languages tied a towel around his waist and washed the disciples' filthy feet.

The One who possesses an eternal dominion that shall not pass away was mocked, scourged and beaten on his way to being humiliated, rejected and crucified. He came to earth – not to be served, though he certainly deserved it – not to be served, but to serve you and I by giving his life as a ransom for us.

God came to earth – and He served YOU! Now, go and do likewise. People who have been served by God humble themselves to serve others. Served people serve.

So, tell me again why serving in the nursery is beneath you? Tell me again why you feel like God would have you spend the rest of your life sipping coffee and doing crossword puzzles? As John Piper would say: Don't waste your life!

Here's the thing: I'm not sure if your gift is a speaking gift or a serving gift, but I know this – every single Christian in this room has a God-given-gift of some sort. I know that, because the Bible says that. Right before listing off an assortment of speaking and serving gifts the Apostle Paul wrote:

and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:6-7 ESV)

To each is given a gift from the Spirit. You have a gift. And before we conclude, I want to quickly answer one more question: What if I don't know what my gift is?

What If I Don't Know What My Gift Is?

I want to make this as immediately applicable and practical as possible this morning, because I want to help make sure that you are found working when the Master returns.

Let me give you two practical steps to take if you're looking to discern your gift. First:

1. Seek Feedback

Ask the people who know you best, because they likely have a good gauge on your strengths. Your best friend might tell you that you've always been good at helping them to make sense of complicated passages in the Bible. That would be a good sign that you should seek to get involved in a word ministry of some sort.

Perhaps your friend will tell you that you've often been used by God to apply biblical truth to areas of conflict or distress. That would be a good sign that you should seek out how you might serve in a mentoring or a counselling role.

Perhaps your friend will be quick to point out that you have remarkable handyman skills. That would be a good sign that you should speak with the men's ministry team about how you might put those skills to work to serve some of our widows and single moms in their home renovations.

Ask those people closest to you. Ask them what they see in you, and how they think you could be used by God to serve His people and further His kingdom.

The second step is just as easy:

2. Do Something

Do ANYTHING. Just do.

Don't waste a year of your life sitting on your hands wondering how God might choose to use you. If you're not certain what He has for you, then find a need in the church and throw yourself in. You might just stumble into the ministry that God made you for!

Or you might discover that you are entirely unsuited for that particular ministry, but that's good too, because now you know! Finding out where He *hasn't* gifted you gets you one step closer to discovering where He *has* gifted you.

There are needs all around you. Children's ministry, youth ministry, men's ministry, women's ministry, senior's ministry, food ministries, visitation ministries – the list goes on and on.

Do something. And then, restart the process! Get feedback from the people who watched you serve with the kids. They might tell you that you seemed disengaged as you played with the toddlers but that you came alive as you taught the small groups. The best way to discover your gifts is to get yourself out there and to see what gifts God reveals to you. He often shows you something you never thought you had.

I was just recently chatting with a friend of mine and we were reminiscing on how much God has changed in our lives ever since we started saying yes to the opportunities that presented themselves. I used to say no to everything that might push me out of my comfort zone. When I was first asked to preach at a men's ministry event and then at a communion with God service, Pastor Jody had to talk me down from resigning. I was terrified! I did not want to speak in front of people. I was a musician, and I didn't need to discern my calling because I figured I already had it sorted out. And then God made me a teaching pastor. This is the last thing I ever thought I would be doing, but I am loving it because I feel God equipping me and using me in ways that I know can only come from Him.

I don't know what God would have you do, but I know that He's not content to leave you sitting on your hands. He has given you a gift so that you can use it to bless others. That gift is not ultimately yours – it's His! And you will give an account for what you do with it. Use your life to bring glory to God. Because Jesus Christ – the Son of God who gave himself in service to you – is coming again. And one day we will stand before him, and we will give an account for the way that we used these lives that he entrusted to us.

We looked earlier at the parable of the talents and we reflected on the third servant – how he was rebuked by the master for his laziness. Let's not be the lazy servant. Instead, let's strive to be like the first servant:

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents

more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'
(Matthew 25:19-21 ESV)

Well done, good and faithful servant. Let that be your goal as you lead your small group, cook a meal or change a diaper in service for the Lord. Don't go searching for the "well done" from your brothers and sisters. Those encouragements never come as often as we want them to and they never satisfy the need we need them to satisfy. Instead, pursue the "well done" from your master who never misses a thing.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.