

What Should I Do If I Haven't Been Doing Anything?

M. W. Bassford, 7-19-09

Introduction.

We're now nearing the end of our year devoted to service. At least by my math, we have one more sermon, maybe two more, that are going to involve the "Service Beyond the Box" logo, and thereafter, we're going to be focusing on other things for a little while. To this point, I have to say that our service groups and our emphasis on increased service generally have been a great success. As a congregation, we're doing all kinds of great things today that we would not have done a year ago. I know that the elders are pleased, and I'm sure that God is pleased too.

However, not everybody here has been a part of this good work. Sometimes the reasons for that are quite innocent. For instance, since the beginning of the year, we've had ten Christians place membership with this congregation, and those folks missed out on all the sermons explaining what we were doing and why we needed to do it. Less creditably, about a third of the members who were around last year never signed up for any group, and others signed up for a group but never really did anything, either because they were never asked to or because they didn't want to.

Throughout the past year, over and over again, we've emphasized how important it is for Christians to be involved in the work of the church. It must be true, then, that if we have so many Christians here who are not involved, that's a problem. On an individual level, those Christians are missing out on a chance to please God. On a church level, their inactivity makes us less effective than we could otherwise be. Now, I'm not interested in assigning blame or pointing fingers this morning. I'm interested in glorifying God, and we do the best job possible of glorifying Him when every part of the body is doing its part. Let's solve the problem. Let's ask, "What should I do if I haven't been doing anything?"

Remember.

If we find ourselves in the position of being pew-warmers, of not sharing in the work of the church, the first thing we need to do is remember what Jesus has done and what He expects. We see the first part of this defined in John 15:12. This, friends, is one of the tallest orders in all of Scripture. The whole New Testament, if not the entire Bible, is the story of Jesus' love for us. He was the prince of heaven; we were hopeless, wretched rebels against God, but He loved us so much that He came to share our wretched state and even die for us. History is full of stories of people who die for their kings, but Jesus is the only king who died for His people. The love of Jesus is awe-inspiring, yet we are expected to do more than just think about it. Instead, every day, we are to show love for Christians like Jesus showed love for us.

When we get right down to the bottom of it, folks, this is what our service groups, and indeed our service generally, is about. We could, in fact, turn our list of service groups into a love checklist. Is encouraging absent Christians an act of love? Yep. Is welcoming visitors to our assembly an act of love? Sure is. Is visiting the sick and shut-ins an act of love? Absolutely. Is spending time with our young folks an act of love? No doubt about it. And so on. Of course, expressions of the love of Jesus aren't limited to what our service groups do. We can be showing that love in any number of ways. One thing, though, is certain. We have to be showing it somehow if we want to live up to what Jesus wants.

It's quite compelling to remember the love of Jesus for us, but we also need to remember His teachings, even when they aren't warm and fuzzy. We see one such teaching in Luke 13:6-9. Some Christians have the idea, I fear, that the Bible is one verse long. They think that as long as they obey Hebrews 10:25 and don't forsake the assembly, they're doing all that Jesus wants them to do. Not so. Being a disciple of Jesus is not about warming a pew. Every one of us can do more, and every one of us is expected to do more. Every one of us is expected to bear fruit, to be doing something useful in the kingdom. If we don't, if we're like the fig tree in the parable that never produces any figs, we're nothing more than a waste of space. If we persist as wastes of space despite opportunity to repent, we too will be cast into the fire. Working in the kingdom isn't a preacher hobby horse. It determines whether we will go to heaven or not.

Think.

After we've turned our attention backward and remembered the reasons why we should work for the Lord, we need to turn it forward and think about what we can do. This process ought to begin by considering the needs around us. Paul urges this course in Titus 3:14. He tells us not that we should engage in good deeds to do make-work, but to meet urgent needs. My dad tells a story about his time in a factory back when he was a young man, and how one day the assembly line he was on happened to be idled. He and some of the other men went and grabbed some chairs out of the break room and sat around on the chairs, waiting for the line to start back up. It wasn't five minutes before one of the foremen came and chewed them out. The upshot of it was that, even though they weren't doing anything, they all had to be standing at their stations, looking like they were doing something, just so that if one of the higher-ups came through the plant, all these guys sitting around wouldn't look bad. Appearance was more important than reality.

That's not the way things are in the Lord's kingdom. None of what we're doing here is busy work. Instead, we're attempting to fill all these vital needs around us that are going unmet. This is a fine church to be a part of, friends, but it's

not a perfect church, and it's certainly not in a perfect situation. If we just keep our eyes and ears open for a week or two, I'm sure all of us can find something that needs to be done better, or just needs to be done, period.

However, just thinking about what the church needs is not enough. We need to think about what we have to offer as well. Paul highlights the importance of this in 1 Corinthians 12:17-19. Each one of us has all these specific body parts, each one of which was carefully designed by God to fill a particular role. In the spiritual realm, it's this local church that is the body, and all of us are the body parts. Just like God designed our eyes to see and our ears to hear, He designed each one of us to be useful for some work in the church. What we need to do, then, is to think about the role that our talents and gifts suit us for. If you're scared to death of standing in the pulpit, preaching a sermon may well not be for you. If you're fussy-natured and can't stand the thought of getting wet and filthy, then going rafting with the young people is probably not the way for you to serve. But everybody, no matter who they are, has something they enjoy and are good at. It's up to each one of us to consider what we do well and figure out how to put that to work for the Lord.

If we struggle with that, if we have no idea what needs to be done, or what we might be good at doing, the next step is to talk it over with somebody else. We see the usefulness of friends described in Proverbs 27:17. I know exactly what this one is about. As you know, I do a lot of digging in the course of all my gardening, and there's nothing more miserable to me than trying to cut through sod with a dull shovel. What I do, then, once the edge on my shovel starts wearing off, is I take my bar file and sharpen it back up. I'd imagine that the noise sets my neighbors' teeth on edge, but once I'm done, I've got a shovel that's useful again. In the same way, other Christians sharpen us back up and make us useful for service. They can both encourage us to do what's right and point out what needs to be done.

Specifically, if we feel adrift and don't know what we should be doing, we should talk to the elders about it. I know that both Joe and John would be delighted to help us figure out where the opportunities for service are. One of the elders, or even just a friend in the Lord who knows us pretty well, can make a great sounding board for figuring out where our gifts lie. With the help of people like that, we can figure out what we ought to do to make ourselves useful.

Act.

All the remembering and all the thinking in the world, though, won't do us any good unless we start to act on it. Service isn't about daydreaming and hypothesizing. It's about doing. When we're thinking about doing, though, we need to remember that it's OK to start small. Jesus comments on the importance of even small acts of service in Matthew 10:42. God remembers and appreciates it even if we do something as insignificant as give a thirsty Christian a drink. Some people don't realize this. They think that if they're going to start serving God, they're going to have to go all-out, and take on 50 different huge projects in 100 different areas. To me, that just sounds like a great way to get overloaded with a whole bunch of things we're not used to doing, get burned out, and end up doing nothing at all. That doesn't help either God or us. In reality, it's much better to do one thing, and actually get the job done, then to take on ten different things that we aren't going to carry through to the end. Let's be sure, then, to start small with something we can handle.

However, just because we start small doesn't mean we should end there. God also expects us to grow. Peter discusses this in 2 Peter 3:17-18. In a lot of ways, serving God is like weight training. On your first day in the gym, you don't start off lifting Olympian amounts of weight. Well, maybe Kody did, but I didn't. Instead, you start off with a moderate weight load, and then, as you stick to it, the amount of weight you're able to lift gradually increases, until finally you end up lifting weights that would have caved your chest in on Day 1. Really, we build up spiritual muscle through a similar process. We start off, say, visiting one shut-in every two weeks, and as time progresses, we get used to it and even begin to look forward to it. Once we reach that point, it's time to up the visit frequency, or start visiting someone else, or maybe even branch out into another area of service altogether. That's the way we grow in our usefulness to God.

Finally, though, once we have grown, we need to hold fast. We see the Hebrews writer talking about this in Hebrews 3:6. This is a challenge for a lot of people. It's very obvious in the realm of weight loss. I know some very overweight people who have, over the course of their lifetimes, lost more weight than I weigh. Their problem is that once they lose that 50 pounds or whatever, they go back to living the way they've always lived, and they gain the weight right back. This happens in the spiritual realm too. We're doing some great work for God, and we're enjoying it, and we're feeling really good about our relationship with Him, and along comes a vacation, or a busy spell at work, and we find ourselves backsliding. We end up right back in the doing-nothing place we've started, and the same mountain to climb is right back in front of us. Friends, that's a lot of effort for not very much usefulness. Let's hold fast to our work instead.

Conclusion.

If you aren't obedient to the Lord now, though, you need to come back to Him before you can work for Him.