

# What Do I Get out of Service?

M. W. Bassford

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## Introduction.

- A. In life, there are generally two kinds of appeals that we use to persuade people to do what we want them to do. On the one hand, people can be motivated by appeals to their better nature. We see a classic example of this in John F. Kennedy's words, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Kennedy there wasn't appealing to self-interest. Instead, he was calling upon Americans' sense of duty and patriotism so that they would do something in which there would be no outward benefit at all.
- B. On the other hand, though, people can be motivated by appeals to their self-interest. This sounds kind of sleazy, but really, it's not. In fact, when our employer says to us, "I'll pay you this salary if you work for me," that's this kind of appeal. I think that few, if any of us go to work every morning because of our passionate dedication to the high ideals of our employers. I'm an exception there. I think we go to work every morning so that we can earn the money we need to support your families, and there's nothing at all wrong with that.
- C. Interestingly enough, God in His word uses both of these strategies to persuade us to obey. On the one hand, He uses the sacrifice of Christ and the sense of indebtedness that we feel to lead us to do what is right. That's altruism. On the other hand, He promises us an eternal reward in heaven if we do what He wants us to. That's self-interest. This two-pronged approach to motivating Christians appears in many other areas of the Bible. For one thing, it certainly appears in the area of Christian service that we're pinpointing this year with our service groups. There are many altruistic reasons why we should seek to serve in the church, but there are some concrete benefits too. Let's look at these as we ask, "What Do I Get out of Service?"

## I. Immediate Benefits.

- A. One of the first things that comes to mind as a benefit of service is that when we serve, it gives us **A WAY TO EXPRESS LOVE**. Paul tells us that love should naturally express itself through service in Galatians 5:13. In some of our earlier lessons, we explored the idea that lack of service could indicate lack of love. This is the flip side of the coin. In fact, when we serve one another, it is often the best way we have to express our love. Let me give you an example. It is most certainly true that I love John Meyer with all the affection of Jesus Christ. However, not all ways of showing that are equally good. If, for instance, I sent John a nice, big bouquet of flowers, I'd imagine that he'd be kind of put off by that. On the other hand, when I draw upon my training as a legal weasel and sit down with John and show him some ways that he can save money on his taxes, John knows why I'm doing that and appreciates the gesture. My love is shown in my actions.
- B. Equally important, when we serve, it gives us **A SENSE OF USEFULNESS** in the body. Remember, friends: every Christian has been designed specially by God with gifts and talents that we should use in His service, and without those gifts, the body of Christ in this place won't be everything that it should be. This is the point that Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 12:21-22. Every Christian here is important, and God needs us all. What's more, we are going to be happiest in the church when we're doing our part in the Lord's work. In my life, I've seen a fair number of disgruntled Christians, and despite all the shapes and sizes they've come in, they've all had one thing in common. Every last one of them wasn't fully using his talents for God, and because they weren't, they found Christianity unfulfilling. If that's where you are now, if you don't feel connected to the body, and you don't like the direction it's going, let me suggest to you that the very best thing you can do is to get involved. Be a solution, not a problem. The more useful you feel, the less disgruntled you will be.
- C. In a much larger sense, service is important because when we serve, we come into **CONFORMITY WITH CHRIST**. This one should be extremely important to us. Remember, friends: Christianity is not about coming to church, though I believe that the assembly is where everything else begins. Instead, Christianity is about being a disciple of Christ. It's about learning His will for our lives and then putting all of our efforts toward imitating Him. As we do this, we need to focus on the core ideas of His life, like the one He mentions in Matthew 20:26-28. This is one of the most radical things that Jesus ever said. We all know what the world's like. Everybody's out for themselves, always doing whatever they can to climb to the top of the heap. Then, they get to be in charge and tell everybody else what to do. Jesus says that His goal is the opposite. He didn't come to earth to climb to the top. He **STARTED** at the top. Instead, He came here to help us get there. Jesus' goal was never to be the master. It was to be the servant. That means, friends, that if we are truly disciples of Jesus, then our goal needs to be looking for ways to serve others too. Our goal needs to be doing whatever we can to make the lives of those around us better. That's true in our interactions with everybody, but it needs to be especially true in the context of the church. Every assembly, we need to be looking around the auditorium, saying to ourselves, "Jesus died for these people. How can I live for them?" Whenever we're talking to somebody and they're telling us about their troubles, we should be asking ourselves, "What can I do

to help?" I'll be the first to admit, friends: this is a challenging way to think, but it's the way that our Lord thought. Unless we learn to think that way too, our claim to Christianity is nothing more than an empty boast.

- D. Similarly, in an immediate sense, active service gives us **PROTECTION FROM THE DEVIL**. Look at what Jesus tells us in the parable of Luke 11:24-26. This story isn't about the literal reality of demonic possession; it's about what happens to us when we drive the wicked things out of our lives and don't replace them with righteous things. If we leave our hearts and our lives empty, in next to no time, we'll find ourselves right back doing those same wicked things, and a whole bunch of new wicked things besides them. The only way we can keep the things of the devil out is by filling our lives so full with the things of God that there isn't any room left. Let me ask you, friends: of all the people you've ever seen fall away, how many of them were passionately committed to doing the Lord's work? Don't get me wrong; no matter how diligently we serve, we can still sin. We can even sin big, but at least in my experience, when workers mess up, they come back. Not so for Christians who don't work. Satan fills their empty lives so full of evil that they don't have any room left for Jesus. Unless we want that to happen to us, we too need to be committed to our share of the work.
- E. The final short-term benefit we'll see from service is **JOY IN HELPING OTHERS**. Paul emphasizes this idea when he quotes Jesus in Acts 20:35. Every time, brethren, we're going to get more satisfaction from giving to others than keeping for ourselves, whether it's money or talents or time. The things we hold on to are like the presents we open on Christmas morning: sure, they're fun for a little while, but in a day or two, they lose all meaning to us. Let me ask you, friends: looking back on your lives, what are the memories you most prize? Do you look back with the most fondness on the evenings when you came home from work, plopped down in front of the TV, and did nothing for four hours? Or do you remember most fondly the times you went to pray with a sick brother, or made food and brought it to another Christian who had lost a loved one? I know which are the times that matter to me. Let's learn from that, and seek our joy in helping others.

## II. Future Benefits.

- A. In addition to all these immediate benefits, there are benefits we can expect to see from our service in the future too. First of these, if we serve, we will receive **THE LOVE OF OTHERS**. Notice the reaction of the apostle Paul himself in Philippians 1:3-5. When Paul talks about the Philippians' "participation in the gospel," he's actually referring to the way that they sent him money for his support. Because they helped Paul, he was quite obviously well-disposed toward them. It works just the same way today, folks. If we help other people, they will love us for it, often much more than we believe our help has earned. I know this is something I talk about all the time, but let me repeat myself. There is no one on the planet who will get more out of a half-hour of your time than one of our shut-ins. If you just show up and talk to them for a little bit, they will praise you to the moon to whomever's listening, and they'll mean it. Even if you're feeling down, even if you feel like you don't matter to anybody, you will know within thirty seconds of talking to them that your presence matters to them. That's the way it works. As soon as you show you care about others, they'll care about you.
- B. On a much larger scale, if we all serve together as God intends, we'll get **A GROWING CHURCH** out of it. This is something that should be important to all of us. I haven't been alive for nearly as long as many of you, but even in my day, I've seen churches that used to be healthy and strong sicken and die. Just a few months ago, I learned that a church in Houston where I used to go to singings is disbanding. We need to ask ourselves: is that what we want for the church in Joliet? Do we want to be there when it shuts its doors for the last time? Are we willing to see the lamp of the Lord in this place go out? If not, Paul tells us the solution in Ephesians 4:16. The only way to keep this church from dying is for it to grow, and the way to produce growth is when everybody in the church is doing their part. The recipe is simple, friends. I guarantee you that if every member of this congregation finds their niche and works diligently for the Lord, God will bless that work, we will grow spiritually, and we will grow numerically. By our efforts, we can ensure that God's great work will continue here for decades or even centuries. All it takes is every one of us doing our share.
- C. Finally, though, the last benefit that we can get out of service is **CONFIDENCE IN THE JUDGMENT**. As we've seen before, the Bible is very clear about how God feels about do-nothing Christians. Indeed, if we haven't been working for the Lord, those passages can be quite ominous. The flip side of the coin, though, is that if we have been doing our part in the kingdom, there are many passages of Scripture that are quite reassuring about that. Along these lines, consider Jesus' description in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:20-21. The servant with the five talents did what his master expected, and he was rewarded. We can be just as certain today that if we do what our Master in heaven expects, we will be rewarded too. This doesn't mean that we have to be great preachers like Paul. It doesn't mean that we have to be as loving as the apostle John. It just means that we have to take whatever God has given us, whether it's a small gift or a large gift, and use that gift for His glory. It may be that nobody else at church even knows what we're doing, but God knows, and God cares. Then, whether our lives end with the Lord returning in glory in the skies, or with us lying quietly on our deathbeds, we can pass on with confidence instead of doubt. We can say, "In the grand scheme of things, I might not have done much, but I did what I could." And that will be enough.

**Conclusion.** If you want to start working for the Lord, become one of His brethren today.