

## “Improving Your Serve”–Dirty Jobs (1 of 4)

I was a Senior in High School in 1983 when I bought this book, *“Improving Your Serve,”* by Chuck Swindoll. This book literally changed my life. One of the bookshelves in my office holds the books that have most influenced my life, and this one’s right there on that shelf.

Why was it such a significant book in my life? Because it challenged me toward a life of unselfish living. Chuck’s book challenged my thinking when it came to my very purpose for existing.

Up until that time, I thought I was on the planet for me. Through this book, I learned that to be like Jesus meant to look after others and consider them first.

Let me read you this quote from page 29, *“I would like to buy \$3 dollars’ worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 dollars’ worth of God, please.”* Wilbur Rees How many of us as Christians want just enough of God to satisfy our needs, but not enough to saturate our existence? We don’t want too much, because it will cost us!

In contrast, listen to these words from the Apostle Paul about his position with God:

*“This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News.”*  
Romans 1:1 (NLT)

*“This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 1:1 (NLT)

*“This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives.”* Titus 1:1 (NLT) What does he call himself? A slave? Most Bible translations try to soften the blow by using the word “servant” instead of “slave,”—but that’s what he wrote.

The word, “slave,” in the original language was “doulos,” which described a person owned by someone else. As a “doulos,” you were subservient to and dependent on your owner. Paul used it of himself at the beginning of three of his letters, and we see that James, Peter and Jude used it of themselves, too. They knew well that to be a leader meant to be a slave to Christ.

“Slave” describes a willing, determined, and devoted service. It reflected the attitude of an Old Testament slave who refused the opportunity for freedom and voluntarily resubmitted himself to his master for life. The Law of Moses provided for this by saying that *“any slave may declare his master and refuse to be set free.”* If this happened then he master was to take the slave and present him to God. Then he would take the slave to the door post and publicly pierce his ear with a tool . After that, *“the slave would serve his master for life.”*

The funny thing is, the early followers of Christ didn’t think of being a *“slave to Jesus Christ”* as anything but a positive thing! Why would it be a negative? After all, God had “purchased” out of the slave market of sin and placed into God’s family as an adopted child!

The late Dr. Bill Bright used to introduce himself as, *“Bill Bright, a slave of Jesus Christ.”* How many of us consider that as a follower of Christ, he’s the Master and we’re the Slave?

But let’s be honest, we love it when people serve us. Everybody struggles with being selfish.

But at least we’re in good company. The people who hung out with Jesus—those who were closest to Him—they were also selfish and they struggled with that.

As a matter of fact the passage that I want to teach you from is in the New Testament, **Mark 10:35-45 (p. 771)**. We’re going to see a very selfish request. And folks, these are the people that spent all the time with Jesus. These guys were with Jesus 24/7. These were His followers, His disciples. They camped together. They ate together. They sat under the teaching of Jesus. They breathed in the same air as God in the flesh. And yet they were very selfish.

Let’s take a look at Mark 10, starting in verse 35,

### **1. Recognize Your Own Selfishness**

*“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, (BTW, Jesus nicknamed these guys “The sons of thunder.” I like that! Jesus had some bad dudes following with him. These are the guys you want on your side in a bar fight.) came over and spoke to him.*

*‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do us a favor.’ (Isn’t this great? It sounds so childish, “just say ‘yes,’ and then I’ll tell you!)*

*“‘What is your request?’ he asked.’*

*“They replied, ‘When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.’ (There’s no humility there! Obviously this didn’t work because later on you see them bring up their momma to ask Jesus the same thing! That’s pretty bad when you don’t get your request from Jesus and so you send in your momma!)*

*“But Jesus said to them, ‘You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?’*

*“‘Oh yes,’ they replied, ‘we are able!’ (Come on, these guys didn’t have a clue! All they could see was the glory of a kingdom. They didn’t want the suffering, they wanted to savor the taste of being in authority over everyone else.) Then Jesus told them, ‘You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.’*

The first step to becoming a slave is to **Recognize Your Own Selfishness**

It’s the first step in any recovery: Admit that you’re hopeless and can’t fix it on your own!

Before we can even begin to think about serving we have to come to grips with human nature.

Why doesn’t serving come naturally? Think about this. Because we don’t want to!

You know what we’re interested in? Me, myself and I. That’s what comes naturally to us!

Let me ask you something, when was the last time you recognized what’s natural within you? When was the last time you paused your life long enough to look inside and do a little evaluation of who you are and saw what you’re all about? Can I tell you something? It can get pretty ugly. Just because you’re a Christian doesn’t automatically erase the selfishness.

Self-indulgence always leads to self-destruction. Self-centeredness leads to regret. Self-absorption leads to emptiness. At this point are you going to run and hide from the truth or are you going to look in the mirror and see a selfish, self-absorbed, natural person?

James and John aren’t alone in this: We’re standing right beside them, asking the same thing!

## **2. Refuse To Follow The World’s Example**

Look what happens next, *“When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.’* There’s that word, “slave” again.

The second step to becoming a slave is to **Refuse To Follow The World’s Example**

Look at the message we’re told: *“You deserve a break today.” “Have it your way.”* And that’s just the when you’re buying a hamburger!

Jesus says, *“If you want to be great you’ve got to serve. Stop thinking about yourself!”* Isn’t that amazing? God, himself, comes down from Heaven and says, *“I’m a servant.”* If anybody should be served it should be him. If anybody exalted, him. But He said, *“No, I came to serve.”*

Folks, it’s natural to be selfish, it’s spiritual to be servants.

Here’s what the world says: take, conquer, rule, consume, discard. And Jesus says, *“No, that’s not it. I created life. I know how it works best. Here’s how you get it. Serve. You want it, serve.”*

Can you picture this? They were mad. Picture this scene. You’ve got to believe those ten other guys were going, *“James and John, I can’t believe that. You have stooped to an all time low!”* Why were they mad? They were mad because they were afraid that those guys were going to get something that they weren’t going to get. They were going to get the glory that they wanted.

There is no way they were going to give up the best seats in the house without a fight.

That’s why Jesus steps in and finishes with these words...

## **3. Respond To Jesus’ Example**

In that moment where everyone was selfish around him he called a time out and said, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Mark 10:35-45 (NLT)

The final step to becoming a slave is to **Respond To Jesus’ Example**

Jesus Christ had all the powers available in the world, yet He came to serve. He was a king born in a barn. He lived a meager existence. He was homeless throughout his ministry and he served others. He cared for people on the other side of the track. The down and out, the prostitutes, the damaged, the sick, the hungry. And he did all that even people’s sinfulness.

Jesus says if you want to be great you have to serve. If you want to be in the front, you go to the back. If you want to stand out in life, you step down. And Jesus gives his own life as an example. In fact, in Matthew 23:11-12 from the Message Jesus says, *“Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you’ll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you’re content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty.”* Matthew 23:11-12 (Message)

Here’s a step: When you walk into any room, look around and ask this question: *“Who needs to be served?”* And then go and do it. You don’t need a greater application point than this!

Now, I hope you’re asking the “why” question. Why serve? The answer really depends on where you are spiritually. If you are here this today and you are you’re a follower of Christ, why serve? Let me give you an answer. It’s because you were created to serve. And you are never more like God than when you serve—because God is a servant.

So when you and I serve, we demonstrate God’s love to a world that doesn’t usually see it. We become God’s light in a dark world. So, if you’re a Christian, why serve? Because God created you to serve. And he’s molding us into His image. And it’s the essence of who God is.

But if you’re sitting here today and thinking, *“I’m not a Christian. Somebody just invited me to church. I’m just kind of checking this whole God thing out. Why would I serve?”* Let’s forget about the spiritual stuff for just a second. Why serve? Because it makes you a better person—bottom line. When you look at the happiest, the healthiest, the most fulfilled, gracious, secure, nicest people, you’ll find that they lead their life by serving others.

If you’re here today just checking out and investigating Christianity this message can apply to you too. It’s a challenge for followers of Jesus but if you want a better life, serve.

Maybe you’re here today and you’re not connected in deep, meaningful relationships. Do you want to know how to connect? Serve others. Just go find a need and fill it!

Trust me, you feel better when you serve others. And if you really want to feel better, please come mow my lawn—I haven’t been able to get to it all week!

Maybe you’re here today and you’re struggling with your spirituality—you’re stumbling in your faith. Can I tell you something that may be hard for you to hear. Typically when you’re struggling or stumbling in your faith your faith is too self-consumed. Your faith is all about you. *“What am I getting out of this?”* The antidote for spiritual apathy is to serve.

So what am I saying? No matter where you are spiritually this message is for you. When you serve your hunger for ambition will diminish and your thirst for significance will increase. ***Our temptation is to want less from God than God desires for us. We only want \$3 of God.***

## REVIEW & QUESTIONS

Q: When do you see selfishness creep into your life?

Q: Where do you find it difficult to step out from the crowd?

Q: What is one practical thing you can do to serve others this week?

I think about **Justin Peterson** in India—but you don’t have to go that far—just cross the street.

I think about our **Food Closet** ministry. **Apartment BBQ & Community BBQ**

Little things done with love become big things! God wants to do great things through you!