

## SATISFYING SERVICE – 1 Peter 4:7-14

### Practicing the Presence of God #5

Debbie Roeger retired a couple of years ago. Anticipating that she would have more time with a less scheduled life, Debbie prayed that God would open a door of service for her. Debbie could have never dreamed how God would answer that prayer.

It was just a week or two after her official retirement that Debbie saw an ad for a Prison Fellowship conference on Restorative Justice. Since Debbie had a master's degree in human resources and had worked during her career as a trained mediator, she had a natural interest in this subject. But the Prison Fellowship part disturbed her. Debbie Roeger is a petite, delicate woman. The last thing she wanted was to get involved in some kind of prison ministry with hardened criminals. Nevertheless she reasoned that she might learn something new so she decided to go to the conference.

At this conference, Debbie met Gary Sims who was in charge of the religious services for the prisons in central Ohio. Debbie lived in central Ohio. Gary told her about a pilot program that they were initiating at Ohio's Marion Prison in which prisoners – Christians, Jews and Moslems – were learning how to demonstrate greater respect for one another. Gary then offered to introduce Debbie to the warden of Marion Prison. Now Debbie wasn't interested in this at all. She had already rejected in her mind prison ministry with women inmates and now she was being invited to meet with the warden of a men's prison. Out of the question. But during the next few weeks as Debbie continued to pray that God would open a door of service for her, she found

herself becoming more and more burdened to at least meet with this warden. So Debbie called Gary and told him that she would be willing to meet with Marion Prison's warden.

The warden was cautious meeting Debbie at first. But by the end of their first meeting, he was convinced to the point where he invited Debbie to develop a conflict resolution program at his prison. Within just a brief period of time, Debbie was working with prison staff, teaching them how to mediate workplace disputes. She selected 24 inmates for a pilot program in mediating conflict with their fellow inmates. Her work has been so successful that Debbie Roeger is now teaching conflict resolution to the entire prison population. She is being used of God to turn the entire atmosphere of one of the toughest prisons in our country around.

Now no human being would choose a delicate, feminine woman to teach hardened male prisoners how to control their anger and settle conflict in a more constructive manner. But God often defies human logic to bring praise and glory to Himself. God is the one who chose a stuttering, stammering man named Moses to deliver speeches powerful enough to lead a whole nation from slavery and guide them to the Promised Land. God is the one who chose a young man named David who couldn't even fit into the only suit of armor available to fight a giant and deliver His people from being under Philistine oppression. God is the one who chose a poor widow named Naomi to be instrumental in influencing the lineage of the Messiah. God is the one who chose a depressed prophet named Elijah to lead a nation back to Himself. God is the one who even chose a dead man named Lazarus to be the most powerful

and influential testimony in his day. God delights in taking anyone who is willing to give his or her heart in service to Him and using that person to make a powerful difference in the world.

We have been looking at the importance of practicing the presence of God in our lives during these past Sunday mornings. This morning, we want to consider how practicing the presence of God affects our service for the Lord. For as we maintain an awareness of the ever-present God in our lives and as we become then more and more cognoscente of what God is doing in the world around us, we will naturally be lead to become more and more involved in His program. This in the most simplistic terms is what service for the Lord is all about – discovering what God is already doing in the world all around us and jumping in to help where God directs us so that we might be active in the building of God’s kingdom here on this earth.

There is a passage in 1 Peter that addresses this very issue. Let me read it for you:

1PE 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1PE 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Peter begins by urgently predicting that the end of all things is near. When the Lord Jesus Christ came to pay the final and complete payment for sin and the church was started to gather a bride for the marriage of the Lamb, the stage was set for the culmination of human history. Peter recognized that nothing more needed to be fulfilled for God to bring all of His program to a conclusion. All that needs to happen is for the bride of Christ to be completed. So Peter was convinced that the end of all things was very near. And if Peter could write those words 2,000 years ago, how much more should we be convinced today that the end of all things is very near. Now the nation of Israel has once again been established according to the prophetic word of God. Now the stage is set for all of the events predicted in the book of Revelation. Our realization that the end of all things could be very near should give to us tremendous urgency in our desire to serve the Lord. Now Peter in this passage gives 6 characteristics that will describe our service for the Lord if we are practicing the presence of God in our lives. I want to outline these for you this morning – and I’m going to have to move quickly, because I have double the points that I usually have in a sermon. So if you don’t want the sermon to be twice as long as it normally is, you have to listen very quickly this morning.

**First**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by a **disciplined mind**.

1PE 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

A couple of decades ago, Tim LaHaye wrote a book entitled *The Battle for the Mind*. In his introduction, LaHaye wrote these words: *In this world, there are 2 basic lines of reasoning that determine the morals, values, life-style and activities of mankind – the wisdom of man or the wisdom of God. Today they take the form of atheistic humanism or true Christianity. What this life is all about is the battle for your mind: whether you will live your life guided by man’s wisdom (humanism) or God’s wisdom (Christianity). Either one will affect the way you live and where you spend eternity. Most people today do not realize what humanism really is and how it is destroying our culture, families, country – and one day, the entire world. Most of the evils in the world today can be traced to humanism, which has taken over our government, the UN, education, TV and most of the other influential things of life.*

LaHaye’s words written over 2 decades ago have proved to be prophetic for the battle for the mind has intensified. The enemy will do anything that he can do to control the mind of the Christian. For the enemy knows that if he has the mind, any productive service for the Lord is completely neutralized. So the enemy will use poor teaching, false knowledge, any kind of controlling substance, anything that hinders a disciplined mind. Without a clear and self-controlled mind, a person cannot make wise decisions. And most importantly, without a clear and self-controlled mind a person cannot pray.

*Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*

Without prayer, a person cannot be confident in God's direction in life. Without prayer, a person cannot gain God's strength for living. Without prayer, a person cannot have the confidence of God's cleansing and forgiveness. Without prayer, a person cannot enjoy most of the blessings that God freely offers to His children. A disciplined mind is vitally important to our service for the Lord. And we are much more able to maintain a disciplined mind as we live in light of the continuing presence of God.

**Second**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by **love**.

*<sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

The Apostle Paul began that great 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians by saying, *1CO 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Paul listed some pretty impressive areas of service in these 3 verses – the ability to supernaturally speak in other languages, the ability to foretell the future, the ability to understand all mysteries and knowledge, the ability to move mountains. But without love, Paul says that all of these, as impressive as they might be in themselves, are worth nothing.

People don't care about how much we know until they first know how much we care. If we are really to impact others in our service for the Lord, then we must be motivated by God's love for them in our hearts.

**Third**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by **faithfulness**.

*10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

The Apostle Paul would agree with Peter here. He wrote in 1 Cor. 4:2:

<sup>2</sup> Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove **faithful**.

Faithfulness is performing a task to its completion and doing it well.

Faithfulness is following instructions carefully.

Last summer I noticed a stream of ants in our back yard and I became so fascinated with them that I just sat and watched them for almost an hour. Some of the scout ants had obviously discovered a new food source. Sandy likes to throw out some pieces of bread or fruit from our rear deck to keep the birds happy. Well some of these scout ants had discovered a piece of this bread and they thought they had hit the mother load. So now here was a stream of ants a couple of yards long from the ant hill to the food source. One line was going to the food, the other was heading back to the ant hill, each one carrying a tiny chunk of that precious bread. Their organization was amazing. They were all straight in line, moving along at a slow but steady pace. I couldn't help but ask myself how they could be so efficient and productive. The answer that came to me as I was watching them was the simple fact that they were such good followers. Each ant followed directly behind the ant that was in front of him without swerving to the right or the left. In that way, every single ant found the food supply and every single ant was able to make it back to the ant hill.

One of the negative character traits that we as Americans generally have is the simple fact that we usually aren't very good followers. Our culture has exalted the pioneers, the innovators, the leaders – but it hasn't put a very high premium on the follower. We have all kinds of leadership conferences. Have you ever heard of a followership conference? I haven't.

We need to again hear the invitation that Jesus gave to His disciples – *Follow me*. It's only as we are faithful in following the Lord that we will be productive in service for God.

**Fourth**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by **God's strength**.

Just as we are so often tempted to serve the Lord in our own way rather than faithfully following what God would have us to do, we are also often tempted to serve the Lord in our own strength rather than relying upon His power and grace.

*11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides,*

You see, the problem with trying to serve the Lord in our own strength is that we are putting far too much confidence in our own abilities. When we try to serve the Lord in our own strength, frankly we jump into water that is way over our heads. Serving the Lord is to engage in battle with all of the forces of evil that are committed to oppose God's programs. The devil and his demons are far stronger and more intelligent than we are. If we try to serve in our own strength, we are going to fail quickly and miserably. Then we will get discouraged. It is only as we serve in the strength of the Lord that we can know His power in our lives and produce fruit that will endure.

When we were preparing to move a couple of years ago, I came across a flashlight that I hadn't used in a long time. I had purchased a new flashlight and batteries as part of my preparation for the Y2K scare. That flashlight had been stored on a shelf in the garage since 2000. Now as I was packing things up to move, I flipped on the switch but no light came on. So I unscrewed the end of the flashlight and tried to shake the batteries out, but they wouldn't budge. Finally I got a screwdriver and began to pry those batteries out of the flashlight – and what a mess I found. Battery acid had leaked out and corroded the entire inside of the flashlight. The flashlight was no good at all – I just threw it away in the garbage can.

Now what had caused the problem? The batteries and flashlight were brand new when I bought them and stored them in a nice, safe place in the garage for emergency use. But a flashlight with new batteries wasn't designed to sit in a nice, comfortable place all its life, was it? A flashlight has been designed to be put into use drawing power from those batteries to produce light. If I would have just turned on that flashlight once a month or so for the past 2 years, that flashlight probably would be working just fine yet today. But because the power wasn't flowing through it, the power was lost – and worse yet, the whole flashlight became corroded and ruined.

Many Christians are like that flashlight. God has designed the Christian life to be lived with a continuous awareness of His presence so that His power and light can flow through His children to others in service. A Christian who just sits idle where he or she is comfortable will eventually become sour and miserable and will lose the capacity to give forth the light that God desires.

**Fifth**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by a **concern for God's praise and glory**.

*10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. . . so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. (1 Peter 4:10a,11b)*

The motivation for our service for the Lord is most important. In fact, it is the determining factor for future rewards that will be given by the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of judgment. God has not given gifts to His children to be used for their own profit but He has rather given gifts to them to be used for the edification of the body. As the body of Christ is built up, God receives praise and glory and honor. Now it is important to praise and honor the Lord Jesus Christ through our worship. But we must also realize that one of the major ways that we give our Creator glory and honor is through our service for him.

I like the testimony that a cowboy out west who was recently converted gave. As I read his testimony the other day, I thought he had a very good handle on a good, common sense approach to service for a young Christian in the Lord. Listen to what he said. *I've found lots of folks in the church who seem to think that being faithful to the Lord just means shouting themselves hoarse and praising His name. I'll tell you how I look at it. I work at a ranch for Mr. Jim. Now if I just sit around the house all day telling Mr. Jim what a good fellow he is and singing songs to him, I don't think that would suit him very well. But when I buckle on my stirrups and ride up into the hills to see that Mr. Jim's herd is alright and not suffering from lack of water or food, I think I'm doing more what he wants me to do.*

There's certainly some homey wisdom in that cowboy's testimony, isn't there? Yes, it is important to meet together and praise and worship God. We are commanded to do so in the Scriptures. This is a time of mutual encouragement and edification. But God is also praised by our service for Him throughout the week if we do it for His honor and glory.

**Sixth**, satisfying service for the Lord is characterized by **perseverance**.

*IPE 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

Service for the Lord is not always easy – in fact, it usually isn't easy. Service for the Lord brings us to the front-line of the spiritual battlefield. As long as we are AWOL or back in the barracks, the enemy isn't going to be very concerned about us. But when we get to the front lines and begin to serve the Lord so that lives are changed and the wounded are healed for the strengthening of God's kingdom, then the enemy becomes very threatening. He attacks and tries to thwart our efforts at every hand. But if there aren't any battles, there can't be any victories. It is through patient and persevering service that victories for the Lord are won.

When Norm Schwarzkopf first entered the military academy at West Point, he was by his own admission an idealistic, ambitious young man. He looked at his military career as a way to make a name for himself. But as he

began to see what service for his country was really all about, his whole attitude changed. Listen to his own words as recorded in a Reader's Digest article:

*When I began as a plebe at West Point, "Duty, Honor, Country" was just a motto I'd heard. But by the time I left, those values had become my fixed stars. It was a tremendous liberation. The Army, with its emphasis on rank and medals and efficiency reports, is the easiest institution in the world in which to get consumed with ambition. Some officers spend all their time currying favor and worrying about the next promotion – a miserable way to live. But West Point saved me from that by instilling the ideal of service above self – to do my duty for my country even if it brought no gain at all. It gave me far more than a military career – it gave me a calling.*

When General Norman Schwarzkoff assumed a position of prominence during our previous conflict with Iraq, when President George Bush Sr. was in office, most of us had never heard of him before. But he rose with such a sense of courage that he lifted a whole nation with him. It was Desert Storm that changed the way we do war as a nation.

It is interesting that one of the key leaders of that time was a man who had learned lessons through years and years of patient service for his country. He could have become lost in the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the military. But because he had learned such valuable lessons through persevering service, he was ready when our nation called to him.

D. L. Moody once said, *The measure of any person is not how many servants he or she has, but how many people he or she serves.* Jesus would agree for on one occasion He told His followers,

*"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:42-45)

God has called each of us to a life of service. If this weren't the case, He wouldn't have given spiritual gifts to every one of us. As we practice the presence of God in our lives, we will be lead to serve the Lord as He directs us. And our service for the Lord will be effective and fruitful as we have a disciplined mind, as we serve in love, as we serve faithfully, as we are empowered by the strength of God, as we are motivated to give praise and glory to God, and as we persevere through trials and suffering.