

## THE CALL TO SERVICE – Gal. 5:13-26

### The Call of God #5

Joyce Brown was depressed. She had been out of work for several months. She had fallen into the habit of sleeping in until almost noon and watching T.V. into the wee hours of the morning. Joyce's get up and go had gotten up and gone. She was thoroughly bored with life. And then to add insult to injury, her car broke down and she didn't have a dime to get it fixed. Without any money or transportation, Joyce decided to go to a nursing home around the corner from her house to apply for a job one afternoon. The reason for Joyce's applying at this specific nursing home was the simple fact that this was the only business close enough to walk to from her house. Joyce didn't like the atmosphere of nursing homes, she wasn't at all attracted to older people, but she knew that she had to do something. As Joyce took an application from the receptionist and found a chair to sit in, she couldn't help but notice a few dozen seniors going through the motions of some exercises lead by a worker at the other end of the room. She noticed the group because of the obvious disinterest of the leader. She was an unsmiling, unenthusiastic women dressed in black pants and a drab, gray blouse, barking out instructions in a monotone voice. As Joyce got to the place where she was to fill in the position desired, she heard one of the exercise group address the leader as Activity Director. Joyce wrote in Activity Director on her application. *I can do a better job than that lady is doing*, she reasoned. At least my wardrobe has some brightly-colored outfits and I can smile when I talk. Well, about a week later, Joyce was awakened at 8:05 by the phone ringing. It was the director of the nursing home calling. "The position of activity director was open," she declared. "Was Joyce still interested in it?" Joyce wasn't at all surprise that the previous activity director had left. She obviously hadn't liked her job. "Yes, she was interested," Joyce answered. "She would be right in." When the director of the home asked for Joyce's qualifications, she recounted all of the various programs that she had helped with at church. Sunday School, VBS, Youth activities. The interview went well and Joyce was given a chance to see what she could do even though she didn't have the professional qualifications that the director had hoped for. That day when Joyce Brown started working at the nursing home was the day that changed the whole direction of her life. Her thoughts throughout the day began to revolve around what she could do to make the residents' day more enjoyable rather than her own problems. Joyce began to wake up early in the morning eager to go to work. She went to bed in the evening tired but satisfied. The creativity that she developed surprised her. Joyce began to love her Seniors and they responded back in love to her as well. Recently, Joyce gave this statement to a newsletter interview: *People who have known me for a long time refuse to believe that I work in a nursing facility. Certainly they would not believe how much I love my job.*

This whole change of direction in Joyce Brown's life came as a result of her service for others. Before she was hired at the nursing home, Joyce was consumed with herself – her own problems and anxieties. After she was hired at the nursing home, Joyce's life began to revolve around her service for the welfare of others.

In a commencement address, Albert Schweitzer once gave these wise words of advice. *I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.*

The very Son of God Himself modeled a life of service as He came on His redemptive mission to this earth. He rebuked his disciples for their ambitious plots by giving them these words of instruction along with his own personal confession recorded in Mark 10:42-45:

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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."

With such an example of our Savior, it should not surprise us to find in the Bible that God has called us to a life of service. We have been looking at various callings in the Bible. We have already seen the call to salvation, the call to holiness, the call to be God's children and the call to peace. Now this morning we come to a consideration of God's call to service.

Galatians 5:13 tells us that we have been called by God to serve. We were called by God to freedom, and we demonstrate that freedom by serving one another. READ Galatians 5:13:  
*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

Now the Apostle Paul uses the rest of the chapter to develop this theme by giving instructions how we demonstrate our call to service with regards to others around us in serving them, with regards to our own person in serving ourselves, and with regards to God in serving Him. In each case, Paul gives both a positive and negative example – illustrations of how we properly serve others, ourselves and God and illustrations of how we improperly serve others, ourselves and God. Let's look together at these 3 demonstrations of our call to serve in love.

**First, note our call to serve others found in verses 14-15:**

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Now here we find the positive and negative examples of serving others stated clearly. We know that we are serving others in a positive sense as we love our neighbors as ourselves. But if there is biting and devouring going on, then we are not serving others but are rather being consumed with our own self-interests.

It's interesting that Paul says that loving our neighbors as ourselves sums up the entire law. We know that he is speaking of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Christ's statement here. When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked by an expert in the law, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" our Savior answered without hesitation, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> and greatest commandment. And the 2<sup>nd</sup> is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:37-40).

Near the conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a test to us for us to measure our love for our neighbors. We know that this statement is connected with the one that Jesus would give later, for He also uses this one as a summary statement for the Law and Prophets. We often refer to this test as the Golden Rule. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 7:12)

The presumption of these statements is that we naturally have a self-interest. It is part of our human nature to look out for ourselves. We learn very early in life that we would rather have good things happen to us than bad things. While still in the crib, we naturally cry out for help if we are hungry or if our diaper needs to be changed. We learn very early that life is better with a full stomach and dry pants. Nobody needs to teach us this. But we don't naturally intercede on behalf of another baby in the nursery who is in a similar state. If a baby in the crib next to us is hungry or has a wet diaper, he is on his own. He can fend for himself. We are only concerned with our own needs.

Now part of the divine nature that we are given in our new birth into the family of God is a concern for others that mirrors God's nature. When God looked down from heaven and saw us hopelessly enslaved by our transgressions and sins, that wasn't His problem. We were the ones who had sinned and enslaved ourselves. God remained holy and righteous. But part of God's nature is a desire to serve others. So He loved us as He loved Himself. As He saw the importance of holiness to His own character and as He experienced the freedom that His righteousness gave to Him, God made a provision so that we would be able to enjoy the same freedom from the enslavement of sin that He had. "God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) The Lord Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven. He took upon Himself the form of a servant according to Philippians 2. He gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sin on the cross

of Calvary so that we might experience the very righteousness of God. “He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

Now that is the supreme example of loving your neighbor as yourself. As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to follow his example. We are to look beyond our own needs and wants to see what we would want to have done for us if we were in our neighbor’s shoes. We are to look beyond ourselves, to see how we would want to be treated if we were in our neighbor’s shoes. Now this doesn’t mean that we pester and badger our neighbors because most of us don’t like to be pestered and badgered. But it does mean that when we see a legitimate need, when we see our neighbor in trouble, we reach out with a helping hand even if it means inconvenience and sacrifice for us. And we know from the parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbors are not just those living next door, but every person on this planet earth is our neighbor.

Last week, Sandy and I went downtown for the art festival. Downtown Grand Rapids is like most major cities in that it is interesting in its extremes. On the one hand, some wealthy people live downtown. We struck up a conversation with a couple as we were waiting in line for a swarma at the Pita House. The man was a retired police officer from Detroit. His wife was an intensive care nurse at Butterworth. They had purchased one of new renovated condos on the river downtown. It was obvious to us that they were pretty well off financially. But on the other hand, there are homeless people that you see walking the streets as well. They live in cardboard boxes or sleep at Mel Trotter at night. Grand Rapids is like every major city having a stark contrast of social classes living almost side by side.

About 10 years ago, a very successful stock broker named Josh Ridker was traveling in one of the neighborhoods not too far from downtown Chicago. He had finally achieved what he had dreamed. Two months before, Josh had purchased a sleek, black, 10 cylinder Jaguar XKE. Now he was just enjoying some time driving his car around some neighborhoods. As Josh drove down some of the narrow streets, he slowed down looking out for kids who might be darting out from behind parked cars. Suddenly, Josh was startled by a loud thump at his side. As he looked in his side rear-view mirror, he realized that someone had just thrown a brick and had hit the driver’s side door of his Jag. Infuriated, Josh screeched on the brakes, jammed the transmission into reverse, and screeched back to where the guilty kid was still standing on the sidewalk. Josh leaped from the car and ran up to the young boy, grabbing him by the shirt. “Please, mister,” the kid pleaded. “I’m sorry, but I didn’t know what else to do. I threw the brick because I had to get somebody to stop. It’s my brother. He’s fallen out of his wheelchair and hurt himself, and I can’t lift him back up.” Sensing the boy’s agony, Josh quickly let go of his shirt and told him to lead the way to his brother. When they arrived at the site of the fallen brother, Josh was able to stabilize his condition and then call on his cell phone for help. It was only after the ambulance had come and he knew that the young lad was taken care of that Josh continued

on his way. Josh could have called his insurance company and had the door of his Jag fixed, but he decided not to. Josh Ridker still drives that Jag to this day. And every time he looks at that dented door, or anytime anyone asks him about it, Josh tells his story ending with the morale – my dented door reminds me not to rush through life so fast that someone in need has to throw a brick at me to get my attention.

I think Jesus would have been pleased with Josh’s response. For the Lord Jesus Christ never journeyed through life at a pace where he wasn’t able to see discern the needs of others around him. And He was the one who summed up the Law and the Prophets by saying that we should love God with all of our being and that we should demonstrate our love for God by serving others – by loving our neighbor as our self.

**Now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> place, let’s look together at our call to serve ourselves found in verses 16-24:**

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup> For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

GAL 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Now I believe that one of the most misunderstood concepts in our country today is found in this matter of how we properly serve ourselves. It’s not that there isn’t a great deal of emphasis on it. We hear plenty about taking care of ourselves. “You have to look out for yourself” we are told. Psychologists are always giving the advice to take care of our own emotional needs. There are even many Christian leaders who add their voices. How many times have we heard that the command to love our neighbors as ourselves implies that we must first love ourselves for if we don’t love ourselves, how will we then be able to love our neighbors? So it’s not that there isn’t an emphasis in our country on serving ourselves – there is plenty of that.

The problem comes with the interpretation of how we are to serve ourselves. How are we to love ourselves so that we can then love our neighbors as ourselves? And the answer that is assumed and generally taught is that we are to serve and love ourselves through self-indulgence. Our human natures cry out to have certain needs met. As we heed that cry and indulge ourselves, we are serving ourselves, we are taking care of ourselves, we are loving ourselves. This is the message that we are so often taught.

This is not the message that the Bible teaches. If we continually give in to self-indulgence, we become enslaved by our sinful natures. Whenever the flesh cries out, we jump. When the flesh asks for something, we reply how much is enough. And the problem is the simple fact that there is never enough to satisfy the flesh. So many end up caught in a vicious cycle of greed, desperately trying to satisfy cravings that will never say “enough”. There is never enough money to satisfy the greedy; there is never enough food to satisfy the glutton; there is never enough drugs to satisfy the addict; there is never enough sex to satisfy the pervert; there are never enough casinos to satisfy the gambler. There is never enough to satisfy the flesh. When the oil tycoon Rockefeller was asked near the end of his life how much money he considered to be enough, the billionaire answered, *one more dollar*.

The Apostle Paul writes that we serve ourselves when we refuse to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. And then he lists some of the most obvious illustrations: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery (which Webster defines as extreme indulgence of one’s appetites);<sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions<sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

On the other hand, we do properly serve ourselves as we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. For the Spirit brings freedom and liberty to us.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

**Finally, note with me our call to serve God found in verses 25-26:**

<sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Now the evidence that we are serving God as we should be is found in our willingness to follow the Spirit’s leading in our lives. As we keep in step with the Spirit, we are submitting ourselves to the will of God in our lives. But if we become conceited, if we are puffed up in pride, if we are provoking and envying each other, then we are not serving God as we should. We might have deceived ourselves into thinking we are by setting up some self-made standard, but we aren’t according to God’s standard. We are not content with God’s direction in life because we think we have a better plan for ourselves. We are not content with God’s provision for us because we think that God owes us more than we are getting.

We often don’t realize what we are saying to God by some of the actions that we take in life. If we go to a doctor complaining of some symptoms that we have, and if the doctor runs several tests and then gives to us some medication that would help to cure our ailment, what are we saying to the doctor if we ignore his

advice and fail to take the medication given to us? Are we not saying that we think we know more about our physical condition than he does? If our mechanic tells us that we need to change the oil on our car every several thousand miles so that our engine will continue to run smoothly, what are we saying to the mechanic if we ignore his advice and just drive our car indefinitely without ever changing the oil? Are we not saying that we think we know more about the way our car engine functions than he does? Now if we consistently ignore our doctor and mechanic we are going to have some problems in life. Our health and our automobiles are going to break down. We go to doctors and mechanics because they have specialized in certain fields and are therefore able to give us good advice for our benefit.

This same principle is true in the spiritual realm. There is nobody who is better qualified to give direction to our lives than God. He is the only omniscient being in the universe. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. And He knows what lies in the future, both for us and for everyone else in the world as well. And God is totally benevolent in His nature. He has no selfish or ulterior motives. He completely desires our best interests. There is nobody who is better qualified to give life advice to us than God. And God has provided the Holy Spirit to us for just that purpose. The Bible teaches us that every single Christian is indwelt by the Spirit of God Himself and that this Spirit has been given to lead and guide God's child in life.

Now how do you think God interprets our actions when we basically say to Him, *I appreciate the Holy Spirit that you have provided and the good advice that He has given on how I am to live my life and the path that He advises for me to take, but I've thought about this whole matter carefully and I think that I have a better way. I think that the path that I am choosing in life is better than the one that the Spirit has for me.* Don't you think that God would interpret such a response as the height of arrogance and conceit? For us to assume that we know more about our lives than God Himself does is quite an arrogant assumption, don't you think? Yet that is what we do when we ignore the Spirit's leading in our lives. Paul writes that we are to serve God. And we do that by keeping in step with the Spirit in our lives and by not becoming conceited.

So then we have been called to serve others. We know that we are serving others as we love our neighbors as ourselves. The red flag that we are not serving others is when we bite and devour one another. If people are fighting amongst themselves, this is an indication that they are more concerned for their own rights and comforts than for the welfare of others.

We have also been called to serve ourselves. We know that we are serving ourselves as the fruit of the Spirit is being developed in our lives. The red flag that we are not serving ourselves as God would have us is found in a life that is characterized by gratifying the desires of our sinful nature.

And we are called to serve God. We know that we are serving God when we are following the Spirit's leading in our lives. The red flag that we are not serving God is found in a conceited and prideful nature. If we

are puffed up in pride, we are probably setting our own course in life rather than following the Spirit's leading as we should.

This year, as has almost become a pattern every year out in California, firefighters have battled forest fires in an attempt to protect houses from burning to the ground. As people have built more and more houses out into the forests, these houses have become more and more vulnerable to fires. And these fires often start by the natural means of lightning striking trees, but they sometimes are started by human error as well. You might remember the tragic story of Terry Barton several years ago. Terry was a Forest Ranger. She had served Americans for 18 years by instructing children in proper forest etiquette and diligence in watching out for forest fires from her observation station. But Terry was arrested for "maliciously destroying federal property by means of fire." It seems that Terry received a letter from her estranged husband that infuriated her. In her anger she burned that letter and started a forest fire by mistake in Colorado. That fire that Terry started ended up consuming over 135,000 acres, destroying 25 homes, and forcing the evacuation of over 7,500 people. All because Terry forgot what her job was all about. Forest rangers are hired to serve the people. They are paid with tax money to protect our forests and prevent destructive fires. For 18 years, Terry Barton apparently served and protected very well. But then she had a personal situation that caused her to lose focus on what her mission was all about. She became consumed with herself and her own needs and she ended up losing everything that she worked so hard to attain in life and destroying the lives of many innocent people as well.

Jesus Christ came to this earth to serve. He has called us to follow in his footsteps. Every Christian is called to a life of service. We are to serve others by loving our neighbors as ourselves, we are to serve ourselves by allowing the Fruit of the Spirit to develop in our lives and we are to serve God by following the Spirit's leading in our lives. To those who heed the call of service there will be great reward in the future. For the Lord Jesus Christ said that the life of service is so important to God that He has made it the barometer of greatness in His kingdom.

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all." (Mark 10:43,44).