

SERVING OTHERS EVEN WHEN IT HURTS

The Cost of Love, Humility, and Christian Service

John 13:1–17; Acts 20:17–19, 33–35; Philippians 2:3–8;

Galatians 5:13

Whiskey, Joshua

Memory Verse — Acts 20:19

*“Serving the Lord with all humility
and with tears and with trials...”*

Central Thought: True Christian service is not measured only by what we do when it is easy, but by our willingness to love, serve, and remain faithful to Christ when doing so becomes painful or costly.

INTRODUCTION: WHEN SERVING BECOMES PAINFUL: It is easy to talk about serving others when everybody appreciates us. It is easy to help when we have enough time. It is easy to show love when people treat us with love in return. But what happens when you serve someone and they hurt you? What happens when you sacrifice your time for someone who never appreciates it? What happens when you keep showing kindness to someone who misunderstands your intentions? What happens when doing the right thing becomes emotionally draining, inconvenient, or costly? That is where the real test of Christian service begins. Many people are willing to serve when it brings joy, recognition, friendship, or

appreciation. But the Christian calling goes deeper than that. Jesus did not only serve when people were kind to Him. Paul did not only serve when circumstances were comfortable. Their examples teach us that genuine service may involve tears, sacrifice, rejection, and personal discomfort.

The question is not simply, “*Am I willing to serve?*” The question is, “*Am I still willing to serve when it hurts?*” Today, we will examine what the Bible teaches about serving others even when it costs us something.

1. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS SERVICE TO THE LORD – Acts 20:18–19

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of how he had lived among them, serving the Lord with humility, tears, and trials. Notice that Paul did not describe his life as one of comfort and ease. He described a life of service that included hardship. The important expression is: “*Serving the Lord.*”

Paul was not serving merely to gain the approval of people. His service

was rooted in his relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the foundation we must understand. When our service depends entirely on how people treat us, we will eventually become discouraged. People may disappoint us. They may misunderstand us. They may fail to appreciate what we have done. But when we understand that our service is ultimately offered to the Lord, our motivation becomes stronger than human appreciation.

Colossians 3:23-24 teaches Christians to work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. This does not mean people's actions do not matter. It means their response must not become the only reason we serve.

Note: If you are serving your family, serve with a heart that honors God. If you are helping a brother or sister in the church, do it as service to Christ. If you are doing something good and nobody notices, remember that God sees. When people become the only reason we serve, their disappointment can destroy our willingness to serve. But when Christ is our reason, we have a deeper foundation to continue doing what is right.

2. JESUS SERVED EVEN WHEN HE KNEW HE WOULD BE HURT Main Text: **John 13:1-17**

This is one of the most powerful passages for understanding our topic. Jesus knew that His hour had come. He knew He was going to the Father. He also knew what was ahead of Him. Yet, during this very period, He took a towel and began washing the disciples' feet.

John 13:3-5 shows us that Jesus, knowing His authority and identity, rose from supper, laid aside His outer garments, took a towel, and washed the disciples' feet. Think about the significance of this action. Foot washing was a lowly task. It was an act of service, not a display of status. Yet the Lord and Teacher willingly performed it. And the circumstances make the example even more powerful. Jesus washed the feet of Judas - **John 13:10-11** makes clear that Jesus knew who would betray Him. Judas was among the disciples whose feet Jesus washed. Jesus did not wash Judas' feet because He was unaware of his coming betrayal. He knew what was in motion. This teaches us that Jesus' service was not controlled by the expectation of being treated well in return. He did not need Judas to become faithful before He demonstrated humility.

Jesus' action was consistent with His own character. What does this teach us? Sometimes, we serve people who will not respond with gratitude. Sometimes, we help people who later disappoint us.

Sometimes, we show kindness and still experience hurt. Jesus' example challenges us not to let another person's wrong attitude turn us into a person who refuses to do good. However, we must understand this carefully: Jesus washing Judas' feet does not mean Christians must ignore wrongdoing, approve betrayal, or remain in harmful situations. Jesus Himself confronted sin and spoke truthfully. Serving others even when it hurts means refusing to let pain turn our hearts away from Christ—not pretending that wrongdoing is acceptable.

3. SERVING OTHERS REQUIRES HUMILITY – *Philippians 2:3-5*.

Paul instructs Christians to reject selfish ambition and conceit, and to consider the interests of others. This is difficult because our natural response to hurt is often self-protection, anger, or withdrawal.

When someone hurts us, we may begin to think! "Why should I be the one to help again?" "Let somebody else do it."- "After everything I have done, this is how I am treated?" "I will never do anything for anybody again." These feelings can be understandable. But if we allow them to govern our lives, hurt can gradually turn into bitterness and selfishness. Humility does not mean pretending that we are not hurt. Humility means we do not allow our pride, anger, or desire for

revenge to become our master. ***Philippians 2:5*** tells us to have the mind of Christ. That means learning to ask: "What response would honor Christ, even in this painful situation?" Sometimes that response may be helping. Sometimes it may be speaking the truth in love. Sometimes it may be forgiving. Sometimes it may be setting a wise boundary while refusing to hate the person. Humility is not weakness. It is a heart that submits its response to God.

4. PAUL SERVED WITH TEARS, NOT JUST WITH JOY - *Acts 20:19*

Paul said he served the Lord: *"...with all humility and with tears and with trials..."* Notice that Paul did not say he served only when he was happy. He mentioned tears.

Tears reveal that service can touch the deepest parts of our lives. Paul's ministry was not merely a public activity. It involved real people, real struggles, real opposition, and real emotional cost. Christian service is not always a smiling experience. A person may serve while carrying personal burdens. A parent may continue caring for a family while emotionally exhausted. A Christian may encourage others while going through a difficult season. A brother or sister may continue supporting the congregation while experiencing personal disappointment.

Paul's example reminds us that tears do not automatically mean failure. You can be hurting and still be faithful. You can be tired and still have a servant's heart. You can experience disappointment and still refuse to abandon what is right. But this does not mean we should ignore our own need for rest, encouragement, or help. Even faithful servants need support.

5. LOVE IS NOT PROVEN ONLY WHEN IT IS EASY - *Galatians 5:13*

Paul writes: *"...through love serve one another."* The key expression is *"through love."* Christian service must be motivated by love, not merely by obligation, recognition, or personal advantage. But love is often tested when it becomes costly. It is easy to love someone who always agrees with us. It is harder when we disagree. It is easy to help someone who appreciates us. It is harder when we feel overlooked.

It is easy to be patient when we are not inconvenienced. It is harder when patience requires sacrifice. ***Romans 12:20-21*** teaches Christians not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. This does not mean evil should be ignored or excused. It means evil should not be allowed to dictate our character. When someone hurts us, we must be careful not to become the very thing that hurt us. Christian love does not mean that we feel no pain.

It means that pain does not have to turn us into people who stop loving what is right.

6. SERVING EVEN WHEN IT HURTS DOES NOT MEAN ACCEPTING ABUSE

This is an important distinction. The Bible calls us to humility, forgiveness, patience, and service. But these teachings must not be twisted to justify abuse, manipulation, or the continuation of harmful situations. Jesus served others, but He also confronted hypocrisy and wrongdoing. Paul taught love, but he also corrected sin and warned the church against harmful conduct. Forgiveness does not mean pretending that nothing happened. Love does not mean allowing someone to repeatedly harm you. Service does not mean enabling destructive behavior. And humility does not mean that you have no worth.

There may be situations where the right response is to say no, seek help, establish boundaries, or involve responsible people. You can refuse to retaliate and still protect yourself. You can forgive someone and still recognize that trust must be rebuilt. You can wish someone well without giving them unlimited access to hurt you. The goal is not to suffer unnecessarily. The goal is to remain faithful to Christ in the way we respond to suffering.

7. DO NOT LET UNAPPRECIATED SERVICE TURN INTO BITTERNESS - *Hebrews 6:10*

The writer reminds Christians that God is not unjust to forget their work and the love they have shown in serving His people. This is comforting because people do not always recognize sacrifice. You may have helped someone during a difficult time, but when you needed help, they were absent. You may have sacrificed for a church activity, but nobody acknowledged your effort. You may have consistently encouraged someone who never asked how you were doing. Such experiences can hurt. But *Hebrews 6:10* reminds us that God sees faithful service. We must not make human appreciation the foundation of our service. If we serve only when people thank us, we may stop whenever gratitude is absent. But when our service is offered to God, we can continue doing good without making recognition our condition. This does not mean we should never communicate our needs or address unfair treatment. It means we must not allow a lack of appreciation to poison our hearts. People may overlook your service, but your service to the Lord is never invisible to Him.

8. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS SOMETHING TO GIVE—EVEN WHEN IT COSTS SOMETHING - 1 *Peter 4:10*

Peter teaches that each Christian should use whatever gift he or she has received to serve others. God has not given every person the same ability, resources, or opportunity. Some can teach. Some can encourage. Some can give. Some can provide hospitality. Some can listen patiently. Some can visit the sick. Some can help carry practical burdens. But service often requires us to give something of ourselves. It may cost time. It may require patience. It may interrupt our plans. It may require us to put aside personal convenience. The question is not whether we have everything to give. The question is whether we are willing to use what God has entrusted to us. At the same time, wise service recognizes our limitations. We are not required to meet every need by ourselves. We can serve faithfully while also seeking help and sharing responsibilities.

9. THE CROSS IS THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF COSTLY LOVE *Philippians 2:5-8; Romans 5:8*

When we speak about serving others even when it hurts, we must ultimately look at Jesus Christ. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. *Romans 5:8* teaches that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. The cross reveals the depth of Christ's love. He did not wait until humanity had become deserving before demonstrating His love. His

sacrifice was costly. His obedience was costly. His love was not merely a feeling. It was demonstrated through action. We must never imagine that our service can equal Christ's saving sacrifice. Only Christ accomplished that work. But His example teaches us the kind of heart we are called to develop: a heart that does not make personal comfort the highest priority, but seeks to obey God and love others faithfully. The cross reminds us that love can be costly—and that faithfulness to God is worth more than the comfort of always choosing ourselves first.

10. HOW DO WE SERVE WHEN WE ARE HURTING? Here are practical ways to live out this lesson.

1. Take your pain to God. Do not pretend you are fine when you are not. Pray honestly and seek God's strength.
2. Examine your heart before you respond. Ask whether your response is driven by love, pride, anger, or the desire to retaliate.
3. Continue doing what is right. Do not let someone else's wrongdoing become an excuse for your own.
4. Learn to forgive. Forgiveness releases the desire for revenge. Rebuilding trust, however, may

require time and evidence of change.

5. Set wise boundaries where necessary. You can remain loving without allowing repeated harm.

6. Ask for help when the burden becomes too heavy. Christian service is not meant to be carried alone.

7. Remember whom you are serving. People may disappoint you, but your faithfulness to Christ remains meaningful.

1. Why is it easier to serve people who appreciate us?

2. What does Jesus washing Judas' feet teach us about serving people who may hurt us?

3. What is the difference between Christian forgiveness and allowing someone to continue abusing us?

4. Have you ever become discouraged from doing good because someone failed to appreciate you?

5. How can we continue serving without becoming bitter?

6. What does Acts 20:19 teach us about the relationship between service and personal suffering?

7. What is one area of your life where God may be calling you to serve with greater patience, humility, or love?

CONCLUSION: WILL YOU STILL SERVE WHEN IT HURTS?

Brethren, serving others is not always convenient. Sometimes it will cost us time. Sometimes it will cost us comfort. Sometimes it will bring tears. Sometimes the people we help may not appreciate us. But the example of Jesus and the testimony of Paul remind us that Christian service is not built

on convenience or human applause. It is built on devotion to Christ. Jesus took a towel and washed His disciples' feet. Paul served with humility, tears, and trials. And we are called to follow their example of faithful service. So, when serving becomes painful, remember: You can be hurt without becoming hateful. You can forgive without pretending the wrong never happened. You can establish boundaries without abandoning love. You can serve faithfully without being applauded. And you can continue doing what is right because your service is ultimately offered to the Lord. Let us not become Christians who are willing to serve only when service is easy. Let us become Christians who, through the strength of Christ, continue to love, serve, and obey—even when it costs us something.