

Develop a servant's heart

Philippians 2:1–11; 1 Peter 5:1–7

The believer is responsible to resist the conforming tendencies of the world, but instead to be renewed in his or her thinking (Romans 12:1–2). Serving others from the heart requires such a transformation in the believer, which God by His Word through His Spirit can accomplish. This transformation to a servant's heart is particularly important in those who lead. The different NT words for serve and servant suggest three important perspectives on serving. The believer with a servant's heart will understand him or herself in three roles:

I. *A servant who values humble service*

1. *Jesus models humble service for the believer.*

If your heart is right, you will want to be like Jesus who models humble service (Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:1–11, esp. vv. 3–5, 8). Humble service is not self-demeaning, but putting God's will and the need of others above our own desires.

2. *Jesus commands humble service for leaders who in turn model it for others (1 Peter 5:1–7).*

If your heart is right, you will want to obey Jesus who has commanded the believer to humbly serve.

- a. The apostle Peter gives Jesus's command to elders for them to obey and model for all to follow. Elders, who shepherd, are to follow the example of the Chief Shepherd, who obeyed the Father on behalf of believers. They, and all believers, are to humble themselves before God and consider others before themselves.
- b. The apostle Peter indicates that we should value such humble service. It is of value because it pleases and exalts the Chief Shepherd and because it brings eternal reward.

Questions for self-evaluation: What do you praise? ... admire? What makes people great in your eyes?

II. *A slave who submits to one Master*

Everyone is born a slave and remains a slave. The only change that can occur is a change in the master to whom you submit. Will it be sin or God?

1. *The believer as a slave embraces from the heart that God owns him or her (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23).*

2. *The believer as a slave submits from the heart to Christ.*

The believer is in God's household and serves the Master of the house. A household servant cannot be subject to two masters (Luke 16:13; cf. Matthew 6:24). God the Father has set the Son, Jesus Christ, over all and to be Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15).

3. *The believer as a slave gives up from the heart personal rights in order to serve others for His Master.*

Jesus Christ's prescription for greatness was to become the slave of all (Mark 10:44), which is not having multiple masters—an impossibility, but the setting aside of personal rights. The apostle Paul followed this pattern by setting aside his right to material support in order to win more for Christ (1 Corinthians 9:16–19).

4. *The believer as a slave follows from the heart the model of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:7).*

Jesus took the form of a slave by setting aside the right to exercise His divine attributes. His essential nature did not change.

Questions for self-evaluation: What rights are you holding on to? How do you respond when others do not yield to you your rights?

III. *A steward who faithfully manages God's possessions*

A steward is the manager of someone else's property.

1. *The believer as a steward recognizes in the heart that everything belongs to God.*

Your very life (Acts 17:25) comes from and belongs to God, as even Job confessed (Job 1:21). It includes all our abilities, natural (Exodus 4:11) and spiritual (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4–6; Eph 4:7–16). It includes the church and God's Word (Titus 1:7).

2. *The believer as a steward manages faithfully from the heart all that God has entrusted.*

The quantity we have received is not so important, but the faithful use of what is entrusted to us (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27). This includes especially how leaders handle the word of God which has been entrusted to them (1 Corinthians 4:1–2; 2 Timothy 1:14).

Questions for self-evaluation: What has God entrusted to you and are you managing it well (body, time, abilities)? Are you acting as a steward for God or serving yourself?

God wants believers to serve from the heart. Leaders should model such service. It is presenting a visible example of what it means to serve like Jesus Christ. All believers are to grow up into Christ, who is the Head. Without this servant's heart, position and skills mean nothing. Pray that God would give you the heart of a servant.

For further thought and discussion:

- How does one best determine the heart of a (potential) elder-pastor?
- What are the areas of stewardship that are particularly special for pastor-elders?
- How could such areas be evaluated before a man becomes an elder-pastor?