

SET FREE FROM STUFF (PART 4) – SERVICE (IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME)

Opening:

Tell about a time when you found unexpected joy in doing something for someone else.

Or tell about a time when you discovered joy in being served by another.

Getting into God's Word

'It's all about me.'

In what ways does our culture (consumerism, materialism, advertising) sell people this line? Where do you find yourself beginning to believe it? How does a me-centred view of the world tie you up and keep you from being fully human?

1. God's grace in serving us:

Read **Mark 8:27-38**.

How does Jesus' response to Peter's confession turn the paradigm 'It's all about me' on its head? What happens to those who try to grasp onto their own life? Why is this true, do you think?

Read **Mark 10:35-45**.

How does Jesus characterise his mission? From your knowledge of Jesus' life, in what ways does Jesus serve us? What are the results of his service?

How does hearing and obeying Jesus' call to service begin to set you free and make you more human?

Comment on this quote:

'If Jesus says that he came not to be served but to serve, then our first calling is to let ourselves be served by him.' (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

How does this quote challenge the usual reading of this passage?

Read **Ephesians 2:4-10**.

What is God's motivation for our salvation?

What is the *purpose* of God's salvation? In other words, what does God save us *for*?

Do you often think of yourself as 'God's masterpiece, created to do good works'? What do you think might be the 'good works' God has saved and re-created you for?

How do those relate to Jesus' words in **Mark 10:35-45**? (**Galatians 5:13** may help too).

Question: How and where shall we serve?

Martin Luther and other reformers emphasised that there were *three* areas for Christian service – church, family, and life in society. In this study I bring the latter two under one heading of *vocation*. Jesus Christ, our great Servant, has called us to serve – and this does not take place in abstract, but in concrete life situations. This study focuses on two areas where Christians are called by Jesus into service. One is to *serve God's people* in the *church*; the other is to *serve God's world*

in and through our *vocation* – the place or station in life into which God has placed each person. A question that can give great clarity as we consider Jesus' call to service, and thus to freedom, is this: *Where has God located me in terms of the church, my family life, and my community, and what is he calling me to be and do in those locations?*

Andrew Pfeiffer writes, 'The Christian calling is not so much a generic one as a specific one. God has so ordered our lives that we find ourselves in *real* locations, *real* families, *real* congregations, *real* neighbourhoods, and we are called to live our our faith in those specific locations and calling.'¹

Area 1: Serving in the church – through the use of our Spiritual Gifts

God, through his Holy Spirit, has some wonderful grace-gifts for you to discover, unwrap and use in his service. These gifts are designed to give you joy and freedom from the terrible burden of selfishness (“It’s all about me”) engendered by consumerism. The gifts are given for you to serve in the church, for the building up of the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12.

As you read this passage, remember that the *charis* (grace) of God is the power behind the *charismata* – the gifts of God given for the building up of his people. Paul finds a *charisma* in everything that builds up the church. God is the one who gives the gifts by his grace. The operations of the gifts are supernatural but not magical – the gifts can be cultivated.

V1-7, v11

Who has received spiritual gifts?

For what purpose are the gifts given?

V12-27: Which gifts are the most important? How do the grace-gifts God gives to different individuals relate to each other?

Write here, and share with your group, the answers to the following questions.

Sometimes, Christians make the whole area of Spiritual Gifts needlessly complicated, with checklists and scales and questionnaires. While each of these has its place, recognising the connection between *joy (chara)* and *grace (charis)* and the *grace-gifts (charismata)*, a simpler way of approaching the freedom of service in the church would ask the following questions:

What do you love to do? What gives you great joy or pleasure? (or – what do other people say you're good at?)

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How might God like to use that to build up the church, the body of Christ?

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Given the answer to these questions, and the truth that ‘gifts’ are given for the delight of the Giver and the delight of the receiver, you are probably getting close to picturing your 'spiritual gifts.'

¹ Andrew Pfeiffer ('Preparing to Give a Defence for the Christian Hope,' *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Volume 43 No. 2, August 2009, emphasis mine).

Stop now and pray for the Holy Spirit to show you how God might like to use your gifts and talents (what delights you and what you're good at) for the building up of the body of Christ.

Prayer suggestion:

Holy Spirit, you have given each one of God's children gifts for the building up of your church. That means me, too. Open my mind and heart to the ways you are calling me to use my gifts and talents for your purposes. Help me discover, unwrap, open, and use the spiritual gifts you've given me – and to know your JOY in serving. Give me your JOY in using your graceful gifts in service within the church.

Amen.

Stop and pray for each other in the use of your spiritual gifts and talents. Encourage each other in the ways you can use these for God's glory.

Area 2: Serving the world – in and through our vocation

Read **Mark 1:29-31**

How did Peter's mother serve Jesus?

The word for 'served' or 'waited on' in this passage (Greek: *diakoneo*) is the same word used throughout the rest of the New Testament for Jesus' *ministry* and *service* to us (as we read above in **Mark 10:45**), Paul's *ministry* of the Gospel (**2 Corinthians 3:3**), the angels *helping* Jesus in the desert (**Matthew 4:11**), and more.

Peter's mother didn't serve Jesus by preaching spectacular sermons or converting thousands of people. She served Jesus in her God-given calling in life, as a mother and hostess, by serving and preparing a meal for him. In other words, she served Jesus *in her vocation*.

What is your vocation? What are your callings in life? Home, work, family, community – where has God placed you?

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In what ways do you see the grace of God at work in your vocations? How is God using your presence to bring his grace to others?

Where have you found joy and freedom in serving others?

How does this call to service help set you free from the me-centredness of consumerism?

Are there some 'jobs' which are out of bounds – work which could never be considered a 'vocation' (or calling) of God to a Christian person? Why?

How could a renewed understanding of Jesus' call to serve in your vocation help to transform your experience of everyday life?

What does it mean to you that you are serving God by serving other people? How does this help you in your daily life? How might God be calling you deeper into his service through serving others in these areas?

Finish your study with prayer and encouragement to 'serve by grace.'