

FORWARD

Week Six | February 11, 2018 | Moving Forward in Our Serving, Part 2

PREPARATION

GETTING READY:

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 4:11–12, Romans 12:4–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–7. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Believers proclaim Christ by serving others in various ways—by equipping others for the work of service, by offering their unique gifts or resources to an area of service in the Church, and by remembering that their service is for the common good.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we actively serve the Church in unique ways, we move it forward in its mission to proclaim Christ. When we avoid serving, we do not proclaim Christ as we should, and we leave the Church deficient instead of healthy.

MEDITATE

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11–12)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *How does our culture view the idea of being a “servant” to another person? How do Christians understand service?*

Q: *What do you think serving the Church looks like on a weekly basis?*

A well-known story circulated around the internet years ago. It goes like this:

A few years ago, a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night’s dinner. In their rush, with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table that held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly-missed boarding.

All but one. He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings, and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him and asked one of them to call his wife and explain that he was taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the floor. He was glad he did.

The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping and no one caring for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered the apples, put them back on the table, and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised. These he set aside in another basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?” She nodded through her tears. He continued on with, “I hope we didn’t spoil your day too badly.”

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “Mister...” He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, “Are you Jesus?” He stopped in mid-stride, mouth gaping open, amazed. Slowly, he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul. “Are you Jesus?”

He certainly was not Jesus, but his actions obviously put Jesus on display. This heartwarming story is a wonderful way to illustrate the purpose of good works—to proclaim how excellent, wonderful, compassionate, and present Jesus is in a world full of darkness. As this businessman’s actions reveal, our acts of service in the

community and also the Church (as we will study in this lesson) should always proclaim Christ. Like this man who stopped to serve and build up another person with the resources he had (his time, his extra \$40, and his compassion), we too should offer whatever we have to serve those in our local community of faith and build them up. Whether it's our time, personality, gifts, resources, or passions, we should seek an area of service where Christ can be better proclaimed through our efforts, and His body can be edified.

🗣️: *Share about a time when another Christian unexpectedly ministered to you or served you. How did this build you up as a believer?*

🗣️: *How does this businessman's story change your view of serving in a ministry of your local church?*

📌 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Today, we will finish a two-part lesson on how God moves us forward in our *servicing*. Last week we learned that believers perform works of service that God has prepared for them to do in order to give evidence of their genuine faith to others and silence the accusations of Christ's opponents. Now, we will explore the role our acts of service have in the Church and the message they communicate when we serve as God instructs us. Through our selected passages this week, we will learn four aspects of Christian service as seen in the Church:

- 1. CHRISTIAN SERVICE PROCLAIMS CHRIST'S EXCELLENCIES**
- 2. CHRISTIAN SERVICE EQUIPS THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY**
- 3. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS UNIQUE FOR EACH OF US**
- 4. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

CHRISTIAN SERVICE PROCLAIMS CHRIST'S EXCELLENCIES

❏ 1 PETER 2:9

Q: *How does Peter define the Church?*

Q: *What is the purpose of God's chosen people?*

In this section, Peter starts by telling us who we are in Christ, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” This is incredible news for the Church, which in Peter’s time was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Peter is saying something remarkable. While being the chosen, royal, and holy people of God was once reserved just for ethnic Israel (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 43:20–21), now, *anyone* who believes in Christ is considered God’s people! The Church now inherits that role, being a light that shines to the nations, introducing them to God and His ways.

We see this principle in the remainder of the verse. Peter doesn’t simply say the people were chosen, but that they were chosen with an explicit purpose, that they may “proclaim the excellencies” of Christ, the Savior who transferred them from being children of darkness to being children of light (Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5). The Church is made up of those who have switched kingdoms, so to speak. Christ the King changes their residence from the Enemy’s territory to His (Colossians 1:13)!

Indeed, Peter does not expect us to sit in our new and privileged position as God’s chosen people and not *do* anything with it. Instead, he wants us to *use* it to serve others and proclaim Christ. But how exactly are we to proclaim Christ’s excellencies? With just our words? As he would go on to say, Peter desires the chosen Church to proclaim Christ in both word *and* deed (1 Peter 3:13–17). While we certainly should proclaim Christ *verbally*, we are also supposed to actively proclaim Him through our acts of service.

Q: *Why do we sometimes forget that our service, and not just our words, proclaims valuable truths about Christ?*

Q: *How would your life look different if you lived each day as if your service to others was a proclamation of the greatness of God?*

CHRISTIAN SERVICE EQUIPS THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY

■ EPHESIANS 4:11-12

- Q: *What roles did God give the Church? Can you name a few church leaders in your own body that fit these descriptions? Why is that encouraging?*
- Q: *Why did God give these roles to the Church, according to this verse? How does this challenge or excite you?*

What does actively “proclaiming Christ” to one another look like in the daily life of the local church body? Ephesians 4 gives us some wonderful details to help us answer that question. To help His chosen, royal, and holy Church represent Christ the way it should, God gave His people certain roles. In biblical times, to start the Church, He began with *apostles* who carried the message of the gospel to new places and wrote Scripture for our benefit. Though the role of apostle is no longer active in the Church, there are various other roles mentioned in these verses that are still present in the Church to help it move forward in its development and faithfulness.

First there are those with *prophetic* gifts, helping the people of God see where there are shortcomings or even hypocrisy in the Church (much like the prophets did for Israel in the Old Testament) so that believers can see the sin in their lives and repent of it often. Next there are *evangelists*, those God has appointed with a special ability to share the gospel and see conversions. Though we *all* are commanded to share the gospel, we follow the leadership of those who are especially gifted and appointed in this area. Next there are *shepherds*, those God has appointed to direct, disciple, and pastor the people of God in local congregations. And there are *teachers*, those who are especially gifted to teach the Word of God to the Church, helping it root all its ministry and practice in the Scriptures.

These verses finish by telling us why God has appointed all these roles in the Church, so that the saints will be equipped for the work of ministry! Every single person in every local congregation needs to be personally equipped in their own area of service. There aren't “professional Christians” who do the work of the Church while the rest of us do less sacred work. No, the reason God gives certain roles to certain people in His body is so *everyone* is equipped to do the work of the Church! The point of various roles of service in the Church is so even more people will be equipped for service. *Every* Christian is called to service, and God makes sure that every person is prepared for that service through church leadership.

While there are many other roles and responsibilities in the Church, this list gives us a great overview of the various ways God helps His people proclaim the excellencies of Christ in the daily life of the Church. How encouraging it is to know even in His choice of roles in the Church, God is committing to moving us forward in our Christian service.

♀: *Church leadership roles are not ultimately in place to do the Church's work. They are ultimately there to equip you to do the work of the Church. How does this challenge your usual views of church staff? How does this also encourage you?*

♀: *In what ways has your church equipped you to serve? Have you ever taken a step to live in line with Ephesians 4 and serve your church in a particular ministry?*

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS UNIQUE FOR EACH OF US

■ ■ ROMANS 12:4–8 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–7

♀: *What do all our activities in the Church have in common? What makes them different?*

♀: *Why do you think our areas of service must be different for the Church to move forward in its health and development?*

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are two major passages that reveal the various ways God has resourced His people with diverse gifts, roles, callings, and activities. For His people to move forward in their service, the Lord encourages them by promising He is the one empowering *all* of their efforts, gifts, and acts of service. Though there's only *one* Lord behind all of this, God also makes sure to help us see that there is a variety of areas of ministry that members of the Church are called to serve in (1 Corinthians 12:4–6).

We are each empowered, called, and gifted by the same God, but the specific areas of service will vary from person to person, depending on the unique calling and gifting of the Lord (Romans 12:6). While we are united by one God, our good works of service are unique to the ways God has resourced, wired, and gifted us individually. As a result,

the body of Christ would not be moving forward as it should without *your* hands on deck in the specific area of service God has called *you* to. The Lord has built His Church in a way that requires every member to be active in good works and service. As each person does their part, the whole body moves forward into the world as it should (Ephesians 4:16).

We take great encouragement from the reality that each member does not have the same function (Romans 12:4), for therein lies the beautiful diversity of the body and uniqueness God has designed in each person. In these passages, we learn that we should offer whatever unique resources or gifting we have to serve the body in specific ways, whether that be teaching, encouragement, mercy, etc. As we do this, the whole church moves forward in its witness to the world, and together we are able to proclaim the excellencies of Christ, the Head of this wonderful, united, and diverse body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:15–16).

🗨️: *Think through the various ministries of our church. Which of these areas of service has God uniquely gifted or resourced you for?*

🗨️: *When it comes to service in the Church, how does understanding our uniqueness motivate us to get more involved than before? Why would the motivation vanish if we were all resourced, gifted, and wired the same way?*

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

📖 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7, AND REREAD EPHESIANS 4:12

🗨️: *How does an average person in our culture view his or her talents and resources?*

🗨️: *How do these verses combat the culture's view of service?*

One final aspect of Christian service for us to remember is that it is not done for us. It's done for others. While many can get overly interested in their own wiring, personality, and gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:12 sharply remind us that the unique calling, gift, activity, or area of service given to a believer by God is not ultimately about the believer, but “for the common good.” The goal of service isn't to bring applause to the server, but to “build up the

body” and move the Church forward in its mission to proclaim Christ to the world.

We should certainly give attention to questions like, “Am I getting equipped in my gifting and area of service in the Church?” However, we should give equal attention to questions like, “Are my resources, gifting, acts of service, and even my whole *life* being used for others, or am I making all those things about me?” Another way to phrase it is this: “Am I interested in being equipped to teach, for example, so I can be known as a great teacher or because I genuinely desire for those in my local body to grow in their knowledge of God?”

While we all rightly want to be developed in our area of service, our motivation for that development should be to better serve others, not to elevate or draw attention to ourselves. No matter what our gift or offering is to the area of service we have chosen in the Church, our efforts should be directed toward the common good of the entire body.

Q: *How have you made your gifting or your service about you instead of others?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *How can you remind yourself frequently that your acts of service are really a proclamation of the greatness of Christ?*

Q: *What area of service in the Church is God leading you to get involved in? Who can you contact this week to learn more about jumping on board with this ministry?*

Q: *If you don’t yet feel equipped for service or ministry, what church leader can you approach this week to ask about getting equipped for service?*

Q: *How can you make your area of service more about others than about yourself in the coming weeks and months? How can you better pursue the “common good” of your local faith community with your abilities, resources, and gifts?*

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- God, help me remember that my acts of service are not just nice things to do, but instead proclamations about the excellencies of Your Son.
- God, lead me to someone in my local church who can better equip me for works of service.
- God, show me exactly what area of service You want me to use my unique abilities, resources, gifts, and passions in so Your Church will move forward in its mission.
- God, convict me in the moments when I am making my acts of service about me instead of the common good of Your body.

COMMENTARY

1 PETER 2:9 Just as Peter harkens back to Old Testament passages like Isaiah 43:20–21 when calling the Church God's "chosen" people, he also harkens back here for the purpose of God's people. As in Isaiah's day, Peter is saying that God chose the Church to "declare his praise." For Israel, that meant declaring Yahweh's praise for delivering them from their physical and political enemies. For the Church, declaring God's praise means proclaiming how marvelous Christ is for rescuing us from our spiritual enemies and transferring us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light.

ROMANS 12:4–5 The diversity and unity of the church is illustrated by comparison to the human body. Just as the human body is one whole with many parts, so the church is united though it is composed of many diverse members. The New Testament uses the analogy of a physical body to describe the Church in many places. For further reading and context, explore all of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–7 By referencing God (the Father), Lord (the Son), and Spirit (the Holy Spirit) as equal agents in empowering a believer's gifting, Paul is making an overt reference to the Trinity. The most common pattern in the New Testament Epistles is to refer to God the Father with the word "God." Likewise, they refer to God the Son with the word "Lord." Therefore, both names are evidence of deity. Lastly, "Spirit" is put on equal terms with the other two when describing the way God empowers the believer. The diversity of divine persons within the unity of the Trinity should be reflected in the diversity of gifts within the unity of the body of Christ in Corinth and in the Church today.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the New American Commentary Series. The introductory illustration is cited from Steve Severance, on SermonIllustrationLibrary.com (<http://www.sermonillustrationlibrary.org/illustration42>).*

