

“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Act 20:35)

Vexing. That is a word that describes so much today. It gives me pause as I watch my children grow up in a world that was already so far gone when I was their age, I didn't see how it could decay any more without drawing the full wrath of God down upon it; but here it is and here we are. Every day brings some new headline that makes you simultaneously want to vomit, cry, and in righteous indignation call upon the wrath of God to end the evil. Every day some new thing that if you weren't actually seeing you would not believe. Some young boy tossed to his own devices by his parents, parading around like a little girl. Or vice versa. No standards, no understanding or care for God's word. Vexing indeed.

So much pride, arrogancy and selfishness surrounding us and our little ones. All the yelling about love, kindness, sympathy and compassion while more and more street corners are occupied by people who haven't had the least bit of this human 'compassion' shown to them – maybe ever. The rich hoarding more and the numbers of the poor growing greater. Murder a past-time, fornication and adultery sporting hobbies. Sin, so much sin, being elevated to a status of holiness; elevated to a status of personal and national identity. So much truth being disregarded, vilified, and labeled hate. Selfies. Do I have to say anything more than 'selfies'? Vexing.

How can you not be vexed like Lot?

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) (2Pe 2:7-8)

Lot lived in times not unlike our own, fully given over to sin at every turn in every corner of life, and daily experienced this vexation. That word 'vexed' is actually two words in the Greek. In verse 7 it means to 'wear down or labor down' in verse 8, it means 'to torture, pain, toil or torment'. Similar concepts but different. The idea is that Lot was worn slick with the active, labored torture and torment of what he saw and heard on a daily basis. I can feel his pain. Can you?

Perhaps what is most vexing is the raw selfishness, the product of overwhelming pride. There is no inclination toward duty to others or a sense of service and self-sacrifice. This generation talks so much about charity, and love, and inclusion, but the truth of the matter is for all that talk, they are a bunch of selfish, self-centered hypocrites. Even at their best, when they look like they're helping people, they are serving themselves, not the person or people they pretend to serve. So much, maybe all of this world's "charity" is done to further the cause of the person providing the so-called charity; by appearing to give so they draw the sympathies and admiration of others, to cause

people to be indebted to them, or to assuage some burning guilt that they think they can extinguish with “good deeds”.

Paul teaches us, from the words of Christ, that giving is a more blessed action than receiving. Today I endeavor to break down for consideration three areas of service, or giving, which should consume our lives. Those being

1. Service to mankind,
2. Service to the elect,
3. Service to God.

Before I undertake that examination I want to look at this verse a little more directly.

“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Act 20:35)

Looking at this verse, we are reminded that not all of Christ’s words are recorded for us in what are commonly called “The Gospels”, and indeed not all are recorded at all. John tells us

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (Joh 21:25)

Those things which were deemed by God, in His holiness, righteousness and mercy as important for us to have direct knowledge of have been delivered by the Holy Ghost to us:

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (Joh 14:26)

Here in Acts, Paul delivers a quote that we have no direct recounting of in the history of Christ. That doesn’t make it suspect or any less of a quote. These words are as most assuredly the words of Christ as any others. He clearly taught this precept of service and giving, for example

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” (Mat 5:42)

So there is no doubt that these words were Christ’s and are an excellent compendium of His teachings on this matter of giving. The importance of this is that you can’t put

them to a lesser meaning or importance thinking this is just some thought Paul had. These are definitely Christ's teachings.

The whole of Acts 20 has many instructive ideas and precepts, but these are the last words Paul spoke to these dearest of friends, amongst whom he had lived and served for some three years. Paul was under no delusion as to what was to become him when he left, and he speaks of it plainly to his friends. The last words a person speaks to you will have special meaning, and I don't mean in some tacky, maudlin, ultra-sentimental, Hollywood way. When a man of Paul's stature speaks, people listen. He was E. F. Hutton before E. F. Hutton. So we should look closely at Paul's last words to the Ephesians to see what was on his mind and what his last message to them contained. Besides the call to service, there are two other lessons I see in this verse.

The first lesson I cling to is a very simple one – **be an example**.

Paul says "*I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring...*" whereby he lays out very plainly to us all that he was not a man of words, but a man of deeds. And that he wasn't just a man of spiritual deeds, but a man of physical ones, as well. He worked hard, he sustained himself, even though a world traveler, going from place to place to preach the Gospel; he owed no man any worldly thing, as we also see from his time in Corinth:

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers." (Act 18:1-3)

Paul did the things he expected others to do. He was a busy man. He spent his time in the labors he expected others to participate in. He didn't sit idly by bossing them all around and being catered to by those around him. He served just as he expected others to serve one another. He didn't let his position and station as an Apostle earn him favors or elevate his status above that of a servant.

We must show our young people and indeed the whole world how they ought to behave; how they should live their lives. We must maintain our diligence and our studiousness, even to the end, and not allow our weary bones to be weary, our tired bodies to be tired. If we do not continue to labor, why will our young ones labor in our stead? Why will another pick up their cross if they do not daily see us carry ours joyfully and with diligence?

It is hard to be an example sometimes. You don't always want to feel like you're being watched, you're under a microscope to be judged for your behavior and how it impacts

other people or how it teaches them to be a certain way. We've all struggled with this, and we will continue to struggle with it, it is a war against our human nature and frailty.

But if we think of Paul, here at this hour, and who he is talking to, perhaps it becomes easier to put aside our fleshly burdens and look to how we can be of service to those around us. We see here a deeply passionate man, dedicated to the service of Christ, knowing – because the Holy Ghost has told him (see verse 23) – that deep trials await him, speaking with these elders about his departure and being an example to them. Reminding them of his example, not to boast, but to encourage them to work hard at being an example themselves and to serve. He doesn't wallow in uncertainty or express any fear to them over what awaits him. He doesn't get all weepy and tell them to remember him or don't cry for me, Ephesus. He doesn't get sentimental and tell them to 'remember the good times we had'.

No, no. Paul maintains his state as an example to them and to us. He maintains that faith and strength, using these last moments of time with these dear friends to keep instructing them in how they should lead the flock, knowing what will befall them and what they need to know. He redeems the time. He keeps working.

Which leads me to the second key piece of the lesson – he keeps working. In order to keep working, he had to start working. He didn't wait for someone to tell him what to do specifically anywhere he went. He put his hand to the work he found to do, and that's our lesson. We must always be examining what there is to do and finding a way to do it. It might not always be holding a sign. It might not always be keeping a website running. It might not be lawyering. It might be something else.

If we get complacent with the way things are, and for some of you, this is the way they've always been, we can start taking these things we do for granted, and we end up looking at them as though they are holy, good works and there is no reason to change them or consider new things that need doing. When you've been at this as long as we have, and we continue putting our hands to the work day after day, it becomes easier for us to miss new things that need doing.

There was a day when these things weren't here. There was a day when we didn't have a website, but Ben created one and basically turned the whole world upside down and simultaneously created a whole lot of work for me 😊. There was a day when there were no signs, but then a day came when it was decided signs needed to be made and a way to make them discovered and employed. There were days when it was necessary to stand at a FAX machine watching flyers go out all over the world.

It is critical for us not only to keep working, but to also keep examining what work needs to be done. We cannot become so married to a thing that we call a 'good work' that we fail to see the need to do another, perhaps different work. We must be

examples to one another in both the willingness to work tirelessly and the willingness to find new work.

Paul specifically exhorts the elders at Ephesus, who he knew would pass it on to the rest of the body, that a life of service, specifically, a life in service to others, should be the driving force throughout their lives. In all our labors we should seek to support the weak. That support there is Strong's 482, *antilambanomai*, which is made up of two other words, one *anti*, which means the same as it does for us – the opposite of, and *lambano*, which means to take. Paul is literally telling them to give and give and give. To serve the weak. Give whatever is needed and necessary, whether that is time, money, goods, exhortation, whatever. Give it, and he drives home the point by quoting Christ's admonition that it is more blessed to give than receive. And not in some Christmas-y mass way, trying to milk money for a toy drive for all the little children, don't you know. I mean in a real, present, spiritual way.

The Scriptures tell us plainly that serving and giving have their rewards, but it also makes it plain that seeking the rewards outright is not the point. See these two examples:

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” (Mat 25:34-36)

“Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” (Isa 58:9-11)

The Lord rewards those who serve and sacrifice in His name. Sometimes immediately but ultimately in eternity. But you don't give drink to the thirsty or draw out your soul to the hungered with an eye to getting something, if you're doing these things from a spiritual foundation. That spiritual foundation is all about serving and not gaining.

Consider briefly that while it is more blessed to give than receive, it is still blessed to receive. Receiving with a spirit of bitterness, anger, resentment or perhaps worst of all, indifference and ingratitude is not at all blessed. It can sometimes be difficult to receive, out of pride or discontentment with your lot, but receiving with a proper sense of gratitude and thankfulness is a blessed thing to do and is in itself a giving back to the person who sought to give you aid in the first place.

Consider that we receive everything from our Father. If it were unblessed to receive, how could that be? Also consider how we should look at and use those things we receive from God, and apply those ideas to receiving from our brethren. Should we not receive with humility and meekness? Ought our reception of temporal and spiritual gifts, helps and assistance be met with humble gratitude? Should we not recognize that we have no right to expect nor are we deserving of that which we did not labor for with our own hands? Indeed, how could we possibly be deserving of anything given us from God or man when our every utterance is an offense and our every deed contrary to His manifest will?

Yet, here we have it. Despite our lack of worth, it is blessed to receive, especially if we do that which is right with what we have received. Looking at the context of Paul's words here to his dear friends at Ephesus, I believe you can make a strong argument that his overall thesis is contentment through labor. He is promoting a life of labor and service to one another and indeed all men. He is promoting a labor in the word and labor of the hands, and to what end? That he might obtain things or grow his worldly wealth and status? God forbid. He did it to teach by example "how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak". He received the ability to care for himself through the labor of his own hands and he turned that gift into a way for him to give, supplying the weak and the poor such things as he could, not coveting the gold or silver of other men. He applied the same ethic to his physical labors that he did the spiritual ones, and we must do the same.

There are probably more ways to look at service than the three I will undertake examination of, but I believe that these three provide the most comprehensive view of the matter and give us some guidance on how to live a life of service. Let us now look to these a little more specifically.

Service to mankind

We frequently speak of our ministry as our service to mankind. We are watchmen, and the watchman provides a great and necessary service to the people.

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." (Eze 3:17)

A sense of service should frame our ministry. We aren't taking to the streets and breaching our four walls with preaching to condemn, judge, pronounce our hatred of, or in any other wise "take it to" this generation. The foundation of our ministry is one of service. Genuine service to our fellow man. Just because the world doesn't see what we do as a service is supremely irrelevant. If any of them see the truth before they die because they saw or heard our words, they will understand the service we did for them. If they don't, they'll still hate it while they suffer in hell. Neither response should

sway our sense of service.

The world's view of our service must never taint our motivation. This is an important thing. If you don't go out into the world with your sign with a motivation to serve, the work you're doing isn't good work. If you don't write a tweet, a blog post, a whatever from a place of serving the wretched souls who are running toward their own destruction, you're just piling on. Service is about setting aside your feelings about the thing, your desires, your wants, and focusing on those being served. That focus on the served shapes your perspective.

Service in this context does not mean pampering, it doesn't mean tolerating sin. I'm not sure in any context it means that, but I say that to be clear. It doesn't mean being weak or mealy-mouthed in the words you use or the way you come across as long as you're not being inappropriate. It doesn't mean trying to be liked. Most importantly perhaps it does not mean trying to win souls to Christ, convert an unbeliever, or save the damned. While our service may be the causal agent that God uses to do any of those things, it is not our aim, our goal or our job to think we CAN do them.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44)

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21)

The preaching may be the cause of a man's being drawn to God, but we cannot draw them. We can only perform the service and be content with the results God has chosen to achieve by it. That is also also part of our service to God – being content to be a vessel.

For our ministry to be a service, it requires approaching it like it is a service, one that is necessary and helpful to the recipient, not just a duty we must perform. You must genuinely be trying to help people with it, else how is it a service? It is easy when doing this work to forget that, I think. This is a vexing lot amongst whom we live, perhaps one of the most ungrateful generations since Nimrod walked the earth. When all we get are hard looks, hard speeches and hard fists, it is easy to put what we do purely into a context of battle, to steel yourself up for the harshness, put your game face on, armor up and get into a defensive position.

While this is battle, first and foremost, what we do is a service, and we must endeavor to approach it as such. There is some difficulty here between these two ideas, but I do not think they are irreconcilable. We put on our armor to protect us, but we're going out to help. It's the way a law enforcement officer should think every morning, I think – "I'm going out to serve these people, and I'm only wearing the gun as a last resort". It's

a good analogy for us, even if it limps. Our purpose is to serve, but we can't go out unarmed. God provides us the armor and these hard foreheads to withstand the rebellion of those we serve (Ephesians 6 and Ezekiel 3:9).

Issuing this warning is not the sum total of our duty to serve. We have plenty of opportunities to serve our fellow man in everyday life aside from holding a sign. I'm not talking about volunteering at the Rescue Mission one day a month and putting pictures on your Instagram account with some homeless guy you just served soup. Aside from the Instagram picture, if you want to volunteer at the Rescue Mission, go ahead. I'm not sure that's a good use of your time, because everything about everyone I've ever met doing volunteer work for them, the United Way, Red Cross, or any of hundreds of other "volunteer organizations" ends up being all about the people serving, not those served. When they're inviting the press in for photo ops and putting out newsletters about how many people they've helped this month, blah blah blah, it's a giant mess. Here's the problem:

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:1-4)

When you join up with most of these groups and the way they do things, it's impossible to do these things secretly. It is difficult to be truly in service to the person when you're putting on a production about how wonderful it is that you're doing the service. There is as much or more effort put into promoting the circus-like nature as there is in actually performing the service, which negates the good nature of it. If you're inviting photographers to your charity event, or encouraging people to post about what they're doing on social media, you're doing it the wrong way.

Service is not about doing things to get something out of them. That's what I despise about the folksy use of this passage in modern Christianity. Its use when they try to drum up participation in their Xmas toy and food drives makes me want to vomit. It's all about self-satisfaction, and it's vile and filthy. It is not about service.

Make no mistake, when you serve from a proper frame of mind and heart, you can receive an immense amount of satisfaction and peace, but if you're serving solely for the purpose of receiving that warm and fuzzy, you're not giving yourself in service, you're leeching off someone else's need just to satisfy your own greed and desire for self-satisfaction.

That might seem harsh, but consider this idea. What is it to serve but to give of

yourself? To serve is a sacrifice, a giving of something that leaves you with less than when you started. If you're sacrificing with the intended purpose of having MORE than when you started, there is no sacrifice.

So if I'm not suggesting you all start working the United Way campaign drive at your work or spending time in the soup kitchen, how else do we serve mankind at large?

To answer that, connect these verses:

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5)

"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:12)

"And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field." (Genesis 39:5)

I believe that living our lives in a way that is pleasing to God is a service not only to Him, but to those amongst whom we walk and live. When we approach our lives with a desire to, and rise up every day with a singular goal – that is to glorify God with our service, we serve our heathen masters and all those around us.

The men of this world may not see it as service, as Peter tells us and we know firsthand. There are times when our service seems to come at odds with their head-long rush to destruction and it creates friction, but in a very practical way as we see from the example of Joseph in Potiphar's house, when we seek contentedness and to serve those all around us who are of the world, it is a service to them. By being an example of contentedness and peace we can bring peace upon contentious situations. I think everyone who is in the workplace knows how contentious this generation has become. There is no sense of service in today's society, only a strong sense of self. From the most mundane things like where to get lunch to the most critical issues of business, these people can't get along. They don't know how to set aside their own petty selfishness and sacrifice something of theirs in service to someone else. But we do that every day.

If we see our daily walk as a service to this generation, being an example by actively looking for ways to serve and help people get past themselves, we do genuinely serve our fellow man. Again, not out of selfishness and a desire to earn favor or look special, but to help those who won't help themselves. They are so blind to their selfish ways

they don't even see they need the help most of the time. Our way of life is a service that can help them get past their self-deployed roadblocks.

That is one way that prayer is a service, and praying for this peace-seeking mindset and finding ways of helping these people is a good use of prayer. Our prayers for our leaders are part of this service we do – help them to lead us properly, Lord that we may live peaceably and focus our energies on serving you more!! That is a service, and that is the state of mind we should find ourselves in every morning when we wake up – how can I help other people?

Service to our co-elect

That state of mind then gets refined and honed down to the elect in the earth. We don't want to use up all our energies on the world, but if we are living in service for those who hate us, how much easier is it to live in service to our brothers and sisters? In the main, it should be easier.

Like everything in our lives, pride is a danger here. If you analyze this too much and start patting yourself on the back for all the help you give people, and you start thinking you have all the answers, you drift away from service very quickly. We can be fooled by our own hearts into thinking we're a servant of others when in fact we're serving our own egos.

The key to avoiding that is making Paul's words your driving force

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (Php 2:3-4)

This is hard to do if your heart isn't in the right place and if you aren't really out to serve anyone. There's the danger! There's the pitfall! If you spend all your time in the world thinking you're serving them but instead building yourself up in your head as some sort of 'winner of souls' or 'shining example doing good work' when you get back amongst those who also have light, you've got to work harder to keep up your sense of superiority. You've got to see yourself as superior to others in order to help, since only those who are in a lesser state of understanding or spirituality or righteousness or whatever would need your help, right? You end up elevating yourself inordinately.

There's the challenge. Remembering two things that seem paradoxical. First, everyone needs help, and second, everyone is capable of helping. There is no first or last, greater or lesser in this discussion. Esteem your brothers and sisters as greater than yourself, recognizing you are just as needful of God's mercy as any other creature.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” (Romans 3:23)

We're all in the same boat, so to speak. About the time you start looking at something you've done and the words "good work" frame up on your lips, punch yourself in the mouth and think of Romans 3:23. There is no good work done by our hands, our hearts or our lips, and that kind of thinking leads you to elevate yourself above others, the exact opposite of what Paul exhorts us to.

Looking at yourself as having service to give but simultaneously not elevating yourself in your own mind as being better able to serve than another is a balanced paradox that I believe only the elect of God can find. Paul is an excellent example of working toward this balance, recognizing he was sent to serve and keeping himself in a humble state by working constantly. He never sought to elevate himself, he worked for his own wages and supported those he traveled with, never seeking support from anyone he went to see. This is a position for us to aspire to and work toward every day. If we are effective at fulfilling this exhortation to

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;" (Romans 12:10)

Then the act of serving one another becomes easier to achieve. This preferring one another is an act that you perform. It is a mindset that you beat back your pride and sense of self-importance to achieve. This is what the world refuses to do. For all their talk about love and tolerance and consideration of one another, they simply will not set aside their self-interests to consider anyone in their lives as preferable to themselves. As we continue to occupy and we see this state of affairs get worse and worse, our challenge is to stay out of that poisonous cloud, both with our brethren and those in the world. If you don't wake up every morning thinking of yourself as being in last place on the world leaderboard of everything, you should.

Living in service to others doesn't necessarily mean serving them in the sense of a maid or a butler. It is a mindset that allows you to see the simplest things for the service they can be. It can be as simple as insuring you are at the dinner table on time because your mother asked you to be, and doing it every night. This might seem like a mundane thing until you consider why your mother asks you to do that. Is it because she is an OCD person-tracker, obsessed with time and moving from one thing to the next at a precise moment on the clock, OR is it because she knows that sitting at the dinner table is an important issue for your father, and she is working to keep his wishes for the house fulfilled?

This is a rather simplistic example, but highlights the point. Serving is about consideration of another person's needs prior to your own wants or desires. You want 5 more minutes of Xbox time to finish off that demi-gorgon – and what's the harm, really? I mean, the food isn't even on the table yet and no one's eating, so 5 minutes doesn't kill anything and the world isn't going to spin out of control over it. But if you

consider it from your mother and father's perspective, that's 5 minutes of time they aren't talking to you about your day or exploring the state of your heart and mind, helping you focus on God. This is 5 minutes of additional chaos in their day where the order they seek isn't present – and you're contributing to it.

That 5 minutes focused on yourself adds to the hours of time they've spent away from doing what they are trying to do – serve God by properly caring for you. Your selfishness then compounds into more time since they have to call you to the table, inquire where you were, and turn aside from their agenda to address your selfishness. 5 minutes turns into 30 pretty quick. And with some care, it would be avoided and you would be better for not having spent the extra 5 minutes with the demi-gorgon. Is this a simplistic view? Maybe. But the world teaches you every minute of every day to focus on yourself, get your quality time, get away from it all, blah blah blah. It never once teaches you – think about other people before you think about yourself. The younger you can get into a mindset of behaving this way, the easier it will be for you to be in service to others more frequently than you are in service to yourself. Looking at life through the prism of other people and how your actions impact them is a hard thing to do, but one that is necessary. Always from a Bible, not a worldly perspective of course.

There are many ways to serve our brethren, just as there are many ways to serve the rest of the world, including prayer, physically serving someone in their home by helping them with menial daily tasks, caring for each other's children, etc., etc., etc., but all those ways start with the same thing – thinking of others before you think of yourself. Once you start, the question you then have to ask yourself every day is are you looking for more of those opportunities? When you've completed a thing, are you looking for another one to do instead of looking for who is going to serve you? Are you engaging as a servant and living in a state of service in every way you possibly can?

Service to God

One could argue that the other two forms of service I've outlined today would also be service to God, and if one argued such a thing, one would be correct. Keeping His commandments to love our neighbors and be watchmen, to let brotherly love continue and to flee from fleshly lusts are all services we do to God, because in performing these services, we show that He is a living God whose ways are not onerous. Our service to Him magnifies His statutes and glorifies His throne by demonstrating that while perfection is unattainable due to our fallen nature, His commandments indeed are not in the least bit grievous.

One way to make that known is through being content in our lot and situation. Not being covetous of what God has not given us is almost always an outwardly visible

thing to see, and it glorifies God by being thankful and acknowledging you have no power of your own to give yourself anything.

There is a service to God in declaring that it is Him whom we will serve, and not another.

Joshua said:

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

This declaration of service to God is the same that Moses sought leave from Pharaoh to go do:

“And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.” (Exodus 4:23)

Some people take this serve to simply mean the same as worship, but I don't think that's quite the right way to take it. Worship and serve are two different words, and if you want a comparison point go take a look at Exodus 24:1, where the Lord uses the word worship specifically.

Worship is a part of service. Worship generally indicates specific actions to be undertaken, as directed by God. The word itself means to prostrate or bow down. God laid out very specific ways in which He was to be worshipped by the Jews, for instance. You aren't to do other things and call them worship – only what God proscribes. To serve God doesn't lay out specific repeated tasks, per se, but it includes worship. Worship is a part of serving God, not all of it.

I think the distinction is this. You can worship God by performing the right motions. Killing the right sacrifice, heaving it the right way, burning the right incense, etc., and that is very important, that it be done in the right way and not include non-proscribed actions. Think how many times I've told you about the importance of how we perform the Lord's Supper, for instance.

But then there's the larger sense of service. This encompasses a lot of the 'why' of it and the level of involvement you are having in your mind, your heart and your spirit in the performing of your worship. Are you here today just listening to the words because it's a necessary thing to show up on Sunday, or are you really ***HERE***, mentally and spiritually engaged, trying to get everything you can from being in this house? Are you thinking about what you've got to do later today or are you fully present, sacrificing your time in service to God?

God doesn't need you to give Him anything, remember. Our service to Him isn't additive to His existence, it doesn't grow His coffers, make Him a greater God, insure His continued existence, or anything else. Our service to Him, our seeking to serve Him, our commitment to serve Him, our declaration to serve Him, all do one thing – glorify Him by demonstrating our thankfulness to Him as our beneficent King. He doesn't need that, but He takes pleasure in it.

“Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself?” (Job 22:2)

This excellent question from Eliphaz strikes at the heart of the matter. We can't be profitable to God, but He has commanded us to serve Him, and by demonstrating it is possible to be done, we show His righteousness, justice, mercy and power.

Does David not tell us that

“The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” (Psalm 147:11)

“For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.” (Psalms 149:4)

The Lord takes great pleasure in this service when it is done in meekness and Godly fear. When we give of ourselves, sacrifice these things we have in every way we can to serve, He is pleased. If we are proactively engaged, we are pleasing to Him. As our King and Lord, pleasing Him in our service should be the primary, I believe our only goal in life. If you are not engaged, present and active in your worship, then it is not a service to Him. If you are rote in your prayer, not taking up your cross daily, not seeking how to serve others with meekness and fear, if you do not esteem others as greater than yourself, I suggest that your worship in this place is of little effect. You can come here from the farthest reaches of the planet or born here and be diligent in your Sunday attendance but not be worshiping and serving God.

Living a life of service means not finding someone to serve on weekends just when you have time. It means creating a discipline in yourself that seeks to serve all day, every day. This is a challenging way to think and an even more challenging way to behave. It is at war with our nature and certainly within our generation, but this is one way in which we do not conform to the world. If you can focus your energies on mastering this way of life early, your life will be fuller as you grow older, and you will be a more pleasing servant of God throughout your life.

My prayer for all of us is that we would rise up every day in service to our generation, one another, and our King. Let us despise service to our lusts and base depravity and in meekness achieve full understanding of our lowly estates, eschewing the things of the flesh.