

“Saying ‘Yes’ to God’s Call”

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

January 13, 2008

Today we’re going to ordain and install officers that have been chosen by God and elected by you to serve in the key leadership positions of Calvin Church. They become the ministry leaders in their various areas of service. And so it’s also the day that we look at God’s fourth purpose for your life...you were created to serve God. The Bible says this, let’s read it together in Eph. 2:20, “*We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” You were made to make a contribution, not just to consume. The Bible says we’re created to serve, we’re saved to serve, we’re gifted to serve. The reality is that though we elect some to serve as leaders, the Lord has called us all into service and into areas of ministry. We are all called to listen carefully to the assignments that the Lord places before us

Whenever God gives us an assignment to do something, He never gives it to us without equipping us first. And in the next verse Job says, “*Your hands shaped me and made me.*” (Job 10:8). And God uses five things to make you who you are: Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences. Those five things make you different from anybody else in the world, for a purpose. And that purpose is to serve Him. God made you unique and your uniqueness is not for your benefit. Look at the next verse. Let’s read it aloud: 1Pet. 4:10, “*Each of us should use whatever gift he’s received to serve others.*”

Your talents are not for your benefit. I’m sure some of you remember the first line in the *Purpose Driven Life* book? “It’s not about you.” God gave you gifts and talents and abilities to be used by serving others.

And the Bible calls this “ministry”. Now “ministry” is a misunderstood word. When I say the word “minister” most people think of a priest or pastor. But the Bible says every believer is a minister. Not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. Ministry simply means using my spiritual gifts and abilities to help somebody else in the name of Jesus. Any time you use your talents, your abilities, your background, your experiences to help somebody else, that’s called ministering. That makes you a minister.

Now the good news is that God not only created us for service, He gave us a model. He came to earth Himself and said, “This is how you do it. Watch Me”. And so he came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, and He said, “This is what I want you to do with your life”. You were created to be like Christ, and while He was here on earth Jesus served. Notice the next verse. Let’s read it aloud together: Matt. 20:28, “*Jesus said, ‘Your attitude must be like my own, for I did not come to be served, but to serve’.*”

So today we're going to look at learning to serve like Jesus. You know a lot of people spend so much of their time searching for self-esteem and significance. But they're looking in all the wrong places! You don't get your self-esteem from status. You don't get your self-esteem from your salary. The Bible says you get your self-esteem from service. Jesus said to give your life away in order to find it.

Look at your outline and let's read Matthew 20:30-32 together. *"Two blind men shouted, 'Lord have mercy on us!' Jesus stopped and called them. 'What do you want me to do for you?'"* Jesus stopped. If you want to serve God, you must be willing to be interrupted. Most of Jesus' ministry and most of Jesus' miracles were interruptions. All the people he healed were interruptions. His first miracle? Interrupted at a wedding. His second miracle? Interrupted on the way to Galilee. You know a lot of people like to follow the steps of Jesus? It's also important to study the stops of Jesus. Almost every miracle Jesus did was when He let Himself be interrupted. The Bible says this: Prov. 3:28, *"Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now."* Servant-hearted people say "OK, let's do it!"

That's what it means to be shaped to serve God.

I. AVAILABLE

You must be available. You must be willing to step out and say "OK God what do You want me to do?" Those who serve in the ordained positions of ministry leadership have been elected by you partly because you know they are available. Some are not as available as others – or so we think. So what keeps us from being available?

Let me state three common barriers. Number one is **self-centeredness**. The Bible says, *"Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand."* (Phil. 2:4) Any time you have a need right in front of your face and it's really obvious, somebody needs help, God is giving you the opportunity to learn to serve like Jesus. You see the number one enemy of compassion is just getting too busy! And because I'm so busy, I don't have time to serve. I've got my agenda, my plans, my dreams, my goals, my ambitions. You know what the problem is? We hang a *"do not disturb"* sign on the door of our heart. We do it all the time. "Don't disturb my heart. I've got my goals. I've got my safe little life going here, so don't disturb me for the needs of the church or of other people."

But you know, real servants aren't too busy and they don't mind being interrupted. If you really have a servant heart, like Jesus Christ, you don't mind being interrupted because your agenda is God's agenda, and you get up in the morning and you say "OK, God, you want to bring somebody in my life today? Bring 'em on!" But we have this self-centeredness that gets in the way and gets to be a barrier.

A second barrier to being used by God...is **perfectionism**. You know, wanting every thing to be perfect. Let's read Ecclesiastes 11:4 together: *"If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."* Would anybody like to give a testimony on that verse? Real servants, Christ-like servants, do the best they can with what they have for Jesus Christ today. Some of us need to recognize that it doesn't have to be perfect for God to bless it. If God only used perfect people, what would get done in this world? Nothing, zip, zero, nada! We all have failures. We all have handicaps. But guess what? God uses us all. God doesn't use perfect people because there aren't any. God uses normal people.

Materialism is the third barrier that keeps us from being available to serve. Jesus said, *"No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money."* (Lk. 16:13). He didn't say, "You should not serve both God and money." He said, "You cannot serve both God and money." You've got to decide whether you want to be rich or you want to be blessed. Really! I'm telling you, you have to determine your priority in life. You cannot serve both God and money. It's an impossibility. The most important decision you're going to have to make in life once you become a believer is, "Am I going to be a kingdom-builder or am I going to be a wealth-builder?" Now if God wants to give you wealth, that's wonderful! But it is not the number one goal of your life. You need to say, "I'm going to be a kingdom-builder." You put that first and let God take care of whatever He wants you to do. If your job is keeping you from having any kind of service, you need to make some kind of adjustment. Serving means being available.

Self-centeredness, perfection, and materialism. Those are three qualities that are not on the list of qualifications to be elders or deacons in the church.

II. GRATEFUL

Secondly servants of God need to be grateful. To serve like Jesus, we have to serve gratefully – grateful that we get the opportunity to serve. The Bible tells us a story in John Chapter 11 of Jesus serving in an incredible way. His friend Lazarus had died, and He went there – you know the story goes – some people thought Jesus came for the funeral, but Jesus had a different idea in mind. He went there to do ministry, to raise Lazarus from the dead. Now, He could have walked up and prayed silently to His Father. But He decided to pray the prayer out loud so those people could hear it. The Bible tells us in John 11:41-42, *"Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank You that You heard me. I know that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here.'"* Jesus had an attitude of gratefulness in everything that He did. Jesus was grateful when He was criticized. Jesus was grateful when things were not easy in ministry. That was the attitude that He had in His ministry. The apostle Paul was grateful. He said, "I thank Jesus Christ because He trusted me. He gave me this work of serving Him." And the Bible talked about our attitude of gratefulness in Psalm 100:2. Let's read this verse "gratefully" together: *"Serve the Lord with gladness."*

Why do we serve God with gratefulness? We serve Him with gratefulness because He's given life to us through Jesus Christ. He saved us! And if He never did anything else for us, that is enough to be grateful for the rest of our lives to serve Him. Look at what the Bible has to say about that in 2 Tim. 1:9: "*It is He who saved us and chose us for His holy work, not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan.*" He saved us, and out of the gratefulness for what He has done for us, we serve Him.

Again there are two barriers to gratitude. One of them is **comparing and criticizing**. When you compare yourself to others, or when you criticize others, that is a barrier that gets in the way of being grateful. The Bible tells us in Rom. 14:4, "*Who are you to criticize someone else's servant? The Lord will determine whether His servant has been successful.*" Remember, we're all His servants. And so competition with each other in service just doesn't make any sense at all. We're on the same team. To think that somehow we can compare or criticize in that effort is pretty ridiculous and very sad. Any time spent in comparing and criticizing is time that could have spent being grateful for all that God has done.

The second way we get in the way is our own **wrong motivations**. The Bible talks about this in Matt. 6:1. Jesus said, "*When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven*". The wrong motivation is showing off. Self-promotion and servanthood don't mix, but it's easy to get them mixed up. A lot of our service, let's just be honest, it can be self-serving at times. We serve as sort of a bargaining chip with God. "God, I'll serve and You take care of me." And it's hard to see the wrong motivations in us. How do you know if you have a wrong motivation? It's the attitude of gratitude. The minute you lose the gratitude you know that there's something wrong with the motivation of your service. But the right motivators can keep us serving with gratitude for a lifetime.

We trust that session members and deacons will continue to do some self-examination and to flee from wrong motivations. Our aim must to have a corporate attitude of gratitude.

III. FAITHFUL

If you want to learn to serve like Jesus, you've got to be available. Then you have to learn to serve gratefully with a generous heart. Then there's a third thing. Serving like Jesus also means being **faithful**. It means you don't give up. As a friend of mine in seminary used to say, you've got to keep on keeping on. At the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, Jesus said this in John 17:4, "*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work that You gave me to do.*" When you get to heaven I want you to be able to say that you completed the work that God gave you to do. Jesus was faithful in fulfilling His

service. He didn't give up. And if you're going to be like Jesus it means you're going to serve as long as you're alive. You never retire from ministry – from service.

So what motivates us to keep on going? The Bible says, (1Cor. 4:2) *“The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful.”* How do we be faithful? What motivates us to stay faithful in serving God over the long haul? Well certainly being grateful for all the past that God's forgiven in our lives is one thing. If God never did another thing for me, I owe Him the rest of my life for what He's already done for me.

And then we also know that what we're doing really matters. Now let's be honest, most of what we do in life is not high-stakes stuff – it's low priority, it doesn't matter. It isn't going to matter next week much less next year or next decade or in eternity. But any time you're serving in Jesus' name and for His kingdom, no matter how small, it matters. The Bible says this in 1Cor. 15:58, let's read it aloud, *“Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort.”* Notice “nothing”. That means it all matters ~ even the little stuff. Why? Because in God's book, there is no little service. He said, “Even if you give a cup of cold water in my name, that counts.” In God's eyes, there is no little service.

Now if you're going to learn to be a servant of God, you must learn the difference between significance and prominence. They are not the same thing. On my body, my nose is quite prominent. But I could lose my nose and still live the rest of my life, because while it's prominent, it's not significant. On the other hand, if I lost, you know, my liver, or if I lost my heart, it's not very prominent. You don't see it. But if I lost it, I'd be dead. And the same is true in the Body of Christ. It all matters. You see the fact is with our limited perspective, we can't see how our small acts have big consequences, but they do! Now, there are always more needs to be met than people willing to get up off their seat and say, “I was shaped to serve Christ.” Have you ever wondered why you're here at Calvin Church? I'll tell you why. You're here because God knew you had something to give back. He did not bring you here just to sit and soak.

One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to say to you, “What did you do with what I gave you, the talents, the abilities, the background, the experiences, the freedom, the education, the family experiences? “Well, God, I was a little busy with my ambitions and plan. I never got around to serving You.” And God's going to say, “Wrong answer! I put you here to serve Me by serving others.”

Now you may be thinking nobody's watching or noting or caring, but God's watching and He cares. Look at this verse, Heb. 6:10: *“He will not forget how hard you've worked for Him and how you've shown your love to Him.”* How? *“By caring for others”*. And God keeps His promise. You know, on earth they give awards for 10 years of faithful service? In heaven you're going to get eternal rewards. Look at the next verse

(Matt. 25:21). *“Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things so; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”* You know, more than anything else, I want God to be able to say that about you. When you stand before God one day, I want Him to look into your eyes and say, “Good job! Well done! You did what I put you here on earth to do. You worshiped me, you and you served Me. Well done!” I want God to be able to say that about you.

So we approach the moment of ordination and installation. Some folks that you all have elected have never served in this way before. This is a new thing. It is an emotionally exciting moment for them. Others are taking up the mantle of leadership and service for a second or third time. For them this is not new. But for them too, it is a time of strong emotion. And so at this very poignant and moving moment I want to place a charge before you. I make no apology in saying to you that the most important thing you’ll ever do with your life is serving God in ministry. It’s far more important than your career, it’s far more important than your hobbies, it’s even more important than everything else you can think of because they aren’t going to last. But this is. You were put here on earth to serve the Lord and to engage in ministry leadership.