

## SERVANTHOOD TRAINING

“This is a thirteen-lesson study on the true meaning of servanthood. Students will uncover the areas of their service that need attention, and their strengths that Christ desires to use for His purpose.



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# **SERVANTHOOD TRAINING - LESSON 1**

## **JESUS – THE OBEDIENT SERVANT**

Biblical Text: Matthew 3:13-17; 4:1-17

### **Introduction**

Have you ever wished that your supervisor were more assertive and in control?

The boss who does not assert his authority often has disciplinary problems with his subordinates. They may take advantage of his unspoken authority and ignore him altogether. They may form bad work habits such as tardiness, chronic absenteeism, or poor job performance.

The assertive boss lays the foundation that a good employee is expected to follow.

In our lesson today, we'll take a close look at the role submission plays, not just in the workplace, but also in our relationship with God, our community and our church.

### **TO BE USED OF GOD**

#### **Read Matthew 3:13-17**

What physical proof of Christ's Deity was present at His baptism?

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What visible evidence is there in **YOUR** life that you belong to Christ?

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There is no life from which we can learn more than from the life of Jesus Christ. His multi-faceted ministry to the lost, the sick, and the dying is a mirror reflection of the righteousness of God.

And if we are to be "like God", we must be "like Christ".

Of all the aspects of His character that we hope to replicate, perhaps the most important is **Christ's obedience to His heavenly Father**; and it is this part of His personality and spiritual make-up that is the focus of our lesson today.

Authority is a two-way street. God cannot use the saint who does not first submit to His authority.

God's omniscient plans can go awry without obedient followers who are willing to follow and carry out His divine plan. We need only look to the Israelites in Scripture for clarification.

God's divine plan for this Hebrew nation was that they would dwell in the land of Promise and prosper. But their repeated disobedience to God led them down a harsh path filled with suffering and destruction.

When we obey God's authority and those in positions of leadership, we invest in our leadership's ability to lead us toward success.

What are the first steps that every Christian needs to take after conversion to be more like our Lord Jesus?

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### **A SUBMISSIVE LIFESTYLE**

Jesus displayed His submissiveness to His Father from the very beginning of His ministry.

Following His baptism by His cousin John, in the wilderness, Jesus went off into seclusion for forty days and forty nights. During that time of fasting and prayer, Satan used every opportunity to tempt Jesus away from God's divine plan for His life. He attempted to provoke Jesus into misusing his power and position for selfish gain; first with food, and then with power and position.

Explain those times when you knew that the devil was tempting you. How did you overcome that temptation, or what would you do differently in the same situation?

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The fact that Jesus submitted to His Father's authority is in no way a reflection of weakness. In fact, it reinforces the truth stated earlier that authority is a two-way street.

Neither God nor the church will benefit from a relationship that is based on resistance, struggle or conflict. James 4:7 says, *“Submit yourselves therefore unto God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

The way to follow God is to demonstrate our humility through complete submission and obedience.

Our submission to authority in the community provides the basis for law and order, and our submission to leadership within the church ensures a successful ministry.

Paul reminds us in Romans 13:1 that, *“the powers that be are ordained of God”*.

Our compliance completes the cycle of leadership and opens the door for triumph in our accomplishments.

How can we help to lead resistant Christians to a greater obedience to God?

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## **CONCLUSION**

Do you know how to obey God and submit to His will?

It helps if you develop regular Bible Study habits and a healthy prayer life.

Through study and prayer you will become distinctly familiar with God's interests and moral values, and your spirit will migrate toward obedience.

Becoming an obedient servant takes perseverance and determination.

**IF YOU DRAW NEAR TO GOD, HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU!**

## SERVANTHOOD TRAINING - LESSON 2 JOHN THE BAPTIST – THE FEARLESS SERVANT

**Biblical Text: Matthew 3:1-12**

### INTRODUCTION

What daily stresses cause you to doubt your faith and lose your perspective?

The troubles that surround us can easily cause us to lose sight of the larger picture.

There is no question that we are impacted and affected by situations and circumstances surrounding us. But the magnitude of their impact is often a question of the strength of our faith.

When God’s divine plan calls for a major impact on the world, He chooses and uses those men and women who will not fail Him in times of struggle.

God chooses men and women of valor who are fearless and determined to carry out His will, regardless of how difficult the circumstance or how heated the situation.

**IN TIMES OF CRISIS, GOD NEEDS FEARLESS MEN.**

Reflection: If there was one thing you could eliminate that causes you to “stress out” what would it be, and why?

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### A CALLED LEADER

God-ordained leadership is necessary for the exercise of God’s Will in the world.

In the case of John the Baptist, the angel Gabriel declared that John *“shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb”* (Luke 1:15).

This does not mean John was saved before he was born. This ‘filling’ is associated with **service**, not salvation.

John was Divinely equipped and empowered for his ministry with the gifts and talents he would need to fulfill his calling. God had His hand on John from the very moment of conception.

We all need the help of the Holy Spirit if we are going to serve God with any degree of success. We cannot serve in our own strength and wisdom alone. We must have Divine help or we will fail miserably. *“Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Psalm 127:1).

John the Baptist’s calling was that of a preacher. Preaching is exhortation or encouragement.

But it is much more. It is the ability to moralize another, or urge another to permit God to change his life.

Question #1: Each of us has a calling on our lives. It is our duty as Christians to discover that calling, and to use our gifts and talents to fulfill our Christian duty. What is your calling?

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## **CONFIDENCE IN CRISIS**

John the Baptist was called to minister to a world filled with fear.

The Roman government had thoroughly oppressed the religious community to the point of forcing many to repress their faith.

The Pharisees and religious hierarchy, in an effort to live at peace with the Romans and retain some form of control over the religious community, agreed to operate according to Roman law.

The religious leaders of Israel did not respond well to the ministry of John the Baptist. That should not be a surprise, however, for they and John were of vastly different character and going in two distinctly different directions.

John was genuine, Godly, humble, and lived a simple life.

They were hypocrites, unholy, puffed up with pride, and lived luxuriously.

Their rejection of John's ministry was not passive; it was aggressively hostile.

But it was subtle hostility, for John was too popular with the people for these religious leaders to be overt in their opposition to him.

Question: How should a Christian cope with subtle hostility from an unbeliever?

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These religious leaders who were belligerent in their attitude towards John and his ministry were comprised particularly of Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests.

It also included the Sanhedrin, the body of seventy Jewish leaders composed mostly of religious leaders (such as Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests) plus some "elders" of the land.

The Sanhedrin, the ancient Jewish ruling group that claimed its origin in the seventy elders Moses appointed to help him (Numbers 11:16,17), was accorded some authority by the Roman government.

In New Testament times, this counsel convened in Jerusalem, and represented the Jewish religion, taking control of all matters relating to the Jewish faith. Eventually, they adopted some of the corrupt practices of the Romans and succeeded in driving a wedge between themselves and the Jewish community.

This was the climate in which John the Baptist was called to preach the coming of the Messiah.

The purpose of John's ministry was to prepare the masses for the coming of the Lord, and turn them back to a focus on their faith.

### **JOHN WAS EVER POINTING TO JESUS CHRIST AS THE ONE TO FOLLOW.**

The Israelites, like many in every age, were following the 'vipers' whose sin John condemned fearlessly and openly. John was sent to turn them away from sinful Pharisaic rule and back to the Lord.



*Question: What role does fear play in our reaction to oppression?*

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## **HEALTHY FEAR**

John the Baptist knew all about fear. But his healthy fear of God far outweighed his fear of man, and it was this fear that enabled him to risk the Pharisee's wrath.

His fear of the Lord gave Him the courage, direction and motivation to make the right choices and live within the parameters of God's divine plan for His life.

Most of the world's trouble can be traced to a lack of fear of the Lord. Sin runs rampant because mankind does not fear God's wrath.

Even those who claim to believe in a God who controls the universe are bold enough to commit blatant sins in spite of their belief.

This syndrome is prevalent because the faith community has confused **“knowing about God”** with **“knowing God”**.

An intellectual knowledge of God is not the same as having faith in God. Knowing about God is not the same as having a personal relationship with Him.

Reflection: Describe your emotions when you commit a sin.

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## **CONCLUSION**

The fearless servant is one whose faith will stand against the Adversary's challenges. He knows that God is his *“refuge and strength; a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore” [he will] not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”* (Psalm 46:1-2)

To keep your faith quotient up, be habitual in your service to the Lord.

Learn to speak out against injustice, knowing that the Lord is on your side. Every believer ought to be living a life that points to Christ. Your life and lips as a fearless servant will encourage men to turn from sin and to the Savior.

## **SERVANTHOOD TRAINING - LESSON 3**

### **PETER – THE SINCERE SERVANT**

Biblical Text: Matthew 4:18-20; 16:13-18; 17:1-4

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever heard people say things about God that were clearly untrue?

We often excuse these lapses by saying, “Well, it may be wrong but at least he’s sincere.”

We treat the error as though truth were completely inconsequential, as though it only matters if a person’s heart is in the right place.

But nothing could be farther from the truth.

God will not accept incorrect thinking about His character or His nature. It is our duty to convey the truth about God, His purpose and His plan.

God builds upon the sincerity of our service as servants of His kingdom.

In our lesson today, God carefully chooses a man to convey the foundational truths of the Gospel upon which the church of Jesus Christ is built.

#### **THE FISHERMAN’S CONVERSION**

Many biblical biographies begin with the record of the physical birth of the person being written about. But in the case of Peter, the record begins with his spiritual birth.

The Scriptures are silent about Peter’s earlier life. We can only guess what life might have been like for a poor fisherman like Peter.

The record of Peter begins with his conversion experience as **a married adult** (Matthew 8:14), **a fisherman** by trade (Matthew 4:18), and living near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44).

But conversion is a good place to start in any man’s biography because real life does not begin until a man is saved.

Peter's conversion experience wasn't a spectacular event that turned the heads of those who witnessed it. It was simply a quiet encounter with Jesus Christ.

But though it was a quiet encounter, it was still an event of tremendous magnitude because of what happened to Peter.

As is the case in every conversion, that which happens to the person is the greatest thing that can happen to any person—a sin-corrupted soul is saved from the damnation of hell and given eternal life in heaven.

**No event in life is greater for a man or woman to experience.**

In the case of Peter's conversion, his call to full time service was the climax of a day's experience with his boat and Christ on the Sea of Galilee (called the "Lake of Gennesaret").

This experience with Christ served to test and to prove Peter in some important areas of his life.

**GOD DOES NOT CALL A PERSON INTO SERVICE UNTIL HE HAS DEMONSTRATED SOME ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR SERVICE.**

In this experience in Galilee, our lesson will reveal that Peter demonstrated a number of spiritual traits that were vital for the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ.

Reflection: Read Galatians 5:22-23. What spiritual traits do you possess, and how can God use them to spread His Word?

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### **THE FISHERMAN'S CONFESSION**

Peter made two confessions before Christ as recorded in Scripture. In our lesson, we focus on the second of his confessions of faith, which took place in Caesarea Philippi not many months after his first confession in Capernaum.

Caesarea Philippi was full of paganism. But in spite of the predominance of heathenism in this place, it was there that Peter made his great confession of faith regarding Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:16).

As in his first confession of faith, which was demonstrated through his actions (Matthew 4:20), this verbal confession was made in spite of its great unpopularity with the people of the land.

**GOD DEPENDS UPON MEN OF ROCK-SOLID REPUTATION TO KEEP THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION SURE.**

Peter's confession of faith was a very short statement of few words. But the conversation that preceded it and the results that followed give us great insight into Peter's life.

Christ initiated His conversation about the church with Peter. It is the first record of Christ speaking about the church.

Christ's revelation about the church was given as a reward to Peter for having honorably received the revelation about Christ as the Son of God.

God had revealed the truth to Peter—the truth about Jesus Christ—and Peter had believed it and unashamedly declared it.

In a culture that worships the god of materialism, how does a believer deal with the unpopularity of the Christian lifestyle?

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Reflection: What is Christ saying to YOU about the church?

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**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ROCK**

Many have erred in calling Peter the rock on which the church of Jesus Christ is built.

To understand the true meaning of Christ's words to Peter, we must look to the original Greek text.

In the Greek language, there are two words for **‘ROCK’**.

The word translated **“PETER”** means **a small rock or a fragment of a rock**; but the word translated **“ROCK”** means **a huge, massive rock**.

In classical Greek, the distinction between these two words is well known. Christ is not building His church upon a small fragment of a rock; He is building the church upon a big rock, a great stone.

And who is that great rock? It is none other than Jesus Christ, the One whom Peter had just declared to be **THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD**.

Peter’s rock-solid faith revealed to him the truth about Jesus Christ as the Messiah, our Savior. Thus Jesus revealed to Peter the further truth that Christ’s Kingdom would be established through His Messianic ministry.

Christ knew that He could entrust Peter with the task of preserving this truth for future generations.

He went on to reveal to Peter, *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”*.

Then Jesus concluded His revelation to Peter about the church when He said, *“I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 16:19).

Christ would later extend this same authority to all of the Apostles (Matthew 18:18). Only servants who were rock-solid in their faith could be entrusted with so great an authority.

Question: Peter was known as the “Rock”. What symbolism best describes your relationship with Christ?

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## **THE TRANSFIGURATION**

Christ and Peter needed *unusual strength* to face the future.

The future held the cross for both of them.

It was most important that Peter grasp God's plan for the world: Christ was the Messiah and was to save the world through death and not through earthly power and conquest as many Jews of that day had assumed. He was to bear the cross for the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24).

**BUT PETER TOO WOULD HAVE TO BEAR HIS OWN CROSS IF HE WOULD FOLLOW CHRIST.**

Christ drilled this truth into all of His disciples for many days prior to the Transfiguration experience. They would soon fully understand the thrust of what He meant by their *"taking up the cross"*.

Christ knew that the disciples would need a divinely endowed strength to face what lay in front of them.

The transfiguration was God's answer to that need. God used five things to strengthen Christ and the disciples.

They are the same five things that give our faith its rock-solid foundation.

Faith must be built on:

**THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S GLORY** (Luke 9:26)

**THE STRENGTH OF GREAT SAINTS** (Hebrews 11)

**THE STRENGTH OF A HEAVENLY EXPERIENCE** (John 3:3)

**THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S PRESENCE** (1 Corinthians 12:3)

**THE STRENGTH OF THE RESURRECTION** (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Christ knew Peter had a rock-solid faith because he had learned these lessons, and learned them well.

Question: In this twenty-first century age of scientific acumen and expertise, do you believe it is easier or more difficult to convince men of the reality of Christ's Resurrection?

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## **CONCLUSION**

From Peter we learn that when we believe a truth about God—we must embrace it, practice it, and declare it—or God will not reveal another truth to us.

**UNBELIEF STOPS THE LEARNING PROCESS; BELIEVING PROMOTES IT.**

Because Peter believed, Christ was able to reveal even more to Peter, and thus cause his faith to be greatly increased.

Peter had quite a learning experience at Caesarea Philippi as a result of his great confession about Jesus Christ.

He learned **truth** that he would not quickly digest, but truth, which he would later expound with excellence in his preaching and in his Epistles.

Churches continue to write doctrinal statements and confessions of faith. But though we may say the truth about Jesus Christ in many different ways, we can never improve upon the truth in Peter's great confession of faith.

## SERVANTHOOD TRAINING - LESSON 4 THE CENTURION – THE SELFLESS SERVANT

**Biblical Text: Matthew 8:5-13**

### INTRODUCTION

True belief is a rare thing.

**BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST IS THE GREATEST STEP MAN CAN TAKE IN LIFE, YET CHRIST IS OFTEN IGNORED, NEGLECTED, AND DENIED.**

Even as Christians, though there are times in our faith walk when we recognize and commend the Lord, it usually comes as a result of our seeking greater spiritual strength ourselves *to shore up* our own spiritual weaknesses and apprehensions about our faith.

What Jesus wants to see in us is *real* faith.

We see a glimpse of this faith in today's lesson, in a most unlikely candidate, a centurion soldier - an enemy of the Jews.

### JESUS TEARS DOWN BARRIERS

The story of the centurion parallels the hopeless state of mankind without Jesus.

The centurion was separated from his only source of hope - ideologically, physically, and spiritually.

Had he, a non-Jew, presented himself before the priests in the temple seeking help for his servant, as was the Jewish custom, he would probably have been scorned and escorted quickly to the door.

But barriers are Jesus' specialty. He has the power to overcome the ideas and prejudices that divide men and neighbor.

Jesus had the power to reach the man, to pierce the spiritual barriers of his soul and save him.



But in order for this miracle to take place, there first had to be a demonstration of faith to which the Lord could and would respond.

Jesus can reach the soul of any man who believes in Him, no matter how lost, or how alien, or how much of an enemy to God he has been.

But that man must take the first step, and with a repentant heart and selfless spirit, demonstrate a real faith in the power of God.

### **JESUS RECEIVES ANY MAN WHO TRULY BELIEVES.**

Conversely, He rejects those who do not believe, no matter who they are.

Question: As Christians, it is our common prayer request for Christ to bless, protect, and save our family and friends. What did this centurion's request reveal about his character?

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### **THE OPEN DOOR**

The great faith of the centurion aroused Jesus (v.5-9), and through the miracle of the servant's healing, Jesus proved He was the Messiah (v.13).

### **FAITH OPENS THE DOOR TO REAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE FATHER.**

What sign was there in the centurion's conversation with Jesus that revealed faith's open door?

### **First, Jesus was aroused by the centurion's humility.**

The man's humility is seen in two most unusual acts. He was a Gentile and a Roman officer, yet he came to a Jew for help.

Approaching a Jew was socially unacceptable and unheard of for a Gentile, but being an officer of Rome made it worse.

Jesus knew that the centurion had great courage and humility to approach Him for help.

And, the centurion identified Jesus as “Lord”, acknowledging His superiority and Messiah-ship. He approached Jesus as the One who could meet his need.

The centurion knew and confessed that he had a need, a need that other men could not meet.

**KNOWING AND CONFESSING ARE BOTH ESSENTIAL WHEN A PERSON REALLY WANTS THE LORD TO INTERCEDE.**

Psalm 34:18 says, *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”*.

Question: What prevents the unsaved from coming to Christ, even at a time of crisis in their lives?

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Jesus’ response to the centurion’s cry for help was forceful: *“I WILL.”*

In these two words, we see Christ’s affirmation that He will span and overcome all the barriers and divisions of men to meet a man’s need. He will meet the need of anyone who truly trusts Him.

**JESUS HAS NO FAVORITES.**

Question: How do Christians display favoritism in the church? In our community?

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The centurion approached Jesus *begging*, acknowledging that he was totally dependent upon Him.

There is no other way. Position, power, fame, wealth, and social acceptability must be laid aside.

Our thoughts cannot be focused on self and social acceptability, but only upon Christ and His power if we wish Him to meet our need.

The centurion revealed the sincerity of his heart through the words that he spoke.

**CHRIST SEES OUR THOUGHTS**—what our minds are focused upon when we approach Him.

If our thoughts are focused on self and social acceptability, then our sincerity is weak and lacking.

Jesus knows when we care more for this world than for Him.

But if our thoughts are focused on Him and His power, then Jesus knows that we are really depending upon Him to help us, regardless of what others may think or say.

Question: How has social acceptability created ‘chameleon Christians’?

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**Second, Jesus was aroused by the centurion’s sense of unworthiness.**

The centurion did not say, “My servant is not worthy to have you come”; but he said, “I am not worthy.”

A sense of personal unworthiness gripped this soldier. Through this statement, the centurion was acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord. He is the One who alone has the power to meet our need.

From the purely social perspective, the greater (the Centurion) proclaimed his inferiority to the lesser (Jesus, a Jew).

Society considered the centurion greater than the poor preacher from Nazareth. But the centurion humbly confessed a deep unworthiness before Christ.

He saw something of God in Christ, something that caused him to humble himself before Christ.

Reflection: The Word says, *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18).

Has pride ever caused you to miss your blessing?

Reflection: Is pride ever a good thing?

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**Third, Jesus was aroused by the centurion's love—his love for a slave.**

The centurion was pouring out his heart for another person.

We call that intercessory prayer.

In the eyes of society the person should have been meaningless to him, yet the man meant much to him.

He loved this *meaningless* person, this slave.

What a lesson that is for us! There is a great need for the love that intercessory prayer expresses, the kind of love that prays even for our enemies.

*“Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]”*. (Romans 12:9a).

Reflection: Do your personal, private prayers reveal a selfish nature? How can you broaden your prayer responsibility?

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**Fourth, Jesus was aroused by the centurion's great faith.**

The centurion believed in the great power of Jesus to span and to overcome all barriers—even the barrier of space and time.

What great faith!

It was great because it was a personal faith in Jesus as the Supreme Authority and Power; power over all men, including him, a soldier of Rome, the conquering nation.

He believed Jesus to be Lord over both the kingdom of nature (disease) and the kingdom of heaven.

Question: As servants of Jesus Christ, how does our limited understanding of Christ's power affect our service?

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## **CONCLUSION**

We learn a valuable lesson about selflessness from this Centurion soldier.

First, we learn that we must see God in Christ. Christ is our Intercessor, and our hope.

Second, we must see value in every man, the value that God puts upon even the poorest and unacceptible. We are to humble ourselves before all, no matter how it may hurt.

Philippians 2:3-4 reminds us, *“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.”*

**SERVANTHOOD TRAINING**  
**LESSON 5**  
**THE RICH YOUNG RULER – THE SELFISH SERVANT**

**Biblical Text: Matthew 19:16-24**

**INTRODUCTION**

The story of the Rich Young Ruler poses many perplexing questions for the student of the Bible.

First, the young man called Christ “*Good Master,*” but Christ denied that He was good. How can Christ, who claims to be God, deny that He is good?

Second, the young man asked how he might receive eternal life. Christ said nothing about believing but told the young man to keep certain laws.

And the third perplexity is the most shocking. Christ told the young man that he had to sell all that he had and give it to the poor in order to receive eternal life. The question immediately arises, does Christ really demand that a person give all he is and has in order to be saved?

These three facts are puzzling to most Christians. However, as we study the passage and understand what was happening, our questions fade.

**FOUR STEPS TO FAITH**

The rich young ruler was obviously a noted Jew who lived according to the Mosaic Law as taught to him by his parents. He was a man of great substance, having acquired untold wealth in spite of his obedience to give a tenth of his wealth to God. Yet he recognized that despite his obedience to the law, there was something missing in his life.

Christ, seeing that this rich young ruler was sincere in his inquiry, led the young man through the steps that are needed to receive eternal life:

- Step 1: **SEEK ETERNAL LIFE** (v.16);
- Step 2: **KNOW THAT GOD ALONE IS GOOD** (v.17);
- Step 3: **KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS** (v.18-20); and
- Step 4: **GIVE ALL YOU ARE AND HAVE TO CHRIST** (v.21-22).

Reflection: Our confession of Jesus Christ as our Savior is only the beginning of our spiritual journey. What evidence should there be that the journey is continuing?

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**STEPS ORDERED BY THE LORD – STEP ONE**

The first step to enter God's kingdom is to seek eternal life.

The rich young ruler demonstrated how we should seek eternal life. He did exactly what we must do when we wish anything: **SEEK IT**.

We are to seek eternal life just as the rich young ruler did, but in seeking there is a critical step to be taken: **we must go to the right source**.

This is exactly what the rich young ruler did: (a) he approached Christ, the Source of eternal life; and (b) he asked, that is, confessed his need.

The rich young ruler believed that eternal life existed, and he was sincere and eager (perhaps even desperate) to receive it. He *"came running and kneeled"* before Jesus (Mark 10:17).

He knew he lacked something, and he openly confessed it. He was seeking inner peace and a sense of completeness, a sense of satisfaction that his wealth and position had not given him.

His error was in thinking that he could SECURE eternal life.

A person does not secure eternal life; he receives it. Likewise, a man does not receive eternal life UNTIL he seeks it, and in seeking it, he must approach Christ, the Source of life.

Isaiah 55:6 says, *"Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near"*.

Finally, a man does not receive eternal life until he confesses his need, according to Matthew 10:32, which reads, *"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven"*.

Question: If Christians believe in the promise of eternal life, why do so many fear death?

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## **THE GOOD MASTER – STEP TWO**

The second step to enter God's kingdom is to know that God alone is good.

The rich young ruler failed at one critical point: he lived a self-righteous life. He did not know that the only good person was God and God alone.

The rich young ruler called Jesus *"Good Master."* By Master he meant "Good teacher, good Rabbi," acknowledging that Jesus was an honorable person to be highly regarded, but that's where his observation ended.

He did not consider Jesus to be the Son of God. He perceived Jesus as a man who had achieved unusual moral goodness and, as such, had become a “Good Master,” one capable of teaching the truths of God and life.

He asked, *“What good thing shall I do?”* which revealed that he had a religion of works, not of faith. Thus, he came seeking to find out what good he could do to secure eternal life. He believed, like so many, that if he could just keep some great rule and live a clean life, then God would accept him.

Christ had to correct these two errors in the rich young ruler’s belief. He attempted to do so by asking a pointed question, *“Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but one, that is, God.”*

He was saying to the young man, “God alone is good. No man is good, not in comparison to God, not even good enough to stand before God in righteousness. If I am but a mere man, a good teacher, then I am not good and do not have the words to eternal life.”

The great misconception of mankind is that man is good—that the basic core and the raw nature of man is good—that man can somehow be good enough to secure God’s approval, or do enough good works to make himself acceptable to God.

But self-righteousness lowers God and makes Him less than perfect. It says that God will accept less than perfection. It fails to face up to the reality of the world, to the presence of evil and death and to the need to be transformed into a new creature capable of living eternally and perfectly.

Question: If works won’t get us into heaven, why work?

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### **THE RULES OF THE ROAD - STEP THREE**

Christ revealed that the third step to enter God’s kingdom is to keep the commandments and love his neighbor as himself. In so doing, Christ pointed out a critical weakness in this rich young ruler.

Because of his low concept of God and his inaccurate concept of man’s nature, he would claim that he had loved his neighbor; that he had kept the commandments dealing with his neighbor.

But Christ would prove that he had not loved his neighbor, not as he should.

He had kept the commandments only in a superficial sense. He had kept the law from without, but he had not loved his neighbor from within...from the heart.

If he had, he would have helped his neighbor more, much more! (Matthew 19:21-22).



Question: Is a Christian's refusal to tithe a demonstration of selfishness?

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Christ's instructions to the young man were very simple - **"KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS."**

The young man asked, "Which?" In asking, the ruler revealed his inadequate concept of God's law. He thought some laws were more important than others. He wanted to know which ones would give him eternal life.

Christ immediately struck at the man's real problem. The man was failing to love his neighbor as himself, so Christ quoted five of the Ten Commandments, the five that have to do with his duty toward his neighbor (Exodus 20:12-16):

- 1) **MURDER**, which concerns our neighbor's life;
- 2) **ADULTERY**, which concerns our neighbor's chastity and purity;
- 3) **STEALING**, which concerns our neighbor's property;
- 4) **FALSE WITNESS**, which concerns our neighbor's name, reputation, and understanding of the truth, and
- 5) **HONORING PARENTS**, which concerns our duty to the closest neighbors we have, our own family.

Christ then summed up all five commandments by saying, **"THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF"** (Leviticus 19:18). This is what James called the **"ROYAL LAW"** (James 2:8).

The person who loves his neighbor will have excellent relations with all and will experience love, joy, and peace—the abundance of life. He will experience exactly what Christ says: he will "enter into life."

Question: Of all the commandments, perhaps the hardest to obey is the one that commands us to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Why?

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The young man then made the phenomenal claim that he had kept all five of the commandments that Christ quoted.

Of course, as is true with all men, he had not kept them—not perfectly, not in God's eyes, not in the spirit in which God intended them to be kept. He was not generous enough with others, not giving and helping like he should.

The rich young ruler misunderstood God's law and had a tragic sense of self-righteousness.

## **SACRIFICIAL SERVICE - STEP FOUR**

The fourth step to enter God's kingdom is to **give all you are and have to Christ.**

Christ knew exactly what the young man needed. His rejection of Christ showed this. He was hoarding wealth instead of distributing it.

God had given to him that he might have much to give others (Ephes. 4:28), but he was failing to love and help his neighbor anywhere close to what he should. He was using the tithe as his reason not to do more.

What the young man needed was just what Christ said: ***"If thou wilt be perfect, then demonstrate to all publicly and without question that you love your neighbor: go and sell ALL you have, and give to the poor...and come FOLLOW me."***

In our struggle to protect the glorious truth that man is saved by grace and grace alone, we often forget and neglect another great truth: to follow Christ is to serve and minister to our neighbor. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, then we show that we truly love God. If we do not love and minister to our neighbor (above self), then we do not love God.

When we deny self by giving all we are and have (1 John 4:20), then and only then do we receive heaven and its treasures.

To deny self, to give all we are and have, is a hard saying; but Christ demands it of each of us. Our attempts to soften it or escape it do not annul or invalidate His demand.

Question: Is charitable giving the same as sacrificial giving?

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## **CONCLUSION**

The rich young ruler loved the things of the world more than he loved the hope of eternal life. He loved the position and recognition and esteem and power of the earth more than he loved Christ.

If we desire to serve the Lord sincerely and completely, we must be willing to put Him FIRST, above all else.