

A Feast of Service

By Stephen Flurry

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It is through service that we picture the fulfillment of the World Tomorrow— when God's Family will serve the world to bring it peace, education and ultimately salvation into God's Family.

In fact, the Feast undoubtedly would be a disaster were it not for the innumerable men and women in God's Church who voluntarily serve to make God's Feast of Tabernacles the best possible every year.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul wrote, "We work together in God's service; you are God's field to be planted, God's house to be built" (Moffatt). God is working with us, and all of us work with God.

The Revised Standard Version renders it, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." This verse inspired Herbert W. Armstrong's use of the term co-worker. We are all working together as a team.

3 John 8 refers to us as "fellowhelpers to the truth."

Think about it. The amazing growth of God's Work over the past several decades has been possible only through the combined efforts of thousands of voluntary co-workers!

In the Philadelphia Church of God's (PCG) early days, we were only able to reach a select few—mostly those in the Worldwide Church of God for whom we had addresses. But look at the power and scope of the PCG's work today! This Work needs co-workers! On a worldwide scale and at the local level. Each local congregation and each Feast site needs co-workers, or volunteers, as well.

Giving Beyond Our Means

"We want you to know brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, for in severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part" (2 Corinthians 8:1-2; Revised Standard Version).

Why such an abundance of joy while yet under "severe test of affliction"? Verses 3-4: "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints" (Revised Standard Version).

These brethren in Macedonia really wanted to help. They were giving to the brethren at Jerusalem who were suffering through a drought.

Notice, the Macedonians gave according to their means, and, when the urgent need arose, many gave beyond their means. Paul was telling the Corinthians this because, a year earlier, they also had volunteered to support the members in Jerusalem. For whatever reason, they did not follow through with their commitment.

Have you ever done that? Volunteered for something and then, as that day grew closer, hoped people would forget about it? “And this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (verse 5; Revised Standard Version). Paul was concerned about more than just the material offerings he thought the Corinthians would give. He was concerned that they hadn’t fully given themselves to God!

The Macedonians, in contrast, gave. And as we give in love, God gives back. That’s why the joy!

“I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine” (verse 8, Revised Standard Version). There were certain things that were commanded of the brethren. But Paul could not command them to go “above and beyond” in their service.

There is nothing special about just serving where you are commanded to serve. God expects more.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (verse 9). If we follow this example, with the attitude of sacrificing everything if need be, we will become rich!

In the coming months and years, perhaps even at this year’s Feast of Tabernacles, you can be sure that God will test us to see whether our love is genuine—whether our heart is really into serving.

Paul continues “Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have” (verse 11). Yes, the Corinthians had the desire to serve, but they did not have the will to carry it out.

Ask yourself, does the performance of your service match your desire to serve? Do you give with the attitude of the Macedonians or the attitude of the Corinthians?

“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (verse 12). If your heart is in it, then the service will be acceptable to God, no matter how small. But no service is acceptable if you do not follow through with what you have committed to.

Verse 13 states, “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened.” God is not trying to burden us. He is not asking us to give more than we can give. He is asking us to give all that we can give.

“But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (verses 14-15). The point here is that we must give of the abundance God has given us.

An Attitude

An example in Acts illustrates this principle of godly service. “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 5:1-2).

Here is a case where Ananias and Sapphira were giving a lot to the apostles. But they kept back part of what they made while professing that they brought the whole amount.

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to [margin: to deceive] the Holy [Spirit], and to keep back part of the price of the land?” (verse 3). Sometimes we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are really giving all we have.

“Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (verse 4). The land was his. There was no obligation placed upon him to sell it. And even after he sold it, the money was his. The problem was that he had volunteered to give it all to the apostles.

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him” (verses 5-6).

About three hours later, his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. “And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much” (verse 8).

Peter was giving Sapphira a chance to make things right with God. It wasn't that they didn't give enough. They just weren't being honest with what they gave. So, Sapphira ended up suffering the same fate as her husband (verses 9-11).

Serving goes a lot further than just fulfilling a certain list of requirements.

Remember the story of Peter and John meeting the lame beggar in front of the temple. Notice what happened: “And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:4-6).

In this case, Peter and John had nothing physical to give. But what they did have, they gave!

Have you ever wondered if you could help God's Work more? To help in the local area more? To help at the Feast more?

Now is your chance!

There are quite a few who cannot give a lot to the Church financially, but that doesn't mean they cannot give a lot!

The point is, godly service is an attitude.

It does not just involve money. It means giving time, encouragement, support, advice, love and affection.

If we go to the Feast of Tabernacles to serve, and serving is an attitude, then we must make sure we come to the Feast with the right attitude!

The Greatest—a Servant

In Matthew 20, when James and John's mother came to Christ and sought more preeminence for her sons, Jesus responded that only God the Father can give positions of authority in His Kingdom (Matthew 20:22-23). God the Father is the greatest giver of all.

"And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren" (verse 24). Not only were the two seeking preeminence, but the other 10 were upset that they were. All 12 were somewhat competitive.

Christ put things in perspective. He said, "Whoever wants to be the great man among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all" (verses 26-27, Moffatt). This is all it takes to be great! How simple that is.

Verse 28 reads, "Just as the Son of man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Moffatt).

Is Christ living in you? Can you give your life for many at this Feast of Tabernacles? Can you carry the attitude of the footwashing, which begins God's master plan, all the way through to the Last Great Day—and, even beyond that, back into the local areas?

Immediately after teaching this lesson, Christ demonstrated it by healing two blind men that everyone else ignored (verses 29-34). A true servant will not only serve the rich and the most popular. At the Feast, there will be many elderly people to serve. In the Church there are also quite a number of singles and young married couples—a lot of qualified servants—to serve God's people.

Let us notice exactly what is a right attitude of service.

Doing More Than Required

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). What is our reasonable service? To sacrifice!

To sacrifice means the "surrender of something for the sake of something else." In this case, surrendering yourself to better help someone else.

Mr. Armstrong said, "If we do only what is required and what we're supposed to do, in God's sight, that is not enough. God requires that we do a little more than that. Many of us think if we do just what is required, we'll get into the Kingdom of God.

We're still thinking of how much we can get. As long as you're thinking how much you can get, you're probably not going to get into the Kingdom of

God."

God does require certain basic things from us. To sacrifice, however, is to do more than what is required.

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (verse 2). Notice again the emphasis on attitude. You obtain the right attitude by the renewing of your mind (see also 2 Corinthians 4:16).

Moffatt translates Romans 12:2, "... be transformed in nature, able to make out what the will of God is." God's will is that we never lose that humble, serving, footwashing attitude.

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (verse 3).

God is training us for leadership positions, and this is how we train!

1 Corinthians 10:12 reminds us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." When you are in a position of leadership, one of two attitudes comes to the surface: either humility or self-righteousness. Leadership in God's Church is a position of service, as we saw earlier.

Mr. Armstrong had tremendous ambition as a young man, but it was all, as he describes it, "pure vanity—a swelled up self-exaltation." God had to humble him, which He did by stripping him of business success, on several occasions. The jolt made Mr. Armstrong do an about-face in attitude.

Once he was in a right attitude, God began to work with him. What then did Mr. Armstrong do? He sacrificed for the rest of his life!

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5).

God's people need each other. The members of the body are all interdependent upon each other. The success of our Feast of Tabernacles is dependent upon our service and the service of others.

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching" (verses 6-7).

Despite the fact that there are different areas of responsibility that we all have, there is one thing we can all do: "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity" (verse 8). We can all give! "With simplicity" is referred to in the margin as "liberally." We must give, and give a lot.

Proverbs 11:24-25, in the Moffatt, states, "One gives away, and still he grows the richer: another keeps what he should give, and is the poorer. A liberal soul will be enriched, and he who waters will himself be watered."

Luke 6:38 backs that point: "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

Acts 20:35 states, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The Moffatt translates it: "To give is happier than to get."

Showing Love

We probably understand these principles—at least academically. But have we really put them to the test to see if they work?

The more we give, the more we receive! That's a promise.

"Let your love be a real thing" (Romans 12:9; Moffatt). What can we give most of all to this year's Feast of Tabernacles?

How can we best serve? By giving love and compassion.

Mr. Armstrong wrote in *The Missing Dimension in Sex*, "Love is an unselfish outgoing concern for the good and welfare of the one loved. Love is primarily on the giving, serving, sharing side of the fence—not on the getting, taking, factional, striving side. It is not selfish Love is unselfish. It is not an emotion, though it may be expressed with an emotional content. True love combines the rational aspect of outgoing concern—desire to help, serve, give or share—along with sincere concerned affectionate feeling" (emphasis added).

That kind of love is a sacrifice. Ask yourself, How much have I really served other people in my Church area and at the feasts? Not just served in a project, but actually served other people.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Living a life of service or give is simply fulfilling God's law of love. How well would the Feast of Tabernacles function with all its activities and meetings without love? Psalm 119:165 states, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is translated in the Moffatt: "Love is very patient, very kind. Love knows no jealousy; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient. Love never disappears."

Are you prepared to give that at this year's Feast of Tabernacles?

Reaping Abundant Blessings

Do you understand God's will for you during the Feast of Tabernacles? If you do, and then don't follow through and carry on with it in service to God, you will end up being punished more than those who never knew and understood these things (Luke 12:47).

"But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (verse 48). Have we been given a lot? Of course we have. Does God expect much from us in return? Absolutely.

Should we go the extra mile and sacrifice for God at this Feast of Tabernacles? That is our reasonable service.

2 Corinthians 9:6 states, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." This is a law. The harder we work or serve, the more we will reap—the more we will grow, and the more we will receive. Put this to the test at this year's Feast. See if it doesn't work!

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (verse 7). Give of yourself and be happy about it. God loves that!

"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work" (verse 8; Revised Standard Version) Paul is saying, Just give, and God will supply your needs! God has given us an abundance of blessings. Let's give of that abundance!

If we give liberally, God will give to us in the same way. That's a law!

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). We are co-workers in the Feast of Tabernacles project—fellow laborers.

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (verses 6-7). We all have our different roles, but there is one body.

But notice verse 8: "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." We are all in it together—working and serving on the same project. Yet, in the end, we are given our own reward according to our own works! That's because we are involved in a volunteer service! There are certain things required of us. But there are many jobs and services which are not required. God cannot force you to go above and beyond. You have to desire that and then carry it out.

If you do, you will reap many wonderful, bountiful blessings. Giving yourself in service brings lasting happiness. Doing so at God's Feast of Tabernacles will make it the most joyous Feast you could imagine!