

Handfuls On Purpose

Studies in the Book of Ruth

Chapter Eight

Seven Character Traits of a Person with a Servant's Heart

“²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest. . . ¹ And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name *was* Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after *him* in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. ³ And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech” (Ruth 1:22-2:3).

We have all heard of someone described as a person with a servant's heart. That is an admirable quality of character. It is a central characteristic of a yielded and mature Christian. It was certainly the character of Ruth.

We pick up our story in Ruth 1:22. It is barley season in Bethlehem. That means it was early Spring. Naomi and Ruth are back in Bethlehem, bankrupt and destitute. The only thing keeping them from starvation is God's provision in the Law giving them the right to glean.

“⁹ And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. ¹⁰ And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather *every* grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I *am* the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10).

In this chapter we want to concentrate on the character of Ruth revealed by her attitude towards gleaning as a servant. We need to review what happened to Naomi to prepare her and Ruth to be used of God (Ruth 1:21). Naomi “went out full” (of wealth and pride) and came home broken and “empty” of wealth and pride.

Before God can use any one of us to the full extent He wants too, we must be emptied of pride. Pride is the essence of our sin nature (self). Before we can be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must be emptied of self. Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (He dwells within us), but He cannot fill us with the power of His glory when our “flesh” (self) is on the throne of our life (control).

We must die to self (pride) and give Jesus the Throne (control) of our lives. This is the central reason why so few Christians ever realize the potential that is theirs in accomplishing things for Jesus Christ. They attempt to serve God while remaining in the “flesh” (refusing to relinquish the *steering wheel* of their lives to God).

In this chapter, we will look at seven characteristics of a servant's heart. Each of these seven characteristics can only be produced by dying to self and yielding control of our lives to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Everyone wants to lead. Few want to follow. Wanting leadership is about wanting control. God only allows those to lead who understand what it means to follow (yield control). When we talk about being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” the central idea is yielding control. The Holy Spirit will not empower what is not yielded to Him. God wants each of us to learn to trust Him with the control of our lives by yielding control to Him. Yielding is a choice to be His servant so God can use us to lead others. This is central to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and central to the principle of service.

“²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28).

“¹¹ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. ¹³ Neither yield ye your members *as instruments* of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as instruments* of righteousness unto God” {**instruments:** Gr. arms, or, weapons} (Romans 6:11-13).

The first characteristic of a servant’s heart is found in the words “Let me now go to the field” (Ruth 2:2). This reveals the character of yieldedness or submissiveness. Read Ephesians 5:18-21.

“¹⁸ And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; ¹⁹ Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:18-21).

No one will submit himself to serving others until he has yielded all that he has and all that he is to serving Jesus Christ.

The second characteristic of a servant’s heart is humility. Ruth was willing to glean. Have you ever noticed there are certain kinds of work some people think they are just too good to do?

The opposite of humility is pride. Pride tries to fool us into thinking it is something good to have. We are deceived into thinking that if we would lose our pride, we would also lose our dignity. The very opposite is true. We have no dignity in God’s eyes until we lose our pride. It is pride that defiles us before God.

“The fear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; and before **honour** {**honour:** dignity} *is* humility” (Proverbs 15:33).

“**By** {**By...:** or, The reward of humility, etc} humility *and* the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and **honour** {**honour:** dignity}, and life” (Proverbs 22:4).

Luke said the following about the Apostle Paul:

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:” (Acts 20:19).

The third characteristic of a servant’s heart is spiritual ambition. Ruth not only was willing to go “to the field,” she wanted to go. The Bible word for ambition is the word zeal or zealous. Every Christian is commanded to be “zealous.” The rebuke of Revelation 3:19 was because the Christians of the church (period of church history) of Laodicia had no spiritual ambition.

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

Spiritual ambition is much different than worldly ambition. Spiritual ambition is intent on bringing glory and praise to God, not self. In fact, spiritual ambition is almost offended when given praise for something God has done through our lives. Spiritual ambition immediately re-directs any praise to God (where it belongs).

Spiritual ambition is more than a willingness to do the work of the ministry. It is a drive to do the work of the ministry. The motivation of real spiritual ambition is that when the work is done (and done excellently), people will praise God.

When the Holy Spirit convicts us about a failure to do the work of the ministry and we yield to

Him about that, we should not confuse that yielding to do the work with actually doing the work. A *decision* to the work is not the same as *doing it*. Every employer knows that some people come to *work*, while others just *come* to work. Those with a servant's heart come to *work* (emphasize on work, not just coming).

The fourth characteristic of a servant's heart is consideration. Being consciously aware of and considerate of the needs of others is central to a servant's heart. Ruth went to glean because she wanted to provide for the needs of Naomi as well as herself. A servant who never does the work of the ministry is nothing more than a leech on the body of Christ.

“²³ Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) ²⁴ And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Teaching others to be servants is best done by example. When Jesus wanted to teach His disciples what it means to serve, what did He do? He washed their feet.

“⁴ He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. ⁵ After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. ⁶ Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? ⁷ Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. ⁸ Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. ⁹ Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. ¹⁰ Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. ¹¹ For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. ¹² So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? ¹³ Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. ¹⁷ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:4-17).

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He asked them, “Know ye what I have done to you?” He answers His question in verse 14, “If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.” Foot washing was usually delegated to the lowest of the servants (like toilet bowl washing today). In His example of being a servant, Christ first considered the need, then considered the people and then did what was necessary to meet the need Himself. (*Jesus washing the disciples' feet was an insignificant example of both humiliation and consideration when compared to His already great sacrifice in becoming a man.*)

The fifth and sixth characteristics of a servant's heart go hand in hand. They are hope and trust (Ruth 2:2, “I shall find grace”). Notice, there is no doubt exhibited in these words. Hope directly relates to faith. The person with faith (trust) is willing to put his life into the hands of God.

A good example is a small child jumping from the top of the stairs into his father's outstretched arms. It is his faith in his father's love and protection that leaps without hesitation. The boy's body is just attached to his faith.

When we put our lives into the hands of the Lord, we can be confident He will fulfill His promises to meet our needs. God does not break promises. The next time you walk into a difficult situation of life (which is an everyday occurrence), make sure you are holding on to the hand of your heavenly Father. He is your willing Protector and Provider. The only time you need to be concerned is when you have let go of His hand to go chasing after something in the world. God will never ask you to do anything that He won't be right beside you helping with.

“¹⁸ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

When God prompts you to do something that appears difficult or even impossible, just take His hand and do it.

The seventh characteristic of a servant’s heart is that of peace or comfort in life. Notice the tranquility about Ruth. Notice the apparent peace in her soul. She has no apparent anxiety about her situation in life. She is in a strange land with strange people who she doesn’t know and who don’t know her, but she isn’t worried or concerned. Why was this possible? Because of faith and hope? Yes, but it brings us in a full circle back to where we started. Death to self equals peace with God.

“⁷ Because the carnal mind {Gr. the minding of the flesh} *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. ⁸ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8).

I have had many professing Christians tell me they just do not have enough time to both work and serve God. Let me tell you why this problem exists in so many peoples’ lives. They try to keep the sacred separated from the secular. In essence they are double minded. They try to think in two directions at the same time. (James 1:8).

Serving God is not something we do separately from the rest of our lives. Serving God is interwoven into everything we do in our lives. Serving God is an attitude that meets each person and each situation in life with a servant’s heart. That means every relationship as well; our children, our husband or wife, our employer, our employees and our co-workers.

We do not need to find time to serve the Lord when we integrate every aspect of our lives into opportunities to serve, encourage, to be a blessing or to be a challenge. When we relegate living for Christ, serving Him and being a witness just to portions of our time, we become part time Christians.

Opportunities to serve are endless. Availability of opportunities is not the issue. People with servant’s hearts do not just look for opportunities to serve. They create opportunities to serve. In fact, their lives are endless opportunities because they have learned to cultivate servant’s hearts.

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Seven Character Traits of a Person with a Servant's Heart

1. List the seven characteristics of a servant's heart.

- A. Yie ___ edness
- B. Hu ___ lity
- C. Spiritual Am ___ ition
- D. Con ___ eration
- E. H ___ e
- F. Tr ___ t
- G. P ___ ce

2. Read Leviticus 19:9-10. What did God's grace provide to such people as Naomi and Ruth? _____

3. What must each of us be fully emptied of before God can fully use us? _____

4. In order to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit, who must be dethroned in our life? _____

5. What is the central reason why so few Christians are ever really used of God? _____

6. How does Galatians 2:20 show the over-all character of a servant's heart? _____

7. Would you say Galatians 2:20 is descriptive of your life? _____

8. Read Matthew 20:27. If you want to be a spiritual leader and lead people to Christ, what is necessary before God can use you in that capacity? _____

A. From that perspective, what priority would you give to learning to be a servant? _____

B. Is that your present priority? _____

9. Read Ephesians 5:18-21. What is the central idea behind being "filled" with the Spirit? _____

10. Read Romans 6:11-13. What keeps the Holy Spirit from having total control of our lives? _____

11. What does pride try to fool us into thinking we will lose once we lose it? _____

12. Read Proverbs 15:33. What does this verse reveal to us about the above question? _____

13. Read Proverbs 22:4. What is the reward of "humility and fear of the Lord"? _____

14. What is the Bible word for spiritual ambition? _____

15. In what way is spiritual ambition different then self-ambition? _____

16. What does true spiritual ambition do with praise when praise is misdirected towards self? _____

17. What is the difference between a *willingness* to do the work of the ministry and a *drive* to do the work of the ministry? _____
18. When you seek to serve the Lord, do you come to *work* or do you just come to work? _____
19. How would you define being *considerate* as it regards Christian service? _____

20. What is the only real way to teach people to be servants? _____
A. Read John 13:12-14. How did the Creator of heaven and earth teach people to be servants? _____
B. How could you apply this principle to your life in a visible and tangible way? _____

21. Read Romans 1:17. What is the principle of living detailed here? _____

22. Honestly, to what degree do you think you live this way? _____
23. What does “peace” with God provide in the believers life? _____

24. How often do you worry about things or circumstances in your life? _____
25. Why do so many professing Christians say they do not have enough time to serve the Lord? _____

26. Establish what you need to do to integrate every moment of your life into the service of others. _____

Remember, every plan begins with a decision to begin, but a decision to begin is not a beginning until you begin to work your plan. The key word is work. A plan is just a plan until the work begins.