

lesson thirteen

SEPTEMBER 21–27

A Community of **Servants**

*“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works”
(Heb. 10:23, 24, NKJV).*



At that Passover feast, no one wanted to lower themselves to the place of a servant. Yet this is what Christ asks us to do. Leading by example, He is willing to serve us and calls us to do the same to the members of our society who are unable to help themselves.

Matt. 17:28;
Heb. 10:22–24

Introduction *The Pride Ride*

Sean took pride in his new car. Aside from the novelty of owning his first car, he was also one of those people who truly valued the things that he worked hard to obtain. He would take great pride in washing and cleaning his car himself with the greatest attention to detail. He would spend hours vacuuming the floor carpets, steam cleaning the seats, and cleaning every possible cranny where dust could be found. He would polish his car regularly and even bought professional equipment to guarantee maximum aesthetic excellence. He was no stranger to flattering comments on the pristine condition of his vehicle—his pride and joy.

People around him soon became reluctant to approach him on anything to do with his precious car.

Regrettably, Sean's car served little purpose for anyone besides himself. Any passenger would have to endure scornful remarks about their dirty feet soiling his plush floor mats or crumbs from their meal getting into his seats. Sean would outright refuse friends and family members a ride simply because he had just cleaned his car and didn't want to get it dirty again. He would complain about the price of fuel if anyone requested his assistance. Sean's car became an idol to which he was devoted and committed. People around him soon became reluctant to approach him on anything to do with his precious car. What's worse is that Sean's pride in his ride prevented him from realizing that he was being cold to the people whom he was meant to care for.

As an organized community of believers, we often find ourselves in Sean's position. We go to great lengths to equip our churches with everything necessary for their maintenance. We become so consumed with the physical condition of the church that we lose sight of our purpose. The church was established to be a lighthouse in the community, a shining beacon of hope, the body of Christ wholly engaged in service to those around it. Just as Christ came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Matt. 17:28), we are to serve others. Ministering not only refers to our commission to teach, preach, and baptize but includes responding to the cries for help in our communities and meeting those specific needs. This week let us remember our true purpose as the body of Christ. Let us seek to draw others to Him. Let the church not be consumed in the pride ride but be consumed with the journey to becoming a mission-minded community.

Logos *The Greatest Gift*

Exod. 32:1–14, 28;
John 3:16;
Rom. 12:10;
1 Cor. 2:14; 13:3;
Gal. 6:9;
Heb. 10:23, 24;
Rev. 14:12

Living in the Past (Exod. 32:1–14, 28; 1 Cor. 2:14)

In the book of Exodus, God's chosen people openly disregard His covenant as they worship the golden calf. The past life of bondage in Egypt seemed but a fleeting memory as they were caught up in their selfish lusts and propensity for pagan worship. As they continued to live in the past, not forsaking their old ways, the people suffered a fatal blow in Exodus 32:28 when "the sons of Levi did according to the words of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day" (NKJV). Instead of serving God through worship and keeping His commandments, they chose to serve fallible gods and their carnal indulgences.

It is a life to be lived.

The church today faces similar setbacks. Besides the common distractions of day-to-day operations, many are caught up in their personal agendas and disputes. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses the problems, pressures, and struggles of a church called out of pagan society. In his words of counsel he states, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33, NKJV). He beseeches the people to love the church and the people in it so that they can show that love to the community.

Transformed to Serve (John 3:16; Rev. 14:12)

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we become transformed and understand that the gospel is not just a mere set of facts to believe; it is a life to be lived. The life of a Christian is a life of service. God's remnant people are referred to as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). To keep God's commandments, we must love Him, and to love Him is to serve Him. The foundation of our very existence is love.

In John 3:16 Jesus tells Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (NKJV). God's love for us is unconditional, but we do not fully comprehend what this means: There is nothing we can do or say to earn His love. We need to believe and serve—not to be saved but because we are saved. As God continues His work in us, His character is revealed and we become more like Him. It is through this transformation that we can do His work with sincerity and passion.

The Gift That Keeps on Giving (1 Cor. 13:3; Rom. 12:10)

God's love is the gift that keeps on giving. As Christians, having experienced this love, we ought not to keep it to ourselves. It is with great consideration that we must take heed to the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 12,

where he beseeches the people to present themselves as living sacrifices to God, serving Him with spiritual gifts. Paul also encourages to “be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (verse 10, NKJV).

Now comes the outworking of love, which can sometimes be challenging even for the church. For can we love others and not serve them? In Paul’s words, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3, NKJV). For us to minister to those in need, we need to understand this love and experience it ourselves. God knows our hearts, and if we do His work with an insincere heart, it will certainly displease Him. The love of God needs to abide in us. Only then can we be motivated to manifest this love to those within the church and the community.

Excel in Giving (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 10: 23, 24)

As a community of servants for Christ, we must also be generous and do good without complaining and disputing (cf. Gal. 6:9). As we live before the world, to excel in giving, we must not become disheartened by the evil that surrounds us. We must keep our focus on God, the One who gives us all that we need to serve Him in the church and in the community. God’s work must continue, even with the challenges that may appear from time to time.

Paul writes, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:23, 24, ESV). The church must understand that its main function is to serve as a beacon of light in a world of darkness, guiding the lost men and women to a place of protection and safety: the sanctuary of God. To guide the lost, we are to encourage one another in love and mingle with the community as Jesus did in the Gospels. Jesus ministered to the people at their point of need but not from a distance. He went out and met with them. He spoke to them and showed compassion. It is by His example that we must serve among the brethren and minister to those in our community.

REACT

1. What are some ways you can show love to the people in your community?
2. What should you do if you are challenged by showing love to those in your community?
3. How would you minister to someone in need who does not believe in God?

Testimony

Service Versus Service

Rom. 1:21;
 Heb. 10:26, 27;
 1 John 3:17-24

“God chose Israel to reveal His character to men. . . . In the early days of Israel the nations of the world, through corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. They had once known Him; but because ‘they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, . . . their foolish heart was darkened.’ Romans 1:21. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them an opportunity of again becoming acquainted with Him through His chosen people. . . .

Upon investigation, will God come to the same conclusion of us?

“But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God’s representatives. They forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission. The blessings they received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages they appropriated for their own glorification. They shut themselves away from the world in order to escape temptation. The restrictions that God had placed upon their association with idolaters as a means of preventing them from conforming to the practices of the heathen, they used to build up a wall of separation between themselves and all other nations. They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example.

“Priests and rulers became fixed in a rut of ceremonialism. They were satisfied with a legal religion, and it was impossible for them to give to others the living truths of heaven. . . .

“Of Israel God declared: ‘I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?’ Jeremiah 2:21. ‘Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.’ Hosea 10:1. ‘And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?’”¹ Upon investigation, will God come to the same conclusion of us?

REACT

1. Christ gave us the perfect example for ministry. What factors have caused us to divert from His plan?

2. What are the similarities between the Pharisees of Israel and the church today pertaining to mission?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 14, 15.

1 Cor. 12:12–20

Evidence *Levels of Organization*

Corinth, during the time of Paul's ministry, was a cosmopolitan city. Apart from its cultural diversity, the city was also one of wealth. Immorality was so rampant, it was accepted as the norm.¹ The church, as a microcosm of Corinthian society, was not exempt from these influences. Upon reaching the Corinthians, Paul would have been faced with a slew of issues within the church that caused major divisions. Two main issues that he addressed were (1) socioeconomic status—the rift between the rich, poor, and enslaved, and (2) religious culture—the differences between Jewish and Gentile practices and beliefs.

Optimum performance can be attained only when the various parts of the body work in unison.

Paul presents the concept of the church as both an organization and community using the human body. Cells make up tissue, which makes up organs, which are organized in systems. A lack of integration and harmony between these elements would likely result in deformity or disability.

The Greek word *sarx* translates as “flesh,” which refers to the biological makeup of a human, our bodies.² The use of *sarx* in this context reinforces the humanistic qualities of the church. The church is the combination of individuals (cells), ministries (tissues), churches (organs), and conferences, unions, and divisions (systems). However, its ability to sense the need for social identity, support, and purpose should extend further than itself.

The church today faces a dilemma similar to that of the church in Corinth. It contains persons of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. There also exists a rift between persons who have been “groomed” in Adventism as opposed to those who have recently joined the body in the height of the millennial movement. In seeking to fulfill the Christian mission, the church members should consider their humanity, which points to not only their need for a Savior but a need for collaboration. Optimum performance can be attained only when the various parts of the body work in unison. The efficiency would allow for a more comprehensive missionary approach when seeking to meet the needs of the oppressed, hungry, naked, and helpless in society.

REACT

1. What individual changes can you make to encourage a spirit of unity at your local church without compromising biblical principles?

1. G. Lacoste Munn, “The Historical Background of First Corinthians,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 3 (Fall 1960), para. 7–17, <http://preachingsource.com/journal/the-historical-background-of-first-corinthians/>.

2. “The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon,” s.v. “Sarx,” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/sarx.html>.

How-to *Your Body as a Living Sacrifice*

Rom. 12:1;
1 Cor. 12:13, 24;
1 John 3:16–18

“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Since we live in Christ and not of ourselves, we must be an example to others as Christ was an example to us. Oftentimes we become distracted with the daily running of the church as an organization, and we neglect our duty to do God’s work in our communities. We get so caught up in ensuring that the church building looks good and maintaining the order of the church service that we forget that the church is not a building but a people and that we have a God-mandated mission to go out into the world. First John 3:16–18 reminds us to stay focused. Here are two things we can do to help us stay focused on our mission.

Let the gospel shape your lifestyle.

Take note of the way you live. Extend the knowledge you’ve gathered outside of the church. We are to spread the gospel to all nations, and you might be the only expression of God’s love to another person for that week. Let the gospel shape your lifestyle. If we are not focused and constantly seeking the call of God in our lives, we will be held accountable. Once you walk and talk as Jesus did, you will be given the opportunity to expose someone to the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior. “For our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundantly honour to that part which lacked” (1 Cor. 12:24).

Stay faithful in your works. Recognition is something we desire as humans beings, but the only recognition you should seek is from the Lord. We are not of this world, and, thus, our minds should be set on higher things. Listen to the instruction of the Holy One as it relates to your purpose and duty here on earth, whether it be joining the children’s ministry or sharing the gospel with your coworker or friend. Continue to love and serve one another. Our minds cannot foresee the talents and ideas that God will instill in us once we obey His call. Never surrender to the discouraging tactics of the devil because God is ever faithful, and He will complete the work He started in us.

REACT

1. How do we avoid falling into the trap of discouragement when doing God’s work?
2. What are some ways we can discern the instruction of God in our lives?

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Rom. 12:3, 6

Opinion *One God, One People*

Music fascinates me. When done properly, various instruments can be played together, each playing different musical notes, yet a harmonious sound is heard. Each musician is dedicated to playing his or her part and playing it well, resulting in a glorious sound. Through the workings of an orchestra, one can see and understand the workings of the church. Each musician must play their part for the composition to sound how the composer intended it to sound. So each member of the church must play a part in the working of the church.

Service to God is not always like instant soup...

For the church to make a positive impact in service to those around us as Jesus did when He walked the earth, we must be united in Him; we must work as one. In the orchestra, each musician has abilities: some can play the violin, some the cello, some the flute. So we in the church have different abilities: teaching, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, healing, and languages. We are to use our gifts and abilities in harmony with one another (1 Cor. 12:4). We are to work as well-oiled machinery; each member must be functioning at their best for the church to be as effective as Jesus was in His ministry here on earth.

Back to the orchestra. All the musicians are playing the same song but different parts. Even the smallest part, like the tinkling of the triangle, brings a sweetness to the overall sound produced. So, too, all members of the church must have the same goal, though we carry out different functions. We must also keep in mind that each function, no matter how small or insignificant it seems to you, is needed for the church to properly represent Christ to this dying world.

It's also important to remember to encourage our brothers and sisters. Service to God is not always like instant soup, where you put in work for three minutes and get results. It's sometimes like learning a musical instrument: you have to invest time and effort to get results. Do not become disheartened when you do not see the immediate effects of the efforts of your service. God reminds us not to be weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9). When we see our brothers and sisters losing faith, we are to encourage them with love to stay on the path (Heb. 10:24). Remember that Jesus is faithful concerning His promises; and if we continue to do His good works, we will reap what we sow (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 10:23).

REACT

1. Do you know what your gifts or talents are, and are you using them to the best of your ability as a member of the community of servants for Christ?
2. What can you do to encourage those who seem to be losing the faith?

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Exploration

Genuine Service

Hebrews 10

CONCLUDE

There is a well-known saying that goes, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Christ in His Word has time and time again outlined His perfect will for the church. He not only teaches us but came to this earth to give us a living example and make a way for us to walk in the “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20). Christ calls us to reject the easy, mechanical, and cold way we’ve been purporting service to be. He’s made a way for us to reach out in true service to those who need it the most. Hebrews 10 is a love letter; it’s a call for God’s people to be who He’s called them to be. To be authentic. To be real. To be a community of servants in a world where to be served seems most important. Let us support each other and encourage each other, and by God’s Holy Spirit, let us hold fast, without wavering, and do the good works we have been chosen to do.

CONSIDER

- Administering a spiritual gift assessment tool to the members of your class to help them understand their service niche.
- Compiling a skills and talents bank to become aware of the resources available to you for mission.
- Brainstorming an outreach program that utilizes the talents of each person in the class.
- Making the word *service* into an acronym.
- Producing a skit that illustrates the differences between service (church) and service (mission).
- Performing a small-scale needs assessment in your community to assess the field to which you are accountable.

Cadia Daniel, D’Abadie, Trinidad and Tobago.

Nehemiah: Studies on Leadership

The fourth quarter of 2019 debuts an updated curriculum titled *inVerse*. Taking cues from the former *Collegiate Quarterly*, this new study will blend topics and perspectives relevant to young adults with subjects that the world church is also studying from quarter to quarter. If you want a deeper encounter with Scripture, order your copy of the *inVerse* Bible study guide today! Here are summaries for the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 Discovery of Calling: Prayer and Purpose

Nehemiah 1; Ezra 4:4–24; Lev. 26:27–45; 2 Chron. 6:26–39

Key Thought: At the opening of the account, Nehemiah is found to be in the Medo-Persian winter citadel palace of Shushan. The year is the twentieth of the reign of King Artaxerxes, and the month is Chislev, around December or January. Leaders today have much to glean from this passage. Problems range not only in political, intellectual, philosophical, economic, and/or structural spheres, but it could be argued that the most important area is the spiritual sphere. This is where the most light, compassion, and grace are needed. This is the realm Christians are called, ultimately, to impact.

Lesson 2 In His Presence: Vision and Planning

Nehemiah 2; Exod. 4:15; 1 Thess. 5:17; Matt. 10:16; Acts 26:24–31

Key Thought: When compared to the first verse of chapter 1, the first verse of chapter 2 also takes place in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes's reign. The month Chislev of chapter 1 was approximately December or January, while the month of Nisan in chapter 2 was around April or May. So Nehemiah prayed and fasted for four to five months. Do you have any large decisions that you need to make—for instance, decisions concerning your career, calling, lifework, marriage, or finding your purpose in life? Why not set aside some time to pray and fast for the Lord's wisdom and intervention? It may be a shorter time than you anticipate, perhaps even four to five months before you notice Heaven moving circumstances in your life as a response.

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