Faith Builders holds servanthood as a core value and states it this way: “In humble and faithful exercise of our gifts and vocations, we carry forward the sacrificial ministry of Jesus, serving all people, especially the community of believers.”

Jesus made one of His most memorable “mission statements” as He was settling a dispute among His disciples: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Leading up to this, two of His disciples were angling for the top seats in the kingdom. The remaining ten reacted indignantly. Reflecting on their tiff, we have to acknowledge that humanity hasn’t grown up much in the intervening years. Jesus used their spat as an opportunity to call them all to reconsider how they thought about themselves and about greatness in the kingdom. And He offered His own life as an example.

Learning from the life of Jesus is a lifelong venture that cannot be condensed to an article. But I would like to consider four observations about servanthood based on the living example of Jesus.

1. A true servant is first a servant of God.

With His rich character and amazing resources, Jesus constantly had people tugging at His time, begging for His help, and pressuring Him to use His influence and power in particular ways. From Jesus, we learn that a life of service does not mean doing everything others ask us to do.

John records Jesus saying repeatedly that His guiding directive was the Father’s will. For example, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

Servants in the kingdom of God must first present themselves as “living sacrifices” to God in order to serve others according to His direction. God then calls us—gives us particular assignments to advance His kingdom by serving in the church, reaching the lost, and caring for the needy—and He gifts us accordingly.

The call of God on our lives enables us to know the things we should say yes to and the things we should say no to. Believers who do not understand their calling will almost invariably fall into one of two traps. Either they will live aimlessly, squandering the resources and gifts God has invested in them, or they will serve indiscriminately and burn out by attempting to be all things to all people.

Jesus knew the calling His Father had given Him, and He stayed true to His calling. He let it guide His entire ministry and did not allow either the demands of people or the suggestions of the enemy to sidetrack Him.

2. A true servant is motivated by love.

Jesus’ ministry to us was love-driven. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son…” (John 3:16). Love moved Him to lay aside His glory and take the shroud of humanity. Compassion moved Him to touch the lepers, give sight to the blind, drive out the tormenting demons, teach the crowds, feed the hungry, and give dignity to the outcasts.

The love of Jesus was others-focused, which means that Jesus lost sleep, became weary, and ultimately gave His life for the good of others.

Furthermore, His love was emotionally connecting. Jesus was “touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15, KJV). He let His own heart be crushed, grieved, burdened, stricken, and pierced with the sorrows of others. These strong feelings of distress enabled Him to connect with those in need, and this same compassion informs His ministry of intercession for us today.

If we would be servants like Jesus, we too must let our hearts feel the needs of others, and then we must commit our

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A Tribute to Beatrice King
For twenty-three years, Beatrice King was an exemplary servant at Faith Builders. She served in a number of roles, but for the last twelve years she served as head cook. Sometimes she doubted the importance of her service because food is material and fleeting.

However, we value her example as a servant because she showed us how to give a “cup of cold water” in the name of Jesus. She intentionally shaped her work in the kitchen to be a contribution to the kingdom of God. She did this in many ways: by serving quality food, by creating a joyful and adventuresome work environment for her volunteer helpers, by offering words of encouragement, by providing uplifting music in the kitchen (that often spilled out into adjoining areas), by her ready prayers, and by her unparalleled sense of humor. We remember her ability to transform very ordinary ingredients into extraordinary dishes; dishes she served to celebrate special events like the return of students following a break.

We miss Beatrice keenly. We miss her at unexpected moments, and in the annual events that she always supported and made special.

But her life continues to speak to us. Beatrice demonstrated in the kitchen what it means to be a servant after the example of Jesus, and we are richer and more responsible because of the legacy she left us.

3. A true servant must exercise humility.
In a touching scene just before He made the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. It was dirty work, a menial task normally assigned to someone at the bottom of the slave spectrum. When Jesus then instructed His disciples to “do as I have done to you,” He likely didn’t have in mind that they should ceremonially wash each other’s feet, appropriate as such a ceremony might be. Rather He was calling them to serve with humility. He was calling them to lay aside ambition for position, to be willing to do the thankless job, to consider no act of service as beneath them, to look for ways to bless others in small ways, to accept shame for doing good, and to identify with the downtrodden.

One of the insidious dangers of learning is pride. As Paul warned the Corinthians, “Knowledge puffs up” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Is it possible that Jesus gave this lesson in humility exactly because the disciples had spent several years under His excellent tutorship?

Learning can be a wonderful experience, but only if it leads us to greater awareness of who God is and who we are in relationship with Him. Applying this to the FB experience, education is beneficial when it is rooted in humility, when it leads us to take up a towel and kneel at a basin.

Much good has been done through those who use their minds and exercise their skills with a humble heart. On the other hand, much damage has been done by those who proudly display their abilities and superior learning.

4. A true servant maintains personal holiness.
The feet-washing lesson was not only about humble service. As He washed the disciples’ feet, Jesus also talked about cleansing. “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). And a bit later He said, “… you are clean, but not all of you” (v. 10).

Looking at the disciples gathered that evening, we can see the sins of avarice, competition, fear, and pride. Some of those sins would be exposed in painful and embarrassing ways in the next twenty-four hours.
And looking at those involved in ministry today, we can readily see how sin damages the effectiveness of a ministry, how it destroys testimonies, and how it brings disgrace to the name of Christ. Power struggles in the church, embezzlement of funds by ministry leaders, sexual sins in the life of a pastor, child abuse by Christian parents... even unbelievers are appalled. Especially unbelievers!

Jesus’ ministry was powerful like no other because His life was righteous like no other. As Peter wrote, He “committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus fully understood the implications of a holy life. The same night that He washed His disciples’ feet, He prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth!” (John 17:17). He knew the ministry to which these men were called, and He knew how their holy lives would lend power to their ministry.

Then He made this astounding statement: “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself” (v. 19). We might ask the unthinkable: “How would it have affected us if Jesus had been careless about His personal holiness?”

We certainly do not carry the weight and glory of Jesus’ ministry, but nonetheless, holiness of life matters for men and women who would serve in the kingdom of heaven. We need to be cleansed of selfishness and sin, purified in thought and action and attitude.

We will not be perfect as servants. Students who graduate from Faith Builders, like their instructors, are still in the process of being shaped, deepening in love and humility, and being cleansed of self. But we hold Jesus as our example of true servanthood, and we stretch our hearts and minds, our actions and our attitudes, to follow in His steps.

John Coblentz

Notes

1. The Greek word translated “touched with the feelings” is sympatheo, from which we get our English word “sympathize”, and in both languages the word means literally “to feel with.”
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