

Serving the Lord

God is unaffected by us. It's true. He is unaffected by what He creates. God has existed eternally in a state of complete perfection in every way, before He created anything. Within the godhead is perfect worship, fellowship, and love. God can't lack anything. God can't need anything. Creating the universe couldn't possibly make God greater or more fulfilled in any way. These truths beg the question, *"Why then did God create us?"*

If God didn't need us for anything, then we might be tempted to think that creating the universe was an insignificant thing; maybe even pointless. But that's not the case. Creation had great purpose. God created us so that we would enjoy His glory (Isaiah 43:6-7, 2 Corinthians 1:20). In creating us, God allows us to see and know His awesome majesty. Think of it like this, when you enjoy something amazing, perhaps your first time standing at the beach looking out over the ocean, or being on the top of a mountain looking out over the vastness below, you think to yourself, *"I want others to be here to enjoy this too!"* In a similar way, God created us with that in mind. Before creation, God's fullness was on display among the persons of the Trinity. God decided to create others to enjoy His goodness.

The idea of God being unaffected by His creation might cause one to ask, *"How can God be unaffected by us? There are times when God is jealous for us, angry at us, and pleased with us."* Two things are mutually true. First, God is unaffected by us; He'd live in perfect satisfaction whether He created us or not. Second, God does respond to our behavior; He engages us intimately. He's not oblivious to us, nor does He ignore us. These truths are not mutually exclusive, they harmonize. His response to our behavior only shows that we have value, despite the fact that we bring no value to God.

When God became a human being, the God-man Jesus, God did what only He could do in order to bring people into joy with Himself. God came down from heaven to get us, to bring us up to where He is, to enjoy Him fully. God is not benefitted by me, instead, as a Christian, I'm the beneficiary in the relationship! Jesus expressed this truth when He was incarnate and prayed to the heavenly Father in John 17:24, ***"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*** Here, the second Person in the Trinity (Jesus, the Son) is expressing the nature of His eternally perfect relationship with the first Person of the Trinity (the Father), ***"before the foundation of the world."*** Jesus also expresses His desire and anticipation about the elect; that they enjoy an eternal relationship with the godhead. The elect benefit by receiving the unspeakable satisfaction of seeing their Savior in His eternal state. Who are "the elect?" The elect is those whom the Father has given to the Son, as Jesus says, ***"whom You have given Me."*** The elect are Jesus' sheep, His bride, His Church. The elect are the beneficiaries in the relationship.

One might say, *"I thought God made us so that we would serve Him?"* After all, the Bible is full of *"serve the Lord"* language. For example, Joshua 24:15, ***"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** Or, Paul's words to the elect of Thessalonica, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, ***"you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."*** Yes, Christians are servants, but in what sense? We don't serve God as though we could meet God's needs. He has no needs. In fact, Acts 17:25 says, ***"God is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything."*** God doesn't call upon us for anything; we call upon Him! God highlights this point in Psalm 50:12, when He says, ***"If I were hungry, I would not tell you."*** This is a blunt way of God telling man, *"Even if I did have a need, which I don't, you couldn't possibly do anything to satisfy it anyway!"* Furthermore, Jesus says in Mark 10:45, ***"The Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."*** He saves us, we do nothing for Him! So then, in what sense do Christians serve God?

The Apostle Peter speaks to this very question. 1 Peter 4:11, ***“Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves does so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified.”*** Any service of man to God, in the name of God and for the kingdom of God, is powered wholly by God. Paul reiterates this when he testifies to the Corinthian Church in 1 Corinthians 15:10, ***“by God’s grace I am what I am...I labored...yet not I, the grace of God with me.”*** So, both Peter and Paul are essentially saying that we serve God by being a conduit by which He operates through us. We serve, by being available to be used by Him. It’s all His power and His authority working through believers to accomplish His kingdom purposes. Christians can’t boast of anything, except what God does in and through them. Amen!

Serving God means that God enlists us into His service; calling us to have a part in accomplishing His purposes. Here’s an example of what this looks like. Let’s say that I’m praying for my unsaved neighbor to entrust himself to Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. I commit to praying regularly for him, and as opportunities present themselves, I’m speaking to my neighbor about faith issues. Now, if he should trust in Jesus, I’m a beneficiary of abundant joy! I rejoice over the fact that God did something, and I was a small part of God’s plan. God’s purposes were accomplished through me, and God used me to speak and pray over my neighbor. Now, change the scenario. Let’s say that I had never spoken to my neighbor about Jesus, nor did I ever pray for him. And let’s say that one day he tells me that he just entrusted himself to Jesus and is now a Christian. Upon hearing that news, I’d be thankful and encouraged, but I wouldn’t have nearly the amount of joy I’d have if I’d had been praying and ministering to him all along. In short, God doesn’t need me to reach my neighbor. He doesn’t need me for anything. Yet, God invites me to participate in His kingdom work, and this is called serving the Lord. I’m the beneficiary in serving the Lord. I experience great joy when God operates through me. Being a part of God’s kingdom purposes gives my life purpose and significance!

Consider what Jesus said, when He talked about either serving God or serving money. There’s a unique similarity in choosing money as the idol in this comparison. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus says, ***“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”*** Let’s unpack this. How does one serve money? A person serves money in the same way that one serves God. First of all, just like God, money receives no benefit if I choose to serve it. Money is unaffected by me. I enjoy the benefits of what pursuing money provides me; nicer things, maybe public attention, etc. In the same way, God is unaffected by me. When I serve God, I enjoy the benefits of what pursuing God provides me; joy and purpose in my earthly life, and the confidence of eternal life in heaven to come! But I can’t serve two things; God and money, or God and anything else.

Years ago, Hewlett Packard put out a study on employment application patterns. The study found that a man will apply for a position if he believes that he is 60% qualified. A woman will only apply when she feels 100% qualified. Now, I’m sure there are exceptions, but the study provides an interesting glimpse on how we view our qualifications. Fortunately, God doesn’t consider our qualifications in the same way that the world does. Perhaps you’ve thought, *“God can’t use me for anything significant, I’m just not qualified.”*

This essay aims to expose the purpose of serving the Lord, and draw attention to the tired excuses that too many Christians have in why they aren’t serving the Lord. Let me be perfectly blunt when I say, if you’re not serving the Lord, you’re not really living!

Stop looking at what's in your hands!

Have you ever thought, *"I'm not equipped for ministry. I don't have the resources."* Consider Moses, and the resources that he had. Moses had a stick! God asked Moses to be a mighty prophet and the figurehead over the nation of Israel; leading them from Egyptian captivity into a newfound relationship with God. But Moses felt unqualified. Look at Exodus 4:1-2, ***"Then Moses said, 'What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' 'The LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' And he said, 'A staff.'"*** God essentially told Moses, *"See that staff in your hand. That'll do!"*

Samson had the jawbone of a donkey! Looking back into the book of Judges, the Philistines were enemies of God, and Samson was one of God's instruments of divine justice. God moved Samson to kill 1,000 Philistine men. Samson had no weapons. He wasn't equipped! God showed him the jawbone of a donkey laying on the ground. God essentially said, *"That jawbone right there, that'll do!"* I'm reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."***

Shamgar was God's instrument to kill 600 Philistine men, using only an ox-goad (Judges 3:31). An ox-goad is basically a pointed rod, used to jab oxen to get them to move along. Gideon only had a trumpet (Judges 7:20-22)! Once Gideon and his men sounded their trumpets, God conquered the Midianite army. And even more amazing, Joshua and his men only had their voices (Joshua 6:20)! Upon shouting, Jericho fell! Christians need to be like David, who only held a sling. Yet, David didn't consider the sling. Instead, David considered the promise of the Lord; that the Philistines would be delivered into the hands of the Israelites. And by a sling, Goliath fell!

Why are you still looking at what's in your hand? JUST MAKE WHAT YOU HAVE AVAILABLE TO THE LORD!

Stop considering your finances!

Have you ever thought, *"If I was rich, I'd do so much ministry."* Remember the account of Jesus feeding 5,000 men, written in Mark 6:33-44. The crowd size was likely 15-20,000 when accounting for women and children. Jesus had been teaching this crowd all day. By evening the disciples pulled Jesus aside and asked Him to send the crowd away to buy food. Jesus wasn't going to send the people away hungry. Jesus said to His disciples, ***"You give them something to eat."*** The disciples objected to Jesus solution, ***"Shall we go and spend 200 denarii on bread?"*** A denarius was a silver coin that generally equaled a day's wages. The disciples didn't have 200 denarii. The disciples proclaimed this exaggerated statement as they were astounded by the enormity of Jesus' request. In short, the disciples wrongfully considered their finances. Jesus wasn't asking them to go to market. Jesus replied, ***"How many loaves do you have?"*** The disciples had five small barley loaves and two small fish. That was enough for maybe one or two people to be satisfied. Jesus used the disciple's food, their resources, however small, and multiplied it to feed everyone there with plenty left over.

On the subject of finances, Paul was leaving the church he planted at Philippi (Philippians 4:15-19), and the people there gave him some money for his continued missionary journey. Paul accepted their gift and said, ***"Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account."*** This means that when I use my finances for kingdom purposes, regardless of how wealthy or poor I am, God credits my account. In other words, I'm the beneficiary of a type of blessing from God when I make my finances available.

Stop considering your finances! JUST ALLOW THE MONEY YOU HAVE TO BE USED BY GOD!

Stop considering your education!

Have you ever thought, *"I'd totally serve the Lord if I had Bible college or seminary degree."* Let's not forget about the simple people that Jesus recruited to be disciples. Keep in mind that many of the people in Jerusalem were uneducated, most not being literate. Peter and John were uneducated men who took up fishing as a means to support themselves. They would later become incredible men of faith. Shortly after they became apostles, in the book of Acts, we read about them being arrested for their faith. The two men are brought before the Sanhedrin; the governing body over Israel in that day. The rulers of the Sanhedrin court were astonished by the sharp and intelligent manner in which Peter and John spoke. We see in Acts 4:13, ***"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."*** How were these, ***"uneducated and untrained men,"*** able to amaze the scholars of their day? They had been in the company of Jesus, and were now allowing God's Spirit to operate through them.

Stop considering your education! MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO BE WITH JESUS, AND BE USED BY HIS SPIRIT!

Stop considering your age!

Maybe you've told yourself, *"I'm too young, God doesn't expect anything from me. I'll serve the Lord when I'm older."* Don't forget what King Saul said to David in 1 Samuel 17:33, ***"You are not able to go against this Philistine (Goliath) to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."*** Man considers a person's age, while God considers the heart. There was also Jeremiah, who thought of himself as too young to be used by God as a prophet. We see in Jeremiah 1:6-7, ***"I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth."*** God replied, ***"Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak."***

There's also Gideon, who when called by God, felt unqualified due to his age, ***"I am the youngest in my father's house"*** (Judges 6:12-16). God responded, ***"Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."*** Of course there's the great King Josiah, King of Judah. He began his rule at the age of 8. And at age 16 he began seeking the Lord. By age of 20, Josiah led a massive revival throughout Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 34).

Maybe you've told yourself, *"I'm too old. God knows I'm limited by my age."* If that's you, consider Anna, a prophetess who served the Lord and lived in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38). Depending on the math, Anna could have been anywhere from 84-104 years old. Luke writes, ***"She was advanced in years...She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers."*** After Jesus was dedicated as a baby in the temple, she, ***"continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."*** Until she died, she talked about the arrival of the Messiah, to anyone who would listen! Remember also, Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39); healed, then waited on her guests. She wasn't healed and then said, *"I'm an old-lady, can someone get me a cup of tea while I rest."*

Stop considering your age! JUST MAKE YOUR LIFE AVAILABLE TO BE USED BY GOD!

Stop considering the condition of your body!

Maybe you've thought, *"I'm not well. I'm fighting sickness...cancer...diabetes, etc."* Or, *"I've got a physical limitation. I'm on disability."* For those that are not well, consider Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30), ***"he was sick to the point of death"*** but ministered as a fellow worker and soldier for the sake of the gospel. I'm also

reminded of a man in my church in Pennsylvania, who when diagnosed with stage-four cancer, was brought before the congregation to be prayed over by the elders. The man testified and said, *"God has seen fit that I bear cancer for His glory!"* The man was not going to let his sickness derail his purpose in life!

Maybe you've got some physical limitations, or a disability of some kind. Then consider Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9), who was Jonathan's son (King David's best friend). Mephibosheth had two lame feet, but when he was called into King David's presence, he came and prostrated himself and said, *"Here is your servant."* If a man with two lame feet can serve an earthly king, he can certainly serve the King of Kings! God knows what limitations you have, and He will use you as you are. God says, *"Who makes man mute, or deaf, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"* God won't put a limitation on your ability to serve Him!

Back to Moses, who felt he had limitations regarding his body, *"I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."* Some think maybe Moses stuttered or had some kind of speech impediment. In any case, God replied to Moses, *"Go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth."* However you feel about your body and its challenges, God says, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Stop considering the condition of your body! JUST MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO BE USED OF GOD!

Stop thinking you have to be someone superior!

Maybe you've said to yourself, *"I'm no Billy Graham or Apostle Paul, who am I to serve the Lord?"* Let's not forget what the Apostle James tells us about the prophet Elijah (James 5:17). We tend to view the prophet Elijah as though he was someone superior, or that ministry is for prominent figures only. James reminds us that Elijah was an ordinary man like you and I, *"with a nature like ours."* It was because of Elijah's righteousness that God used him to do great things. Elijah prayed that the rain would stop, and not a single drop didn't fall for three and a half years. Then, Elijah prayed again, and God sent rain and ended the drought.

Consider the Apostle Peter, who we certainly regard as someone magnificent. Yet Peter himself reminds Christians that they have the same Spirit in them that he has in himself! He writes in 2 Peter 1, *"Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, (I write) to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours."*

Stop thinking that serving the Lord is for prominent people! JUST MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE FOR GOD!

Stop considering your experiences!

Perhaps you've thought, *"I just don't have the experience to do anything for the Lord? I'm limited as to the kind of service I can offer."* Satan wants you to think you're limited to only ministering to people who share your same experiences, or that you have to have an abundance of life-experience in order to serve the Lord with excellence. As a jail chaplain I'm often told, *"I've been in prison, so I'd be a great fit for jail ministry."* My response is, *"Maybe. Your time in prison isn't what qualifies you to minister to inmates. I've never been arrested, and I'm a full-time jail chaplain."* I say this simply to point out that we look at qualifications differently than God does. The Scriptures are full of "unexperienced" people, unfit by man's standards, that God calls to serve in radical ways. Remember, human reasoning leads to spiritual blindness.

Stop considering your experiences! JUST MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE FOR KINGDOM PURPOSES!

Stop considering your past sin!

Maybe you've thought, *"I've got so much sin in my life, I'm not fit to serve the Lord! You'd be shocked by my past."* I'm reminded of a lady named Rahab (Joshua 2:11, 6:23, Matthew 1:5), who was a pagan of pagans. Not only was she one of the God-hating heathens who lived in Jericho (a city that God destroyed because of their wickedness), she was even a prostitute amongst them. Yet, she turned in faith! She was saved because she entrusted herself to the Lord. We might think that when a pagan prostitute comes to faith, that God simply hands her a broom and says, *"You made it by the skin of your teeth. You're only fit to sweep the gutters."* No way! She went from being a pagan-nobody, to being prominent. God not only grafted her into the body of Christ, she became the Great-Great-Grandmother of King David, and a notable part of the lineage of Jesus!

Then there's the Apostle Paul. If there was anyone who had a checkered past, it's him. I've known many people that committed murder, but I've never met anyone whose resume consists of "professional Christian killer." Paul was a hunter of Christians; killing and imprisoning them simply for their faith. Yet, he became one of the most prominent servants of God. In short, there's no baggage in your life that puts you out of reach of God's grace!

Stop considering your failures! JUST MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE FOR GOD'S GLORY!

Stop stewing in your anger at God!

Remember the prophet Jonah, who didn't want to serve the Lord because he didn't like the thought of God forgiving the Ninevites. The Ninevites were God's enemies, and God's patience was at an end. However, God gave that wicked civilization one last chance. God sent Jonah to call them to repentance. Long story short, Jonah reluctantly obeyed the Lord, and preached repentance to the Ninevites. Then Jonah sat on a hillside and watched over the valley of Nineveh, hoping for God to rain fire and brimstone over the city. Jonah wanted these people to die, as he hated them. However, God was forgiving, and as the Ninevites repented, God relented from sending His wrath upon them. This angered Jonah. Jonah argued with God from upon the hillside. Jonah was so mad that God had forgiven the Ninevites, that Jonah even asked God to take his life; Jonah thought it was better to die than to see the Ninevites receive forgiveness! As Jonah stewed in anger at God, God was gracious, and quickly grew a plant out of the ground to shade Jonah and cool him off in the heat of the day, and from the heat of his anger. What a beautiful picture of God's grace!

Next though, God sent a worm to eat the plant, and Jonah's shade was lost. Jonah's anger grew hotter. God used the vine as an analogy about Nineveh, asking Jonah, ***"Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?"*** In the same way that God had compassion on Jonah, amidst his sin, God had compassion on Nineveh, amidst their sin. God didn't need Jonah. God could have sent a worm to tell Nineveh to repent. Jonah simply lost out on the blessing of enjoying God's goodness, and instead chose to stew in his own anger. Perhaps you're angry at God because you've heaped false expectations upon Him. Maybe your angry at God because He was gracious to someone you hate. Your anger at God doesn't impact God one bit, it only impacts you! By choosing anger, you self-inflict harm. Why rob yourself of the joy in being used by God?

Stop stewing in your misplaced anger at God. ENJOY THE DELIGHT THAT ONLY COMES FROM SERVING HIM!

Stop looking at what's in your hands! Stop considering your finances! Stop considering your education! Stop considering your age! Stop considering the condition of your body! Stop thinking you have to be someone

superior! Stop considering your experiences! Stop considering your past sin! Stop stewing in your misplaced anger at God!

Stop being paralyzed by the limitations in your life, and discover what God can do through you. Stop drowning in fears of insufficiency. God doesn't call the equipped, He equips those that He's called. Remember, if you're a Christian, then you're God's solution for the needs around you. Relax, He'll equip you. Are you ready to start living? Then serve the Lord!