

CIC 8/2/26: Pastor Justin Samuelson, Serving Others

As the speaker in the video says, **to love God is to love what he loves.**

And if God loves others then who should we love? Others. Loving and therefore serving others is a fundamental, essential part of our Christian identity and walk with Jesus. The speaker quoted the famous passages of the greatest commandments, to love God with all of our being, and love our neighbors as ourselves, and he also referenced Jesus example of the story. And throughout the New Testament, we see examples of this truth.

Acts 20:32-35

³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Paul is talking with a group of leaders while he is on his way to Jerusalem, and since things where he is going might get dicey, he shares some concluding thoughts for them to have. As Paul demonstrated with his own lifestyle, service, and sacrifice, he is calling the church to continue that example service to others. Including and especially service. As he said, we must help the weak, and it is more blessed to give than to receive. This was actually the note Paul ended on.

Galatians 5:13

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

As Paul points out here, The mandate of serving others is so central to our faith and practice that it intertwines with and applies concepts like our freedom in Christ. Because of the mandate to serve others, we have a natural and logical direction with which to use our freedom. Not towards selfish ends, but towards selfless ends.

And it wasn't just Paul who wrote on the need to serve. Peter also does so

1 Peter 4:7-10

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

In light of living in the end times, should we be more selfish? No. What does Peter say, to Above all, above all, love each other deeply. Offer hospitality, use your gifts to serve others, so that in all things God may be praised.

John also wrote on service in his letters

1 John 3:16-18

¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

We serve, we give, we love because Jesus Christ served, gave, and loved first. With his example, this fundamental cornerstone of our faith in mind, how could we not serve?

And it wasn't just the writers of the Epistles who emphasized the necessity of service, Jesus did so himself.

Mark 9:33-35

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

So while his disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest, Jesus sits down and tells them, interesting topic, in fact if you want to be the greatest, you must be the least, and you must be a servant to everyone else.

And in the next chapter Jesus reiterates this reality.

Mark 10:35-37, 41-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."...

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever

wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

I guess Jesus’ previous time addressing this quest for greatness didn’t quite sink in for James and John. And so Jesus addresses the issue once more. Whoever wants to be great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave, ie the least. And he begins readdressing this topic by first comparing his followers to the Gentile rulers, saying the way they lead (by glorifying themselves and telling others to worship them) is not how you’ll lead. Not so with you. And then Jesus concludes by tying in himself, saying that even he did not come to be served, but to serve, even to the point of giving his own life for the sake of the many.

If the question we ask is should we serve, or is serving necessary to follow Christ, the answer to that question, according to Scripture, is an overwhelming, definitive, decisive yes.

The writers of Scripture have left us with no doubt. Service is absolutely fundamental to our life with God.

The problem we face isn’t a lack of knowledge, communication, or direction, Scripture leaves us with no confusion there. Our problem is one of application. Where even though we recognize the mandate before us, we don’t act as if it is a mandate or command. We act as if the imperative to serve is more of an ideal suggestion.

One famous Christian pastor and writer, one of the most prolific of our current moment, Francis Chan, has written about this issue.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22) I recently read an article about the fattest people on earth, people weighing well over a thousand pounds,

people who are eating themselves to death. At a certain point, they lost the ability to walk. Eventually, they were bedridden and depended on others feeding them because they could no longer even feed themselves. It reminded me of a lot of people I find in the church. They are fed more and more knowledge every week. They attend church services, join small group Bible studies, read Christian books, listen to podcasts—and are convinced they still need more knowledge. Truth is, their biggest need is to do something. They don't need another feast on doctrine. They need to exercise. They need to work off what they've already consumed. Some have become so used to consuming the Word without applying it that you wonder if they even can. These are the spiritually bedridden, resigned to spending the rest of their lives studying the Word without ever making disciples or tangibly caring for others. These are the ones about whom James asks: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14)''

— **Francis Chan, You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity**

I don't share this to call out anyone specific in this congregation, or to criticize CIC in general. There's a lot of people that serve here and do so well and sacrificially, and I am so grateful for that and affirm that. But this is a challenge that the church overall, particularly in America, needs to hear.

We all need to ask ourselves, have we, have I become spiritually bedridden? Am I so consumed by spiritual consumption, that I'm inactive in living out what I preach. If we are certain, as we've said, that there is a divine biblical mandate on our lives as followers of Jesus to serve, but we aren't serving, then we have a big problem. Teaching is a good thing, preaching is a good thing, study is a good thing, but if our faith is just about what we hear, or watch, or think, or what we feel, but not about what we do for God or others, not about how we love and serve as Jesus did, and as the early Christians did, we have a problem. Luckily for us, the way to

address that problem is actually pretty straightforward, and that is to serve. Say yes to serving and do it.

Now that the challenge has been issued, I wanted to share some perspectives from my own experience that will hopefully be an encouragement to us.

If God's heart is one of service, as we can clearly see in the New Testament time and time again, **then when we serve, more of God's heart is revealed to us.**

So when we serve, we don't just fulfill our Biblical mandate, we get to know God better. Oftentimes in today's Christian culture, there's a lot of questions about the topic of calling, and most of them in essence are "what is God's calling for me?" "what am I (as an individual) called to do with my life?" Discerning calling can be a topic for a whole other sermon, but in my personal experience, we discern calling by doing what God has instructed all of us to do first. Clearly we don't need to wonder if we're called to serve, scripture has made it clear that we all are.

Sometimes people ask how I became a pastor, and oftentimes they're a bit surprised by my route, because I didn't go to Bible College, I got a secular degree, my time in vocational ministry began with college students in New Orleans. My story is kind of odd in a few ways. And up until I was serving in ministry, if someone asked me if I had considered being a pastor, I would have said no. My path towards a career in ministry began in High School when I started serving in various ways. I started serving with the younger kids in my home church's kids ministry on Sundays. My parents took me to a local soup kitchen on Thursday nights to serve the homeless and hungry. I volunteered to hangout with kids once a week afterschool at a local inner city elementary school. In the fall I would help my church's local service project, rake thy neighbor, where we'd rake yards for people in town who were elderly or disabled and couldn't rake their own leaves. And when the opportunity to serve on mission and service trips popped up, I took it. I served in Queens, in Nicaragua, in Kenya, and in New Orleans as well,

where I eventually ended up for 12 years of my life. A small side bar to a previous quote, I'm thankful that my parents allowed and encouraged me to pursue all these different ways of serving, and letting me use my freedom to serve in some spaces and on trips that other parents might have said no to, in some spaces they actually served with me, modelling that choice to serve. And I'm thankful for my home church offering so many opportunities.

I had zero intention of being a pastor then, but I knew I had a mandate to serve and so I did. And as opportunities to serve popped up, as I was able, I said yes. I don't recall ever praying asking if God called me to do these specific things, I just did them out of obedience and willingness. I saw a need and opportunity to serve and was willing to fill that need. Little did I know what God would do with that willingness.

At the start of my senior year of college, my local Chi Alpha campus pastor resigned to go be a part of a church plant in another state. And we were left without a consistent staff presence on campus. Most of the work of the ministry fell on the student leaders' shoulders, including mine. Also at that point, Chi Alpha was the one gospel centered ministry operating on campus. And as the year progressed, and my time as a student began to draw to an end, the need for staff to continue the work of ministering to the students on campus, and the need for the gospel witness to survive, grew in my heart. I felt convicted to not let the work of the ministry and line of students ministering to their fellow students die with me. And so to do what I could to fill the need that was made readily apparent to me, I committed a year to serve as staff with Chi Alpha after I graduated. I saw a need and was willing to serve. And as I served, God kept expanding and convicting my heart, and so that one year snowballed into me serving as a vocational pastor from then until the present.

And looking back, that road was paved by the willingness to serve the needs where I was, years before the need for serving in a vocational capacity arose. I didn't know it at the time I was helping with kids, or in the soup kitchen, or raking leaves, or part of a mission trip team, but God was shaping and expanding my heart through my willingness to serve.

All that to say, **when we serve God and others, more of God's heart is revealed to us, both his heart for the needs around us, and God's heart for us individually.** So for all of those wondering what God has equipped you to do, what God has given you a heart for, or a gift or talent for, where can God use you, how can God use you to bless others, go and serve others now. God will use that service, both for others's good, and your heart. Respond to a need around you now, or if you don't know of one, find one. If you want to find a need to fill here at CIC, talk to Pastor Randal, he's got a list, talk to Pastor Jim for the seniors ministry, talk to Laura Dahlstrom for the Kids Ministry, or Paul Porto for the outreach team that serves the homeless in Woonsocket, Francisco Perez for the AV team that runs the sound and slides every Sunday, Madeline Gonzalez for the Worship Team that sings and plays onstage for every event, Pastor JD or Darlene DeCastro for BGMC that ministers to kids on Sunday night, Elaine Isaiah for the greeters that make sure people are welcomed each service, Yojanna Westerlind for the cleaning team that keeps this place in good shape, Deb Maston for the Welcome Team that helps people get plugged in, Flo Joseph Francois for the Cafe that serves food and beverages, Michael Bartlett for the Security team that keeps us safe, talk to myself for youth, mission trips. I can guarantee that there is a need somewhere at cic that you can be a part of meeting.

How can you serve a need around you? What needs is God putting on your heart? I want us all to walk away from here with a practical step forward.