

Sunday, December 28, 2025 - JOYFUL SERVANTS OF THE LORD – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Today we encourage believers to embrace service—not as a burdensome duty, but as a joyful privilege that grows our faith, blesses others, and glorifies God. True Christian service is rooted in love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and leads to both spiritual and practical rewards.

1. Service: A Privilege, Not a Burden

- Serving others is not something Christians "have to" do, but something we "get to" do as followers of Jesus.
- Self-centered living is contrasted with the joy and purpose found in serving God and others.

2. Breaking Generational Curses & Modern Idolatry

- The idols of ancient times (Joshua 24:15) are much like today's distractions—technology, money, fame, and selfishness.
- Through Christ, believers can overcome generational curses and worldly idols, choosing to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

3. The Heart of Service: Love

- Service begins with loving God and loving people.
- You don't need to know "how"—just be willing, and the Holy Spirit will guide you.

4. Created for Good Works

- Each believer is uniquely designed for good works, prepared by God in advance (Ephesians 2:10).
- Fulfilling your purpose brings wisdom, joy, and peace.

5. The Example of Jesus

- Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).
- True joy is found in laying down our lives for others, just as Christ did.

6. Rewards of Generosity

- God promises practical blessings to those who serve and care for others (Psalm 41:1-3, Proverbs 11:25).
- Generosity is not about accumulating wealth but being a conduit of God's blessings to others.

Key Scriptures

- **Joshua 24:15 (NIV):**
"...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."
- **Ephesians 2:10:**
"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
- **Matthew 16:24:**
"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."
- **Psalms 41:1-3:**
"Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble... The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness..."
- **Proverbs 11:25:**
"The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself."
- Make yourself available to God for service—He will provide opportunities and equip you.
- Be ready to serve at a moment's notice, trusting the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- Remember: Generosity and service bring joy, peace, and blessings both now and eternally.

"Be a garden hose, not a vessel—let God's blessings flow through you to others."

JOYFUL SERVANTS OF THE LORD

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout the last year I have been encouraging my beloved church family to become involved in service both inside and outside the church.

Today I want to talk about why you should want to expand your heart of service in this coming year and how it will grow your joy at the same time that it will edify others and glorify God

Many people look at service or serving others as something they have to do if it is their job or are supposed to do if they are believers, but as followers of Jesus, I maintain that it is something we get to do.

In fact, I will go so far as to say that it is a form of prideful idolatry when we choose to serve ourselves in general without some component of serving others as a part of our daily lives.

Our society is full of self-help directives that will tell you that your ME time is the most important thing for your mental health.

Many of those directives are specific to not letting people take advantage of your generosity or kindness.

That is something that we would expect of the world.

As we saw last week in the Gospel of John, we as followers of Jesus are not supposed to love the world or the things of the world.

The reason for that is because the world is the world and it is passing away because of its selfishness.

Conversely, the Kingdom of God is already here because of what Jesus did on the cross.

As believers it is imperative that we understand that serving God is not only our mandate but should become our joy.

As a starting point, let us look at this Old Testament scripture which puts a fine point on the choice that we all have as God's Israel, His chosen people in Christ.

Joshua 24:15 NIV

if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

I chose this translation because it has a kind of immediate almost modern feel to it.

I think it might be most relatable to those of us who have not chosen to fully serve the Lord in our current lives.

This was Joshua speaking to the second generation of God's chosen people who had not even been circumcised in the long trip from the Red Sea to the promised land of milk and honey.

In the 40 years that their parents had journeyed, their sandals never wore out and they never starved.

However, their parents, the first generation of Israelites were also never satisfied and because of their grumbling and lack of trust in the Lord who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt,

they all perished in the desert, and for their unfaithfulness, they never entered the Promised Land as their children and children's children were now doing.

For those of you who read scripture daily as I always exhort you to do will know, many of this second generation and the generations after them of God's people did choose to serve the idols of the nations that they were sent to replace.

Here's a thought for you... The idols of the nations of the Canaanites and of the Egyptians and in fact, all of the idol worshippers of the ancient world were all gods of convenience.

Kind of like the cell phone and computer gods of today.

Worship of these gods was always a quid pro quo which means I do something for you because I expect you will do something for me.

These were gods that demanded sacrifice of their worshippers in order to do the things that they asked for.

Things like bringing rain, giving divine favor to human rulers, ensuring prosperity, military victory and protection from natural disasters.

If we're honest there are many Christians who treat Jesus that way as well.

They pray for things that they want and some of them even agree to do things that they believe that Jesus wants albeit grudgingly.

Like an idol, they look to Jesus to provide control over life's uncertainties, promising sacrifices of time, money or resources to secure His favor.

But God really doesn't want that kind of allegiance.

Let's really look at this scripture again.

Now you may be thinking what does this scripture have to do with me?

After all, your ancestors never lived beyond the Euphrates nor do you currently dwell in the land of the Amorites.

Let's think a little more broadly about this scripture however.

You've all heard of a generational curse.

You should know that those curses still exist and that they are prevalent in most families.

Curses like violence, alcoholism and sexual preoccupation are fairly common sadly,

but even more common are generational curses like anger, stubbornness, selfishness, pride, greed, jealousy and laziness.

You've heard the old saying "like father like son".

That is strictly a world concept.

However, I've heard many Christians say things like "oh he's just like his father he'll never change".

I've also heard Christians say things like "I can't help being an angry person. That's just the way I am".

Well, I will tell you as your pastor and your friend that it doesn't have to be like that.

One of the great benefits of a relationship with Jesus Christ is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which we talk about quite a bit here at Abundant Life Church.

When your spirit is awakened by the Holy Spirit upon believing in and receiving Christ as Lord, you become a new creation.

Once your spirit is awakened you have the mind of Christ then it's just a matter of whether you are willing to turn your carnal mind over to the mind of Christ and DO the will of God. In other words, serve the Lord.

My point is about this scripture is that the idols that your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates are the generational curses which you are now able to overcome.

“The gods of the land of the Amorites in which you are now living” that this scripture references are simply the idols of the current age here in America and around the world.

Idols of sex, money, power both political and personal, fame, social media adulation just to name a few,

and they lead their worshippers into the desire for more and more and better and better and there is no end to their demand for allegiance.

I hope this scripture makes more sense now.

Let's look at that last great word that Joshua gives to that generation who had the promised land in front of them and the desert behind them.

Joshua said to them as I say to you today “As for me and my household we will serve the Lord”.

Now let's talk about how to serve the Lord.

It starts with love, just like we were talking about last week.

You just have to love God and love people.

You don't have to know HOW to do it.

You just have to make up your mind that you WANT to do it.

Then the Holy Spirit will reveal it to you in real time.

You won't hear from the Holy Spirit until you let God know you're available for use.

Once He knows that you want to be used by Him and that you mean it, you will start having opportunities for service that you can only imagine.

Obviously, at this juncture, I can't resist including this scripture in this teaching about the joy of serving...

Ephesians 2:10

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Each of us is specifically designed with skills, talents and abilities as well as being given blessings of resources.

We are his workmanship and we have been designed for good works that he has prepared before we were ever born.

As we live out this life as believers, we have access to wisdom and knowledge and insight that comes directly from the mind of Christ, the Holy Spirit.

If you have ever felt or acknowledged the feeling of knowing that you know that you know something that benefits someone else that there is no physical evidence or reason for you to know,

other than God's Spirit is speaking to you then you will understand what I'm talking about.

This is how we walk out the good works prepared beforehand. This is how we serve God.

Serving God is serving people.

What we're really talking about is fulfilling your purpose.

Matthew 16:24

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

It's always worthwhile noting that Jesus said this to His disciples and to you and me before he went to fulfill his purpose on the cross at Calvary.

He said this in response to Peter saying that He shouldn't fulfill his purpose because it would lead to the laying down of his life.

What Jesus was saying to Peter and the other disciples and to you and to me is that if we are going to follow the King of glory in our mission on earth,

then we are going to have to fulfill our purpose as he fulfilled His... laying down our lives with intention and with courage.

Jesus said: Greater love has no man than this than that he would lay down his life for his friend.

Jesus experienced joy in fulfilling his purpose.

He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

The joy that was set before Him was opening eternity to and spending eternity with the “whoever”, those who would believe and so love Him as He so loved us.

If we are going to take up our cross, our purpose, as He took up His, To serve God by serving each other, then sometimes we are going to have to lay down our time, our money and our preoccupation with ourselves to help someone in need.

Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't have balance in our lives. Our time with family and even our time alone outside of our time in prayer or the Bible is part of our lives.

But what I am saying is that being a servant of God is being readily available when the opportunity to serve arises.

We should be willing to switch gears and move at a moment's notice when the Holy Spirit says to move.

Your purpose or that good thing that God puts inside of you is not meant to be a burden but is meant to bring freedom, joy and peace in your life.

Just think about a time when you were aware of that unexpected push from the Spirit to do something good for someone else.

And when you did, that inexplicable joy and peace that came over you.

That is what our purpose is meant to accomplish in us.

God's will is done in his willing servants and the result is joy in us and glory to God.

As long as we ignore that which we are created to do, our purpose, we will never be truly satisfied.

But here is the good news...

You've heard me say often that God takes very good care of His servants.

With God, this is not a quid pro quo because His grace is sufficient for us and our salvation is not tied to any works before or after we receive Him as Lord.

But what I want to say further is that while it is true that when we fulfill our purpose and complete our tasks there are great rewards that scripture describes for us in heaven

but on a practical level there are also great earthly rewards.

Here are some scriptures that you may not hear often, but they are consistent with my personal experience...

These are promises that the Lord makes to His servants.

Psalm 41:1-3

Blessed is he who considers the poor;

The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.

2 The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive,

And he will be blessed on the earth;

You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

3 The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness;

You will sustain him on his sickbed.

And here is a blockbuster for you...

Proverbs 11:25

25 The generous soul will be made rich,

And he who waters will also be watered himself.

Take that one in for a second...

The generous soul will be made rich...

That scripture can easily be perverted into something commonly known as the Prosperity Gospel. (as seen on TV!)

Now, as those of you who know me will hopefully understand, I have no desire to be wealthy.

That said, however, ever since I began my walk with the Lord, He has led me into generosity by giving me the inclination, as well as the opportunity to be generous in the areas of time, money and resources.

We have a saying in our house. All things are affordable for us.

We are not extravagant, but we live quite well and we always have enough to give to others.

Here's the flip side of the Prosperity Gospel which tells you that all you have to do is ask God for the things you want and you'll get them.

That's not true and everyone who prays for things they want with a selfish and greedy heart knows it even if they won't admit it.

But the flip side is this...

If you are truly selfless and care more about other people and what they get from your talents, resources, abilities, money, thoughts and prayers then you will have all the blessings that you desire to be to others.

Let me repeat that.

If you are selfless and desire to be a blessing to others, used by God to be His generous hands of mercy and Grace to your neighbors then he will bless you because you are willing to be a conduit of His blessings.

Why would He not bless someone who only desires to be a blessing?

It takes faith and trust to live like that, but when you do you see the rewards and they are not just in the by and by.

These rewards are given as resources to people who are willing to be generous to others.

This is not the Prosperity Gospel.

This is the Generosity Gospel.

I once heard a pastor give a sermon about becoming a bigger vessel to receive more blessings.

After the service it occurred to me, that no matter how big a vessel I become to receive blessings for myself, I will still be a vessel.

A vessel has no outlet.

Whether the vessel is big or the vessel is small, the blessings that fill it, like water in a bowl eventually become stagnant.

The Spirit spoke to me in that moment and said, “don't be a vessel”.

“Be a garden hose”.

Plug into Me the source of all blessing and let Me flow through you to water the dry ground all around you, which are the good works prepared beforehand, and you will constantly be filled with living water.

Beloved, there is no greater blessing than that.

Let's pray.