

Sunday, March 1, 2026 - INTENTIONAL SERVICE: TAKING UP YOUR CROSS – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Intentional service is not optional for followers of Jesus—it is the daily expression of discipleship. From Abraham to the early Church, God’s people have always been called to serve Him by serving others. Jesus fulfills this calling and commands us to live it out by taking up our cross daily.

God’s People Are Chosen for Purpose

God did not choose Israel for privilege, but for purpose—to be a blessing and a light to the nations.

Genesis 12:2–3 – “I will bless you... and you shall be a blessing.”

Exodus 19:5–6 – “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

1 Peter 2:9 – “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood... that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness.”

As believers in Christ, we inherit not only God’s promises, but His mandates—to represent His character to the world through service.

Jesus Fulfills and Commands This Mission

Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. His life models the very service He demands of His followers.

Matthew 28:18–20 – The Great Commission

Luke 9:23 – “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

Taking up the cross is not about random suffering—it is intentional self-denial for God’s mission.

What “Taking Up Your Cross” Means

- **Choosing obedience over comfort**
- **Choosing compassion over convenience**
- **Choosing self-sacrifice over self-preservation**
- **Choosing God’s will daily over personal desire**

When we live this way:

- **Needs are met**
- **Burdens are shared**
- **The broken are restored**
- **The world sees Jesus**

Five Marks of Intentional Service

- 1. Purposeful, Not Incidental - Service is a decision, not an accident.**
- 2. Seeing People Like Jesus Does - With compassion, dignity, and redemptive purpose.**
- 3. Interruptible Living - God often works through inconvenient moments.**
- 4. Willing Sacrifice - True service costs time, comfort, and resources.**
- 5. Empowered by the Holy Spirit - We serve through His strength, not our own.**

The Early Church as Our Model

Acts 2:44–45; 6:1–7; 11:29–30 - They shared, cared, and acted—because they belonged to Jesus.

How the World Will Know

The world is not convinced by arguments, but by love expressed through service.

John 13:34–35 – “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The Bottom Line

We are not a club, an event, or a brand.

We are a kingdom of priests, a body of servants, a cross-bearing community—called to reveal Christ through intentional service.

INTENTIONAL SERVICE: TAKING UP YOUR CROSS

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

Last week we explored ten ways that we can be intentional about bringing the humility of Jesus into every aspect of our lives.

We learned that when we intentionally jettison pride off our lifeboat, the Grace of God is more able to flow to us freely and provide supernatural Grace and clarity to get us through life's fogs and storms.

Today we are going to access the Mind of Christ through His Word and tackle the subject or rather God's mandate of intentional service.

If you heard last week's message about humility, you may recognize many of the similarities in today's Word.

Once we recognize the humility of our God and King and decide that we want to follow Him in Spirit and in truth, that humility leads us inexorably into the expression of service.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and put forth to you a conviction that I hold, that there is no difference between the call to service of God's Chosen people of the Old Testament, and the call to service of the people who have chosen Jesus who are the Body of Christ today.

There are a lot of modern teachers who like to teach that there is a separate salvation for National Israel.

As a Jewish man who, by the Grace of God, follows Yeshuah H'amaschiach, Jesus Messiah, I feel that I have a somewhat unique perspective on this.

Those teachers like to teach that the promises to Israel have not all been fulfilled and so they believe that when Jesus returns, He will finish the job.

However, I stand on His word that He said on the Cross.

He said, "It is finished".

That tells me that all the promises of God to Israel were fulfilled in the person of Jesus and His finished work on the Cross. That makes the Church the Israel of God.

Now why would I go off on a tangent like that in a message about service you may wonder?

Here it comes...

Although the promises of God to Israel were fulfilled, and we are the blessed recipients of them in Christ Jesus, the mandates that God expected of His Chosen people Israel were also therefore passed on to us as followers of Jesus.

Let me illuminate my position and then let's talk about how we can intentionally serve the Lord in all the ways that Israel (the ancient Chosen people, not the country) were expected to do.

God Called Israel to Be a Blessing and a Light to the Nations

Remember, as I just stated, we ARE the Israel of God in Christ.

All of God's promises to Israel belong to us because they were fulfilled in Jesus, the perfect Israelite.

Therefore, all the promises to Israel are the same promises to us AND ALSO all of the mandates for Israel to be a blessing and a light to the nations are also mandates for us.

From Genesis to Revelation, God's people are marked by one defining characteristic: they are to serve God.

Most of the time they serve God by serving others.

This is not a New Testament invention.

Jesus' call to "take up your cross" is the fulfillment of a mission God began with Abraham, rolled out through the law of Moses, and revealed through the Prophets.

Today we will explore how intentional service is the heartbeat of discipleship — and how the Great Commission is the continuation of Israel's ancient calling to be a light to the nations.

The idea began with God's promise to Abraham.

Genesis 12:2-3

I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you and make your name great

And you shall BE a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in YOU all the families of the earth will be blessed.

From Abraham through Isaac, the "child of promise", from his son Jacob who became Israel, on through his children the twelve tribes, the torch passed to Moses and found its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Through the Prophet Isaiah the Lord revealed this when He said...

Isaiah 42:6 NASB

**“I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness,
I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You,
And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the nations,**

God’s plan for a Chosen People was revealed in the Old Testament as a Covenant of Service.

God didn’t choose Israel for privilege —He chose them for purpose.

In Genesis Chapter 19 verses 5 and 6, God speaks to the people through Moses, these words of promise and warning...

“If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people... and you shall be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

So, if you follow my premise, we, who ARE the Israel of God in Christ, are a Kingdom of priests.

In the New Testament, Peter echoes these words...

1 Peter 2:9a

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God’s special possession,**

Sounds pretty great right?

Modern royalty. Chosen. Special. Priests. Awesome.

Kings and priests. Kings get to tell everyone what to do and priests get to be right all the time and have the last word. YES!

Well... It is pretty great but remember what we discovered last week about what kind of King Jesus is.

He came not to be served but to serve and His scepter was a servant's towel.

Okay so going back to the original nation of priests, Old Testament Israel... if you want to know what a priest did, read Leviticus, the third book of the Torah. It was a pretty tough job.

The first thing you have to know is that a priest's job is to serve. It was a priest's full-time job.

Priests represent God to others.

Priests stand in the gap for the world of sinners.

So wait... You might say, "John, if I am a ROYAL priest as Peter tells me in the scripture we just read, why do I have to serve?"

Well... mostly because Jesus said so, but we will expand on that in a minute.

There is more to being a royal priest than telling people what to do and always being right and having the last word.

In fact, that's exactly what the Pharisees thought they could get away with.

But let's go back to 2

Peter and finish his thought.

2 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

So we, like the chosen nation of Israel were chosen as priests, so that we might declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Which brings us handily to... TADA! The Great Commission.

Now we will talk a good bit more about the many ways to serve God intentionally in a minute but let's camp out here for a bit since, after all, it WAS Jesus final command to His disciples.

Now before I read the Great Commission, let me swing us back to the Old Testament for a little more background and buildup...

The scripture we are about to read is from Deuteronomy which is the last of the 5 books of the Torah.

Here, Moses is sending off the children of the 1st generation of Israelites who were about to go into the promised land.

Their parents had all died in the wilderness because of their disobedience and now this generation had the great opportunity to carry the original torch of Abraham and become a "light to the nations".

Deuteronomy 4:5-6

Surely, I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.

Therefore, be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people".

Get it? Israel's obedience was meant to evangelize the world.

Israel was meant to be a living display of God's character.

A nation of priests set apart for service.

What Moses is describing here is literally the Great Commission. And here it is...

This is what Jesus told the disciples at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew after His death and resurrection as He was about to be taken up to rule and reign forever ...

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age". Amen.

So, we have seen that the original Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic covenant all comes to fruition in Jesus Messiah and the Great Commission.

How do we make disciples of "all the nations"?

Well, for one thing, we aren't making disciples of actual nations but of people FROM all nations.

All races, creeds and colors.

How do we make them disciples?

By living a life that brings the light of Christ into the darkness of the world, thereby attracting them, then baptizing them (which literally

sets them apart from their old lives and habits) and most importantly, by teaching them to observe all things that Jesus has commanded us.

What are those things you ask?

Well, as we know they all come down to two. Love God and love people. But God has always been pretty specific about HOW we are to do those things.

Let's jump back to Moses' last words to the new generation of Israelites and see how it lines up with Jesus mandates to His new creations, us.

Moses continues in Deuteronomy 10...

Deuteronomy 10:12

“And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

We recognize this one as the most important of God's commands as Jesus told the Pharisee. Fair enough. Love God. Check.

Then Moses continues...

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords. The great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow. And loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

So... if our job as priests is to model God's character to the unbelieving world we are supposed to stand up for the oppressed and take care of the poor.

In Mathew's Gospel there is a familiar scripture where Jesus basically says "as you have done to the poor and the oppressed you have done so unto Me".

Sounds more like a command than a suggestion, doesn't it?

If you remember the parable, not treating the poor and the oppressed well came with a terrible price.

All this to say, we are supposed to model God's character.

We are supposed to be like Jesus. To show the world who Jesus IS.

Jesus' life was one of intentional service.

Every conversation, every act of compassion, every miracle was purposeful.

He touched lepers.

He fed the hungry.

He restored the broken.

He had fellowship with sinners.

He washed feet.

Jesus didn't serve when it was convenient. He served because it was His mission.

Now here is where this conversation may get a bit uncomfortable.

Every Christian I know has a story of the time they gave the homeless man 20 dollars.

If it was always the same guy, he must be pretty rich by now.

But Jesus did not tell us to serve once in a while or when we feel like it or when it is convenient.

Luke 9:23

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”.

The Old Testament commanded service.

Jesus demonstrates it. Then He demands it of His followers.

“Taking up your cross” is not about random hardship. It’s not about suffering for suffering’s sake.

It is about intentional self-denial for the sake of God’s mission.

Taking up your cross means:

Choosing obedience over comfort

Choosing compassion over convenience

Choosing self-sacrifice over self-preservation

Choosing God’s will over your own desires consistently

When believers take up their cross:

Needs are met.

Burdens are shared.

The lonely are welcomed.

The broken are restored.

The world sees Jesus.

This is the true Church, the Body of Christ at its best.

Here are five things to consider about intentional service.

1. Intentional Service Must Be Purposeful, Not Incidental

We don't drift into Christlike service.

We decide to serve.

Ask yourself:

What burdens has God placed on my heart?

What needs in my community is He making visible to me?

2. Intentional Service Requires Seeing People the Way Jesus Does

Intentional service begins with intentional awareness through the Mind of Christ.

Jesus saw:

The crowds as "sheep without a shepherd".

The woman at the well as thirsty for grace.

Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham.

The disciples as future leaders despite their flaws.

Ask Yourself:

Who do I know that would benefit from learning what I can teach them?

3. Intentional Service Requires Interruptability

Many of Jesus' greatest miracles happened during inconvenient times.

Think of the Wedding at Cana.

We often miss divine appointments because we cling to our schedules or our preconceived ideas about religion.

Ask Yourself:

What routines or habits do I maintain that are getting in the way of my ability to serve others?

4. Intentional Service Requires Sacrifice

Service costs:

Time, Energy, Comfort, Resources and Emotional investment

If it costs nothing, it's not cross-shaped.

Ask yourself:

Am I holding the things God has given me so tightly that I am afraid to be generous?

5. Intentional Service Is Empowered by the Holy Spirit

We don't serve in our own strength.

The fruit of the Spirit equips us to love in ways that our human nature cannot.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to see like Jesus did and be witnesses of His Grace to all people.

Ask Yourself:

Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of my heart and lead me into true service that honors Jesus and draws others to Him?

Let's look at the early church in the Book of Acts as a model of intentional service.

- They shared possessions (Acts 2:44–45).
- They cared for widows (Acts 6:1–7).
- They sent relief to other regions (Acts 11:29–30).

They didn't wait for someone else to act.

They acted because they belonged to Jesus.

We, the church today, can learn from their example.

We are not a club.

We are not an event.

We are not a brand.

We are a kingdom of priests, a body of servants, a cross-bearing community.

Our intentional service reveals Christ to the world.

Jesus commanded us to love one another. Again, this was not a suggestion but a command.

Above any other allegiance, be it family, team, party, prejudices or preferences this is the commandment...

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The world will not be convinced by our arguments.

Unbelievers will be not impressed with our knowledge of the Bible or our ability to intimidate with scripture.

Seekers will be most influenced by our service when they know we have nothing to gain.

Then the world will be transformed by our love.