

# ARE YOU A SERVANT?

## (PART 1)

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a very interesting question. We are all Christian workers, but can we all say, "I am a servant?" What is the difference between being a Christian who does good deeds and being a servant? Maybe we just need to think about it. I want you to think about having a servant's heart. I want you to think about wanting a servant's heart. In this lecture I am not asking, "Are you working?" I am asking, "What is the deepest secret feeling and attitude you have about being a servant?" You will only be able to have a true servant's heart if you surrender it to Jesus.

Being a servant means literally being a slave. A slave must do whatever his master wants, but it doesn't mean that deep down inside that is what he wants to do. Being a servant is not about an outward action but rather about an inward attitude. I am talking about being a servant to your students. It doesn't matter who the student is or who the student's church is or what the situation there is. Being a servant is not a list of good deeds to do; it is **the way a life is lived**.

You need to **live service**. If you learn to serve outside the class, outside the group, then you will learn to serve your students as well. Part of this is being loving, kind, not spiteful, gentle, and gracious and so many other character qualities that the Bible talks about. You need to listen when a student talks. You need to cover a student's fault. Everybody wants to attack other people because of their faults. Fighting and aggressiveness is a well-known issue and it is not only in the world, but also in the churches between pastor and elders or other members of the congregation. You need to overlook your students' faults. You need to lift up his strengths. Yes, he didn't do that or he was late. But look at what he did last month! Look at his potential.

A true servant doesn't seek to lift himself up or fulfill his own desires. Rather he knows his master's needs and desires; a true servant doesn't do just what his master tells him to do, he also anticipates and then seeks to meet his master's needs and desires. Do coaches really know their students? You are a coach and maybe later on you will be a leader. Do you know your students' needs? Do you anticipate them? Do you do everything that you can to meet those needs? A true servant knows when his master is hurting. Do you know when your students are hurting? To know these things requires effort and a desire to know them, a desire to learn. To know these things requires a heart that **wants** to serve. A true servant must have a heart that wants to serve.

## I. THE TOWEL OF HUMILITY

### A. A Masterly Example — John 13:3-15

Verse 3 reads, *"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God."*

The idea is Jesus knew He was the President of the world. Like the president of Ukraine, or the president of America, He was on the very top.

Verse 1b tells us, “...*He now showed them the full extent of his love.*”

This is a very special passage, showing the heartbeat of the Master. The greatest man on earth was not afraid to show humility, not ashamed to be humble. Wow!

Verse 4 tells us, “*He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist.*”

Do you get the picture? It's so clearly written here. When he knew that everything belonged to Him and He was the boss of everything, then, at that point, He said, “*I will take the lowest place.*” We all know the story of what he did that night.

Then He commanded the disciples, “*Do as I have done.*” We find that in verse 15. “*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*” Have you done that, Grisha? Have you washed people's feet? By God's grace we did that at the very beginning of the ministry. After preparing the very first group of students to start their own ministry and to start their own Discipling Ministries they sat in a row and I washed their feet. It was a beautiful celebration and God used that ceremony.

Then Jesus added in verse 17b, “...*you will be blessed if you do them.*”

Jesus is so very generous; He gave this tremendous promise of His blessing. I want that blessing, don't you?

## B. Arguments among the disciples concerning greatness

The disciples argued more than once about who was the greatest among them and who would have the highest place in heaven! Doesn't that sound just like us? A man is chosen to be pastor for a church and immediately gossip starts up that it is only because he is the superintendent's cousin's son. Immediately three other people start gossiping about this man because they believe he got the place that they should have had! Or what about somebody who is chosen as a deacon?

### 1. *Jesus rebuked the disciples*

We see that *Jesus rebuked them* for having those desires. Not just for the gossiping they did about each other, but for even *desiring* to be the greatest. Why is it wrong? Let's say Bogdan wants to be the greatest. What does that mean? It doesn't just mean he wants to be the greatest. It also means that he wants Ivan to be lower. Do you understand that? Being greatest doesn't just mean that you're the best! It means that everyone else is not as good as you are; they may be good, they may even be great, but they are not the *greatest*. And in order to remain the greatest that person must devise ways both to keep growing and gaining more power himself, and to push others down who might threaten his position. I heard of one director where the ministry was not going well because the director did not allow anybody to grow higher than he was; he keeps everybody lower than himself. This is, of course, a very sinful thing. Greatness comes because God gives it to us. Under part 'A' we've seen very clearly that Christ said that greatness is a blessing that comes only through true servanthood. As we also saw in part 'A' true servanthood requires humility like that which Christ demonstrated when He washed the disciples' feet.

### 2. *Jesus set a child on his knee*

One of the times the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus used a child as an illustration. “*He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'*” I don't think He chose a 14-year old child. That child was probably a young child who was still dependent on his mother. His mother had to help him get dressed; his mother had to prepare food for him, his mother had to give him a hand when he was walking. Here we have these big men with muscles like balloons. They were fishermen, you know! “We can take care of ourselves!” I can just imagine Jesus surrounded by these men who towered over him. He looks up and says, “You guys should be like this innocent child.” Ruslan, would you like to be a child again? Maybe Ruslan would like to but many adults don't want to be a helpless child again. Jesus said, “You big guys should be as humble as that little child.” No pretense, no false motives, nothing about it for yourself. Just let God serve you and be a blessing to you, like you let your mother be when you were a child. Allowing someone else to serve you requires humility, but moving from the position of the one being served to the one who serves requires even greater humility.

### 3. *A crucial question: Who is greater?*



Jesus asked, “*Who is greater: the one who sits at the table or he who serves?*” The answer, of course, is the one who sits at the table. But Jesus says, “Ha-ha-ha, *I am here to serve.*” Who was greater, Moses, or Aaron and Hur? Aaron and Hur held up his hands. Who was greater? Who won that battle? Moses? General Joshua? We will have to ask God. But maybe Aaron and Hur had a pretty big part in that. It shows the power of servanthood. God’s way is not the way we think as human beings.

## C. He who is least among you will be the greatest

### 1. *Whenever there is an argument about who is greatest, the problem is about who is least.*

The problem is not about being the greatest. The problem is not whether Ivan is better than Peter, Peter is better than Vladimir, and Vladimir is better than Leonid and so on. The problem is very simple. **No-body wants to be the least.** Perhaps Alyosha will be the least, he will wash the apples and he will clean the dishes. Just think about it. We think the question is about being the greatest. The real question is not about pride but humility. What do people think! I don’t want them to talk about Ivan and Peter and Vladimir, oh! and Alyosha. The question is about not wanting to be thought of as the last and the least.

### 2. *Most of us will never be the greatest, but neither does one want to be the least!*

Let us look at verses 14 and 15 again in John 13. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher,” and we’ve just seen what a great Lord and Teacher he was in a verse 3, “have washed your feet you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” Most believers think this is a wonderful story! What a beautiful story in the Bible! What a wonderful Jesus we have. If I had only been there and if only I could have seen that!

But do we realize that in this wonderful story Jesus chose to do the most dirty, most despised job that only the lowest of the servants were required to do? This great man, the greatest man that ever lived, did not choose to dwell on His greatness, but rather on servanthood. Why is Jesus such a great man, why is He such a great God? Because He was willing to put all that aside and come to earth and perform the ultimate act of service, by dying for our sins, and thus cutting himself off from the one He loved the most. Would you be willing to do that? Would you be willing to give up your position and go and train the smallest group? That is just a hypothetical question, but would you actually follow the other example that Jesus set? Would you be willing to literally wash somebody else’s feet?

## II. WHO WANTS TO WASH FEET?

*“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”*  
(John 13:14, 15)

Do you think Peter ever again hesitated to wash a weary friend’s feet? I don’t think so! But have **you** thought about doing it? Have you thought about **doing** it? Almost no believers have thought about doing it. Doing this literally? Doing what the Bible says? Most of us know we’ll never be greatest, but who wants to wash feet? Jesus was not ashamed to be the least.



### A. We would much rather do something more difficult

Let’s say I would ask one of you to go to Benjamin with a basin and a towel and say, “Benjamin, I love you, I’ve been praying for you and would really like to show you how much I love you. Would you please sit down?” You take off his socks and you wash his feet. You would probably rather go and work in Chukotka for a month. Do something, anything, even if it’s much more difficult. Don’t ask me to do that! Not because it’s difficult, not because it’s hard but because it is so dirty and personal. It is not a job for a spiritual worker, this is about the lowest thing I can do. In other words it is humbling.

Or imagine you are on your way to wash Benjamin’s feet but you are embarrassed and uncomfortable about it and just when you get into his apartment there’s a lot of noise and the neighbor’s apartment is in flames. “Now I can do something heroic! Now I can do something really good!” You rescue that girl, you burn your hands, you lay in the hospital and the newspaper writes about you and inside you say, “Thank you, God, you organized the fire just when I was going to wash his feet so I didn’t have to do it.” Do you understand what I’m talking about? Are you a servant? Are you willing to be a servant?

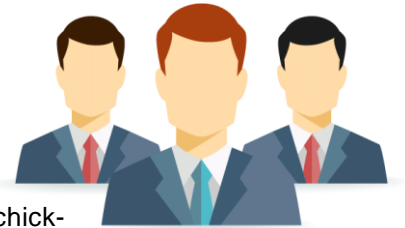
## B. We would rather suffer injustice or be a martyr

If there was one characteristic about the old independent church leaders it was their strong stand of “no compromise.” You could beat them or you could kill one, or whatever, but they would never compromise with a dictatorship regime. But get along with another Baptist or Pentecostal? No way! Did they have unity; did they exhibit love? There were many good brothers, but slowly they came to believe that they were right and no one else was. That was their attitude. They were never willing to work with other people. They were able to stand against the totalitarian regime but they never learned to accept people as they were. They didn’t learn that true greatness means being a servant to everyone.

You may say, “I’m willing to suffer; I’m willing to sacrifice.” Losing your job or facing a court sentence may even look attractive compared to humility and servanthood. But to do something simple like literally wash somebody’s feet? Really showing the lowest place of humility that we can take or imagine? Who wants to wash feet? The answer is “Nobody!” Who wants to wash feet? Do I want to do it?

## III. PECKING ORDER DONE AWAY WITH

### A. “Pecking Order” Defined



The term “pecking order” comes from the way that chickens behave when they are eating their food. Maybe you have a couple of different varieties of chickens. One sort is what we call “white leghorn.” It is usually more aggressive than some of the other smaller colorful chickens. When you feed the chickens that rooster or that main chicken will pick up all the little seeds that he likes best. He pecks at the other chickens to keep them away and what he doesn’t like he leaves for them. After they’ve been eating for about five minutes there comes that sick looking chicken. It wants to eat too. But the other chickens stop picking up their food and start pecking at that chicken. It always has to wait till last, so it is scrawny and doesn’t lay very many eggs. The owner thinks, “Well, we must put it in the soup.” But it’s so little and it’s so poor it’s not good enough for soup. So what do you do? You leave it and instead you kill the big chicken for the festivity because you have guests and you need a lot of food. A month later you say, “Where is that little chicken? Did it die? I didn’t see it this week.” You start counting your chickens. They are all there! So what happened? The pecking order changed! The big chicken is no longer there so the order changed and that little chicken is growing, it’s getting bigger and then two months later you say, “Where did that big chicken come from?” Notice that chicken always eats first. It doesn’t allow the others to eat. The whole system is changed. You’ve all seen chickens do that. That is what a pecking order is: the order of importance and priority.

Dear brothers, you already have a lot of experience. Have you noticed any “pecking order” among church leaders or elders? Just think about it. Sometimes what looks like aggressive Christian service doesn’t always have the best Christian motives. Let us not be like chickens but like holy men of God who allow room for other men to succeed further in life than we can. Let us not prohibit the spiritual development of others but rather let us serve them whenever and however we can so that they can grow and become even more spiritually effective for God’s kingdom than we are!

### B. You can’t throw away all sense of leadership or authority

Doing away with the pecking order does not mean giving up your authority or leadership. Instead it means using that leadership, that God-given authority, to build up other Christians. It means looking for the brother who is spiritually malnourished and arranging for him to be disciplined. It means making sure that the cleaning lady is treated with respect. It may even mean washing someone’s feet to bring healing to a relationship. When we work to abolish the pecking order we are following Jesus’ example of true servanthood.

#### 1. *Even between Jesus and his disciples there was a sense of leadership and authority.*

Jesus was the leader and the disciples were the followers. There was Judas as the treasurer, there was Peter the unspoken leader. There were Peter, James, and John, the group that was closest to Jesus. There was a variety of people circles and groups, or levels of leadership and authority. In the middle of all these different groups Jesus held ultimate authority. When it came to the bottom line Jesus was the leader, **but** He led by **serving** his followers! He was always seeking *their* best.

#### 2. *Jesus never taught that everyone had equal authority.*

Jesus never taught that all men have equal authority. Jesus did not teach with words about authority as much as with His actions. He accepted the authority of Caesar to claim taxes and of the Temple keepers as well. He accepted that a centurion had authority over his soldiers and that a master had authority over his slaves. The Apostle Paul taught more plainly about authority, but even he never said, "We are going to abolish slavery." He said, "In Christ all are equal. Men and women, masters and slaves, they are all equal." But he didn't try to abolish leadership and followership and the system of authority. Rather he strengthened the idea that the leader has the responsibility to serve and build up the follower.

### **3. Jesus did not reverse the "pecking order"-- He abolished it!**

Jesus didn't say, "Thomas why don't you be the leader for the next three months instead of Peter." He abolished the whole thing! He recognized that all people are gifted in different areas. But He did away with the idea of "climbing up the ladder of success." He doesn't want people thinking, "I'm going to be like Peter," or, "I'm going to be like Billy Graham." The inward idea or feeling of being more important than others is what Jesus abolished. Then he said, "You can be on whatever level you are on and you can be that perfect person, that perfect leader right on that level."

## **C. Jesus totally rejected the pecking order**

Let's read Matthew 20:25-28 — verse 25 *"Jesus called them together and said "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."* God gives each of us different levels of authority and leadership, and we need to accept that and use those gifts to the best of our ability for His glory.

Obviously Jesus came quietly into the lives of the Jews. He earned His disciples' respect, and then He taught them, as much by His example as by His words. Later Paul wrote to Timothy, *"When you talk to your elders talk as to your father."* You better remember that! As a spiritual worker reject your feelings of authority, of superiority and pride, and put on the clothes of thankfulness and humility. Tell your spiritual "fathers," the church leaders, "I thank God that I could study with New Life for Churches and I believe it's a wonderful program. It's been a real blessing in my life. I've seen it blessing many other people. If God gives me grace I would like to help you and serve you as much as I can. I'm new here and I want to learn many things from you. I hope we can really help each other to make Jesus beautiful to the unbelievers." Jesus says, "I have not come to be served but I came to serve." What a challenging concept!

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **How was it to be among the 12?**

Just imagine the disciples after Jesus' ascension. What would it be like if He hadn't taught them about true authority and true leadership? If you know the details about the disciples' lives you can just imagine James and John, the sons of thunder, saying, "Peter, who do you think you are? Why should we be listening to you? We spent just as much time with Jesus, and we didn't deny Him three times! We should be the leaders." Instead we don't read one time about the disciples arguing about anything, not even once. Why? Because just before he left Jesus totally did away with the "pecking order." "You want to be great, John? Be a servant! You want to be better than Peter, James? Just serve." In the last eight hours before He died Jesus chose to teach them that greatness comes only through service. In those last few minutes that they had together what was the important message that He gave to them? Serve. A true leader is a true servant. Tell me, are you a servant? Would Jesus say to you today, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"?

This lecture gives us a lot of food for thought and ..... opportunities to practice what Jesus urged.

The following task may make it easier to get involved.

### **Definition of a servant**

This will be your practical assignment. You can go to good dictionaries, you can go to the Bible and you can get extra literature from other good writers, Christian or non-Christian, and write up one paragraph of what a servant is. Then summarize the paragraph with a little motto-type statement in the form of one word, three words or maybe a short phrase, perhaps just one simple sentence that can be written on a little card. Have that card standing on your desk. That one word or those two words which embody the whole little paragraph. Provide your training leader with a copy of your definition please. Thank you brother for taking this first step to greatness.

There will be two more lectures offered in this series: "True Servanthood" and the "Key to Servanthood." Prepare yourself for them this month by becoming a participant. God's grace flows to the lowest place. Great things are going to happen in Ukraine . Thanks for becoming a participant. May God bless you, real good.

Amen and Amen!

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

## *Practical assignment*

Completed

- Develop a simple definition of a servant. You may use dictionaries, the Bible, or other literature. In one paragraph summarize your findings on what a servant is. From that paragraph develop a short, motto-type statement. Keep it very short, one to three words if possible. Write it on a little card and display the card on your desk as a reminder to yourself. Submit a copy of your paragraph definition and the abbreviated definition to your conference leader. Remember: understanding what true servanthood is, is your first step to greatness

