
The Shepherds' Servant Hearts

(Lesson #3)

As I have worked within my own church and in another church's office, I've noticed many servant hearts over the years. There are many servants of the church who do things on a regular basis; things that many of us enjoy having done, but don't think about *how* or *who* does it. Some of these are:

- Straightening the sanctuary after services in preparation for the next service.
- Sweeping the front stoop of the entry and taking out the trash before it begins to smell.
- Cooking and cleaning up behind themselves for a weekly lunch to feed the community.
- Changing the message on the sign near the road so those who drive by would get a glimpse of Christ and His Word.
- Counting money after service while their tummies are ready for that great Sunday dinner.
- Getting a dead animal out from under the sanctuary so it wouldn't smell and ruin service.
- Washing the side of the fellowship hall building on someone's day off from work.

This list can go on and on. It is amazing how those who have a servant's heart work in the backgrounds. You never really know who they are because they are usually the ones who are doing it out of their love for Christ and in following His leadership they are humble in their service.

My father is one of these servants that I have observed. On Sunday mornings he sweeps the front stoop of our Sunday School building so that it looks presentable for those who come to Sunday School. Over the years that stoop has changed from a small stoop to a drive thru concrete slab, but still he makes sure it is clear of debris. He folds the bulletins and inserts whatever anyone has for him to insert without complaining. I have noticed that even if he is complete and someone comes in with a new insert (that is usually me), he doesn't complain. Then he hands out the bulletins at the beginning of each service as a greeter. I have visited many churches before, but I have never seen a greeter like my father. He certainly has the gift of greeting. I have seen those who are walking into church service with their heads hanging and all the worry of the world on their shoulders. Once they reach the church door and see my father's face their spirits are lifted immediately. You can see the countenance on their face change from drag to brightness. It is usually the greeting that they receive that makes them brighten, "Good Morning, Jane, so glad to see you here this morning. You sure are looking pretty!" That is a regular greeting you will receive from my father. It doesn't matter how you feel or really how you look, he's glad you came and sees you how Christ's sees you – as beautiful!

In seeking to have a humble servant's heart, I have asked the Lord to reveal to me the characteristics of a servant of His; characteristics that please Him for the service that is performed. He has revealed to me that a servant is willing to serve no matter what the task may be and whatever the time they are called. I have seen how servants are so willing to rearrange their own schedules to do the Lord's work. This alone amazes me how much they put the Lord first in their lives. Without complaint, they get to work on the task at hand. They have a joyful and jubilant spirit about them. They are eager to serve and usually seek where they can serve and desire for you to ask them to serve. And this is the most important characteristic I have picked up from those who have a servant's heart: They can see beyond what the world sees and look through Christ's eyes. Viewing through the eyes of the perfect servant, they see what needs to be done . . . a little sweeping, a little folding, or a little encouraging . . . they see the need and they fulfill it as Christ would have it fulfilled.

In looking at the story of Jesus' birth, I see this same servant heart in the shepherds. They were willing to serve the Lord and trust in Him as they followed His lead. As we study their steps, let's seek to have a servant's heart so we too can please Christ in fulfilling the needs He sees in this world.

Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Luke 2:8-20

It was a clear night and the sky was beautiful. The field was quiet and all the sheep had settled down. The shepherds had done their job. They had led them to the waters to drink and cleared the path for them as they traveled the mountainous terrain to this location. It seemed to be shaping up to a quiet night as all the sheep and even the lambs seem to be satisfied. None of them seemed to want to wander away and no predators seemed to be in sight. This was the kind of night the shepherds enjoyed. It was a peaceful night when you can look at the sky and enjoy God's creation as you watched over the flocks. This story starts off by telling us that the Shepherds were abiding (or living) in the field. Now one might think that this was the shepherd's job to abide in the field. However, when we consider the heart of one who desires to be a shepherd, we will see that a servant's heart is evident. A servant's heart is one who abides in the service that is in need. Many times this may mean there is a need for them to change their lives so they can abide. Let's look at what Jesus has to say about abiding in Him.

Memory Verses:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. . . . This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

John 15:5, 8 (NIV)

Read John 15:1-17. In this Scripture Jesus talks about how important it is that we abide (or remain) in Him. What do these particular verses describe as a reason or benefit for abiding in Christ.

John 15:4 ~

John 15:5-6 ~

John 15:7-8 ~

According to John 15:10-11, what is the way we can abide in Christ's love? What is the benefit from this way of abiding in Christ's love?

What does Jesus say we are to Him if we do what He commands? (John 15:14-15)

Don't you just love how Christ's describes what He means by abiding in Him? He doesn't leave it up for us to guess. He tells us explicitly that if we are to abide in His love than we must obey. How many times have you tried to abide in Christ love, but you didn't want to obey Him? Abiding in Christ means we are to obey and in that obedience there is a joy that overflows into the love that He desires for us to experience.

The night soon changed from tranquility to uncertainty. All of a sudden the sky was overshadowed by light and an angel appeared. The shepherds were terrified not knowing what to think or what to do next. They trembled in fear. Can you imagine if you were one of these shepherds how you would have felt? I think I would have been just as terrified and probably hiding behind one of my sheep, the biggest one I could find near me. Thankfully, the angel immediately goes into the message of good tidings. I'm sure they were still terrified, but the message was worth settling down to ponder. The thing that amazes me the most is that the shepherds didn't sit and ponder this message long. Instead, they went on their way to find out what the angels were talking about. Have you ever wondered if they left the sheep behind or if they took them along? I know we see many scenes where there are actually sheep with the shepherds at the manger scene, but was that really the case? Or did they trust the Lord to take care of the sheep while they were gone? Regardless, they had to trust the Lord if they were taking them or not, because they had to go and see about this news that was just told to them and they had to go right at that moment.

A servant's heart is not one that procrastinates. They hear the news of something the Lord has done or of something the Lord needs to get done and they move forward immediately.

The Bible refers to those who procrastinate as being "sluggards." According to Proverbs 13:4, what is the difference in the sluggard and diligent person's appetite or desires?

According to Ephesians 5:15-17, why should we make the best use of our time? (v. 16)
What does the wise person do? (v. 17)

Many times we procrastinate in doing what the Lord has called us to do because we have too many other priorities in our lives that are overshadowing the Lord's call. According to Matthew 6:33-34, what is the answer to this problem? Why is it important that we take care of each day's troubles on the day they appear?

Procrastination is a huge problem in many lives of Christians. And many times it is because we are too busy with our own desires that we don't want to take the time to do what the Lord has called us to do. Even in writing this study, I have experienced this problem and have been fighting against the struggles of life. However, the Scriptures are clear that we *must* put God first in our lives. He will direct our paths and He will show us His will. This is what the servant heart of the shepherd's displayed as they eagerly got up to see what the angels had told them about.

After the shepherd's had seen baby Jesus, their hearts were overflowing with a joy to tell the world about what they had seen. They glorified and praised the Lord everywhere they went. A servant's heart is one that not only displays God's love through their actions but through the praises of their lips. I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with those who serve the Lord who can't wait to tell what all the Lord has done in their lives. You see, it is in the midst of serving God that He reveals more and more miracles in your life; miracles that you can't wait to share with the world.

As Christians we know that we are supposed to fulfill the great commission (Matthew 28:19). However, how many of us realize that the fulfillment of that commission is many times done in the living of our lives? When we proclaim God's goodness in our own lives we are telling others that He loves us and He loves them as well. What does Psalm 16:8-11 tell us about setting the Lord before us? What does it do to our hearts, whole being, and flesh?

Write below the promise that is proclaimed by the psalmist in Psalm 16:11?

Christ is who leads us in triumphal procession as we go through this life. What does 2 Corinthians 2:14 tell us that He does through us as we proceed in life?

The message of Christ is powerful. It has been powerful in many lives. According to Romans 1:16, why should we not be ashamed to proclaim the gospel?

As the shepherd's did when Christ was born and as we can proclaim today, Christ, the Messiah, has come. He has come to redeem His people. There is no better message we can speak about in our lives.

Are you striving to have a servant's heart? Do you abide with Christ and seek His word to dwell in your life? Do you desire to produce His fruit in the world? Or are you procrastinating in producing His fruit and you would rather produce your own? It is a good thing for us to realize we are procrastinators and have not been fulfilling the Lord's desires in our lives. In realizing this we can ask the Lord to strengthen us in overcoming the obstacles that we have allowed to get in the way of us proclaiming His message of love to this world. Don't sit in regret over what you have not done in the past, but look to the future as a fresh opportunity. Look to the future through Christ's eyes and see yourself as the servant He is calling you to be.