

Last week, we talked about being bold in spirit – we were reminded that we speak boldly about what we believe deeply! Today we're going to talk about being faithful in service. When I meet a family to discuss a funeral I normally ask if the deceased had a habit or a saying or something that, if mentioned, would cause people to go, "Yes!" Always away in the caravan; always doing crosswords; always at the bingo; always smiling

That raises the question I want to put to you today: If somebody were to describe you including the word "always," what would they say? "He's always doing such and such" or "She's always doing this."

They might say you're always encouraging, they might say you're always moaning. They might say you're always finding fault, or they might say you're always looking for the good. What would they say that you're always doing? Maybe you're always working or always sitting about doing nothing. She's always sharing her faith. He's always on Twitter. What would others say that you are always doing? We're thinking today about 'faithful in service' Our current series is called Selfless, and I think you would probably agree that we live in an incredibly selfish, self-centred, self-gratifying, self-promoting culture. In fact, if you look up the word "self-promotion" on Google you'll find article after article teaching you how to promote yourself, to get ahead with self-promotion. I noted three of the different articles of all the many ones, there was one called, "The Art of Self-Promotion: 6 Ways to Get Your Work Discovered." Forbes wrote one called, "Self-promotion is a Skill." In other words, if you want to be good in this society, you better learn how to promote yourself. Then this is one that maybe somebody needs to read: "40 Ways to Self-Promote Without Being a Jerk." How about that? Self-promotion is a skill and we need to get really good at it. Well, this idea is becoming pervasive throughout our culture. In fact, if I ask you what do you think is the most common career that a teenager wants? This is the aspiration of the common teenager today. What do you think it would be? Well 54% of teenagers, for a career, want to be a celebrity. They want to be YouTube stars. We have to learn to self-promote, to help others see just how great we are, as a career, 54% of teenagers today want to be a celebrity.

What do we want to be? Well, maybe some of you, like me, want to be the GOAT! I want to be the GOAT, how many of you know what the GOAT is? The GOAT is the, greatest of all time. I just want to be the GOAT! I want to be the greatest of all time. The problem is if you want to follow Jesus: Jesus' teaching is diametrically-opposed to a self-centred, selfish, self-promoting culture. Jesus said: *If you want to follow me, you don't promote yourself. He said, first you must deny yourself and then you pick up your cross, in other words, you are dying to your own selfish natures and then, you follow me.* Jesus said, if you want to be great, you don't self-promote. He said, the greatest among you will be your servant. If you are a follower of Christ, we are not called to self-promote or to live selfish, self-centered lives, but instead, he calls us, invites us, to be selfless, denying self and taking on the very nature of a servant. In other words, as Jesus followers, serving is not just something that we do. It should be the action that reflects who we are. Serving isn't just what we do - at our core a servant is who we're called to be. I'm going to say it this way: I'll say the line and you repeat it:

I am a servant.

Of the Most High God.

When I serve others.

I am serving Christ.

Serving isn't just what we do, a servant is who we are. What are you always doing?

Acts 9:36 is a powerful little verse, one verse that shows what someone was always doing. *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.*

She was actually the first Greek female mentioned in the New Testament. Her name means "gazelle," so some scholars think she might've been a beautiful woman, we don't know for sure. But what we do know, is what she was always doing, what does the text say? *She was always doing good and helping the poor.* What a description. What was Dorcas always doing? She was always doing good and helping the poor. What she actually did is she made clothing and she would give it to those who were struggling and would often serve widows. Her ministry evidently so important that when she died, God used Peter to raise her back from the dead; this little revival broke out in her community, because here is this woman and what was she known for - always doing good and helping the poor. Instead of always being self-promoting in attitude, she was always selfless using what she had to make a difference in other people's lives, serving, because she knew who she was. She is a servant of the Most High God.

So how do we, as Jesus followers, how do we become faithful servants? You might say, I can't make clothes so I can't give to the poor, or I can't play an instrument like David can, and I can't sing. I'm not a Bible teacher, I don't really know how I can make a difference. And so what I want to do today, is keep it really simple. I'm going to give you three images from Scripture, to tie it in with three very simple stories that I hope will be memorable and will inspire you to serve because of who you are.

You're called to be a servant of the Most High God. How do we become a faithful servant, three images: The first thing you can do, is you can bring a lunch. Second, you could also offer a lift. Third, you can carry a towel. How do we become a faithful servant? You can bring a lunch, offer a ride or carry a towel. Let's start with the lunch, and I want to show you a story from the Old Testament about David. David was a war hero. He rose to notoriety when he killed the giant, Goliath. When he'd come back from battle, he was so admired that the women would actually gather in the street and they would sing songs to him, about him, like, "Here comes David, he's our hero." And it kind of raises the question, why was this guy so great? A lot of people say that he was great because he won the battle. I would tell you, he was great because he brought a lunch. You look all throughout his life, whether he was playing a harp for Saul, or doing the right thing behind the scenes. This man was promoted in the kingdom of God because he had the heart of a servant. What do we mean by the lunch? Well, David was the youngest of eight brothers, the son of a man named Jesse. The older brothers were out fighting at war, or at least preparing to fight and the father said one day, "Son, I need you to do something, it may not look important, but it's important to God." One day, the Bible says, Jesse said to David, "Take this basket of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread, and carry them quickly to your brothers. See how brothers are getting along and bring back a report on how they're doing." In other words, hey David, you want to one day fight in the battle? First, you bring a lunch. First, you're willing to do what

may seem insignificant, what isn't often visible to others. What you and I may do may feel like it's behind the scenes, but the way you're promoted in the kingdom of God is never by self-promotion, it's always by serving.

You can also offer a lift. I asked someone for a lift last week and they said, "Sure, you look great, the world's your oyster, go for it!" Then they left without me. I love this Old Testament prophecy, 553 years before the event ever took place, imagine this, Zechariah the Prophet prophesied that one day, the King would come riding in on a donkey. This prophecy would have blown people's minds, because they're going to think, if the King's coming in, he's not coming in on a donkey, but he's coming in on a white horse with flowing robes, a crown on his head, and everybody going crazy. Just like in our culture, it'd be like, he's coming now, in a stretch limousine, paparazzi's everywhere, but instead the equivalent of riding in on a donkey would be, here comes the King puttin' in on a moped. That's what it was like. And Jesus said to his disciples, I'm going to need you to secure a donkey. A 553-year-old prophetic event is about to come down, and Jesus says, if anyone asks you why, here's what I want you to tell them. If they say, "Why are you untying the donkey?" Just say to them, "The Lord needs it." How can you be faithful as a servant? Well you can simply, offer somebody a ride. This is exactly what this person in the New Testament did. What I love about this story, is we don't know their name, we don't know what they did for a living, we don't know if they owned one donkey, 10 donkeys or 500 donkeys. We do know, and can assume, it was a man because he had a business because it was a luxury to be able to afford a donkey, and this person simply said, "Yes, you can take what I have and I'll offer a ride." Notice what this person didn't do when they went for the donkey, that had never been ridden before. He doesn't say, "Oh, I didn't realize you were asking for "my low-mileage, never-before-ridden donkey. "This isn't Eeyore, this is the high-end donkey. "This has the upgraded hooves, you know, "this is the best of the best, "so it's going to cost you a little more." No, what he simply did, was said, "If the Lord has need of it, then ok. How can you make a difference as a servant? Well, you can bring a lunch, or you could simply offer a ride. By offering a ride, this guy made a way for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. Lastly, you can carry a towel. In fact, to me, this is one of the most powerful pictures from the New Testament. The setting is just before Passover and there's a secret meeting going on in the upper room. Jesus was seated there with his disciples, and he knows that he's about to give his life. In other words, the very reason that he's here is about to come to pass and he is going to suffer in a big way. And then, an argument breaks out amongst the disciples. Do you know what they were arguing about? This is what they wanted to know: Who's the GOAT? Who's the GOAT? Who is the greatest of all time? That is exactly the argument that broke out, right before Jesus was going to give his life. Who do you think is the greatest? And you can almost imagine each of the disciples kind of pitching their part, I can just imagine John saying, "Well, obviously, I'm the greatest because everybody knows "that I am the one that Jesus loves." Do you realize how annoying John was? John wrote about himself in second person and called himself the one that Jesus loved. Read it, you're reading in the Gospel of John and over and over again, he says, "And John, the one that Jesus loved." You know that ticked Peter off, Peter's all up in John's face going, "No, no, no, no, no. "Remember when Jesus walked up on water? "And everybody else stayed in the boat? "Who was it that got out of the boat and walked on water? "It was moi, me, not you, but me, you sat your bum in the boat 'cause you were feart, I was the one walking on water." Think about it, somebody else speaking up going, "Yeah, but you only took three steps and

then you sank." Oh, "But yeah, he brought me out, because I'm his favourite." And then there's Bartholomew going, "Yeah, but what about me, I'm the greatest." And they're all like, "Bartholomew, we didn't even know you were a disciple, "nobody's going to remember you." And he shuts up because that's poor Bartholomew. Who's the GOAT? Who's the greatest of all time? Jesus is sitting at the table, knowing that he did not come to be served, but to serve others, looks around and sees, proud hearts and dirty feet. And so what does Jesus do? Well, Scripture says, Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist. After that he poured water into a basin, and he began to wash his disciples' feet. Now, if you had been there, this would have been the most scandalous act of selfless service that you had seen in your whole life. Everyone there is going, "No Jesus, you can't do this, no, not you, and not to me." Now you may say, what is this washing feet business about? This was a tradition or a custom, it was polite, for example, if you came to my home today, I would say, "Hey, can I take your coat or could I offer you a drink?" And that's kind of what they would do. Can I wash your feet because, you're in sandals, you walked a long way here, your feet are dirty and dusty, but the host would never wash feet. You'd tell your servant to go and kneel down and to wash feet. And what Jesus does is he looks around the room, and he sees proud hearts and dirty feet, and Jesus puts on a slave's apron, gets down on his hands and knees, takes a bowl, and a towel, and starts washing feet.

Who is Jesus? He is the son of God. He is the bread of life. He is the prince of peace, he is the living water. He is the great high priest, he is the light of the world. He is the lamb of God, he is the righteous judge. He is the living stone, he is the true vine. He is the King of glory, he is the chosen one. He is the King of all kings, he is the Lord of all lords. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, he is our redeemer, he is our righteousness, he is our sanctification, he's our rock, he is our Lord, and he knelt down. Took a bowl, carried a towel, and he washed feet. Because Jesus knew the greatest among you, is never a self-promoter. But he's always a servant. I didn't come to be served, I came to serve others, to give my life as a ransom for their sins. How do you become great? You bring a lunch, you offer a ride, you carry a towel. Because serving is not just something that we do, a servant is who we are. I am a servant of the Most High God, and when I serve others, I'm serving Jesus.

So, how does that make sense? Well, Jesus told another story, in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 25. And Jesus said, "One day, at the end of time, all the people are going to be standing before me, and I'm going to separate them. I'm going to put the sheep on this side, and on the other side, I'm going to put the GOATs." And he would say to the GOATs, "I'm sorry, but we didn't know each other." And he'd say to the sheep, "Welcome into the kingdom I have prepared for you, and I just wanted to tell you, thank you." Because when I was thirsty, you gave me a drink. And when I was locked out, you invited me in. And when I was sick, you prayed for me. And when I was in prison, you visited me.

And the sheep will look back and say, "Um, glad we're getting in, but I don't remember that happening. When did I visit you, when did I give you something to drink?" And Jesus looks back at them and said, "What you did to the least of these brothers, you actually did to

me. When you visited someone else in prison, you were actually showing love to me. When you offered a drink, to someone in another country that didn't have access to clean drinking water and you contributed to helping them get a well, you were actually doing that to me. When you welcomed somebody who didn't feel welcome, and you showed them love and grace, you were actually welcoming me."

How do you become great? You become great by being less about you, and more about him, therefore more about other people. Because serving isn't just something that we do, a servant is who we are. It's our essence, it's our core, and then Jesus would look at his sheep and he would say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." Because serving isn't just what we do, a servant is who we are.

You may say, "But I'm not great at a lot, I may be able to do something small but it's very insignificant." Listen, in the kingdom of God, the little things are the big things. It's the little things, it's the things that you do when nobody else is looking, it's what you do when you feel insignificant, and in your faith with the little things, God trusts you with even more. Promotion is not a reflection of self-promotion, promotion in the kingdom of God is selfless serving, putting others ahead of ourselves. And every so often I hear of people here taking someone a pot of soup when they're unwell, picking someone up for church or lunch club and putting this into practice in so many ways. But I also know that some people don't do what they could because "nobody asked me!" Nobody asked Jesus to wash feet. We always need servants: people to work with our young folk; to help at Messy Church; to read or pray; to help at the café or the food bank. If you think you have never been asked to help then I'm asking right now.

What are you always doing? If someone were to describe your life, he's always, she's always, wouldn't it be amazing if they said, Oh, he's always offering a ride. She's always carrying a towel. He's always bringing a lunch. She's always holding a baby. He's always welcoming people at the door. She's always giving to somebody who's in need. Oh, he's always praying. Oh, she's always a light in our office. He's always making sandwiches. How do you become great, it is not, and never is, by self-promotion. When you come to Jesus, you deny yourself, it's not about us, it's all about him. But when it becomes all about him, the only thing you can do is respond and say, "I'm not doing good because I want to impress anybody, but because of what Jesus did for me. "I am a servant of the Most High God, "and when I serve others, I am serving Christ."

Here's my suggestion for you, for every single one of you who are Jesus followers, I would suggest that you don't currently have one then find a consistent place that you serve. This is where you use your gifts. It may be someplace in the church. It may be someplace in the community. But have a systematic place that week after week, you are there, consistently pouring into people, in the name and for the love of Jesus. I believe that we should all have this place, we have gifts that we consistently use to serve. Then, every single day we wake up. And we say something along the lines of, "God, this is the day that you have made, I will rejoice and be glad in it. Give me your thoughts, give me eyes to see people who are in need, give me a heart that breaks "for the things that break your heart".

And then one day, if someone were to hear the question, what's he always doing, what's she always doing? They would have a really powerful answer. She's always serving. He's always making a difference. She's always engaged, helping people seeing the love of Jesus. He's always there, every single week, showing consistency. You can count on her, she doesn't just talk about Jesus, she lives the love of Jesus. Then one day, one day, you will stand before him, and he will say, "Thank you for what you did, for me, because what you did for the least of these, you did to me. Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Remember, serving is not just what we do, a servant is who we are.