

How Can You Serve God?

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A Church That Works Series

Romans 12:1-8

This past weekend I had one of the really wonderful experiences of my Christian life, at least as it regards my family. Most of you know that I come from a Jewish background and my father and mother are not followers of Christ. My parents were divorced when I was 14 and they live on opposite coasts. My mom lives in New York and my dad lives in California. If the country were bigger, they probably would live more than 3000 miles apart. But in all the years that I have been pastoring and before that teaching in a lay capacity, my father and stepmother have never heard me speak publicly even once until this past weekend.

I was out in California doing a conference and I was invited to speak at a Vineyard church. And so I asked my dad and step-mom to attend. There they were, sitting in the congregation and the service went wonderfully. Afterward they were gushing with praise. They said they just loved my speech. For people who have never been to church even once in their lives, that's not bad. They didn't know whether to call it a message or a sermon or a teaching. They loved the speech. My stepmother gave me high praise when she said that her mind usually drifts when she listens to people speak, but she didn't daydream at all.

After I got done teaching, we went out to lunch and had an opportunity to talk with them at a real heart-to-heart level for a couple of hours about what I believe concerning Christ and why I believe it. So I am still pretty excited because it was, without a doubt, the best time in conversation I have had with my dad in 25 years.

Part of the reason I am sharing this is from time to time one of you comes up and says that (and I am very grateful for this) you are praying for my family or praying for my parents. And I just want to say "thank you", especially for those of you who for whatever reason have chosen to pray for me and for my family.

Now before I left, I was engaged in a series that I want to continue this week and next called "A Church That Works." Part of the reason I began this series this fall was because I discovered that only about 45% of our adults here in the Vineyard were meaningfully employed in some activity of service within our church family. That meant 55%, approximately, were either doing their entire Christian ministry outside the church or were not involved in any kind of Christian ministry at all. Moreover, even among those who were employed, I know that there were lots and lots of people who really never discovered what their spiritual gifts were or what God had put in their lives for the sake of other people. On top of all of this, I kept hearing continual complaints from individuals in the church saying that they were just overworked or overburdened. They were stressed out by trying to juggle too many activities and too much service.

So we decided as a pastoral staff to focus this fall on helping our entire church to discover their spiritual gifts, assisting people to find out what niche would best express their passions or what God had put in their lives, and then nudging people to serve within this church family. See I don't want to pastor or preside over a church with an ever shrinking, exhausted core and a large fringe of uncommitted church consumers. We have a very clear purpose as a church. Those of you who have been through newcomer's class have heard our church purpose statement. We exist to produce mature reproducing Christians and to plant mature reproducing churches.

Part of maturity is learning to conceive of yourself as a servant – in your home, in your work place, at your school, and here in your church family if you are part of this church. That mature people serve others. And I have been spending the fall talking about that. We even saw it in the model of Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve. We saw this principle of service in John 13 as Jesus took the role of a servant and washed the disciple's feet.

So we created a vehicle for moving you in the church into service. It is not real complicated. The first step is having people sign up for the Discovering Your Ministry class. We have run three of these classes so far this autumn and the final class this fall is December 6. This autumn we will have put through the DYM class about 800 adults which is just a great joy. By the way, I just need to tell you, again, how nice it is to pastor people who are so responsive. I mean 800 people have signed up for this thing. So, if you haven't signed up for the DYM class, do that. It is a Saturday morning. We are giving you enough lead-time to arrange for childcare or your wife's breakfast or for getting a ride here. And through this class you will have the opportunity to learn about what God has done in your life so that you can find that particular area of service that best suites your desires, passions or gifts. Once you have filled out the ministry questionnaire, you will have the opportunity to sit down with a ministry counselor in your small group who will be able to assist you in discovering your niche here in the church.

With that as a lengthy backdrop, I am going to talk this morning about how you can serve God. No matter what your job is, no matter how much money you have, no matter how much ability or lack there of, this morning I want to convince each one of you that you can serve God even though you might just be beginning your relationship with God or starting it today, or on the other hand, you have been a follower of Christ for six decades. The title of my message today is "How Can You Serve God." Let's pray.

If you have a Bible what I would like for you to do is open up to Romans 12. I am going to be reading verses 1 and 2. Next week, we are going to continue in Romans 12 and tackle verses 3-8 on spiritual gifts. Romans 12:1-2 reads this way,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

We are trying to figure out how we can serve God. What does God want me to do with my life? Where should I be serving? What particular niche has God uniquely designed for you? How can you know?

Well, Paul makes a precious promise here, and if verses 1-2 are operating in your life, you will know, you will be able to test and approve God's will in your life – his good, pleasing and perfect will. If verses 1-2 are operative, you are going to find out what God's mind is for your service and it is going to be absolutely pleasing to you and to God. You are going to find out that his will for your service is good. In fact, Paul says that it is perfect and pleasing.

How can you serve God? First of all, you need to serve God from the right motives. Let's look at this opening phrase in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God's mercy..." Now, lots of times when we read opening phrases like that, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy..." and literally it should read "in view of God's mercies." That word in the original is plural – in view of God's mercies. Lots of times we read opening phrases in the Bible as window dressing, as fluff, as niceties, stylistic elements to make the reading of the letter more pleasant. But I want you to know something. Paul was a very efficient writer and there are no wasted words in his writings. He meant what he said and he said what he meant. Paul is very concerned that when he is urging us to service that we learn to serve God from the right motives.

I want you to see Paul's motivational style. He says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters]..." Urging people on is an absolutely necessary work for a pastor or a leader, a parent, spiritual father or mother. Because the fact is every human being struggles with inertia. Do you know what inertia is? You know the old physics principle that you might have learned in 6th grade – a body at rest tends to remain at rest. Inertia. That sense that you know what is right to do but you don't have the energy, the get up and go, the passion to get off your duff and really do what is right to do. We are like wind-up toys who, over a period of time, have their inner springs wind down. It is not that we need new information, but we need an injection of passion. We need a little shove, a push, because on our own as a result of inertia we fall back into old patterns, familiar habits and the same old ruts. There is this downward drag that every human being is constantly fighting. We all are like planes with just a little too much cargo. Some of us, I see, are carrying more cargo than others. But there is this downward drag. There is this loss of focus and passion and energy. So the continual necessary work of a pastor and a leader and a parent and a spiritual father and mother is to act as a counter force against inertia. To nudge people toward the doing of what they know they ought to be doing.

Now, I love the style of Paul's motivation. Because there is a fine art in nudging people toward doing what they already know they ought to be doing. Parents, listen up. Wives, husbands, leaders, listen up. There is a fine art in nudging people toward the doing of what they already know they ought to be doing. I picture nudging being like a high wire where most of us fall off one way into nagging or the other way into neglecting. We see someone overcome by inertia, not doing what they already know they ought to be doing. What is our

response? We nag. We brow beat them. We wheedle, we whine. We manipulate.

Or we fall off entirely in the other direction and we say to ourselves, “It is their job to know what they should be doing” and we neglect being counter forces helping someone fight against inertia. We nag. We neglect. We don’t gently nudge.

And you know Paul was a wonderful model for you to study in terms of the way to motivate other people. It comes through everyone of his writings. But let me share with you a couple of other verses. If you are taking notes, you can jot these down.

2 Corinthians 1:24 – All of 2 Corinthians is a study in how to motivate. How to get buy-in from people who are unwilling. Paul says, “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy.” Not that we lord it over you, but we work with you for your joy. You know that your style of motivation is probably wrong if you are standing over someone yelling at them from above. If you are belittling them, condescending, if you are constantly referencing your authority over them as husband or parent or boss or leader in a church. I am not saying that it is never proper to reference your authority, especially with someone who is quite rebellious. But that ought not to be your style of relating, especially toward someone who is not a rebel. Paul says that we don’t lord it over you, we work with you. And so when we are trying to motivate another, the model of the scripture is to come along side with an arm around someone and try to bring them into the direction that the scriptures tell them to go.

Paul is a great model of having a godly style of motivation. Listen to this in Philemon 8-10, “Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.”

I could order you. I have that authority, Paul was saying. But I choose to appeal to you in love. See it is so important that we adopt the proper style of motivating others. And through this series, I hope you hear me not standing over you, ordering you to serve your church family – lording it over you. But appealing to you in love to find your place of service.

What is the content of right motivation? We see it in this little phrase, “In view of God’s mercies,” in verse 1. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercies,” in the light of the many mercies of God. Paul is about to begin a lengthy section on Christian conduct and Christian service in the body. He could motivate Christians toward service in the body through threats of punishment, through demands – if you don’t obey, you will be judged, something terrible will happen to you today. You are going to lose your health. You will lose your reputation. You will lose your job. You will lose your kids. You will lose your wife. It is not always wrong, by the way, to threaten as long as you are willing to follow through on the threats. Sometimes with a really stubborn, recalcitrant person threats of dire consequence need to be announced. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, had no problem employing the threat of hell to deal with those highly destructive problems in our life like lust.

But Paul is not dealing with stubborn, recalcitrant people, people who are digging their heels in saying, “No, I don’t care what you are saying, I am not going to do it.” He is dealing with folks who want to honor God, who want to obey his commands. Who have an internal desire to serve and to give and to yield? And so he motivates people by not a view of dire consequences and threats and the fear of punishment. He motivates them by a clear description of the mercies of God.

I remember being at another church while Marlene and I and the kids were on vacation. The pastor of the church asked the men in the church, “How many of you are going to join us for the Promise Keepers event?” Promise Keepers, as most of you know, is a national men’s movement. More than a million people just descended on Washington to pray, to repent. He asked people in the church, “How many are going to join us for this event?” About 20 people in the church responded. He said to the men, “I would like those of you who are joining me to stand, because I would like to pray.” And then he prayed. “O Lord, I pray that you would convict the socks off the men who are not standing. I pray that you would give them no peace, cause them to lose sleep. Burden their consciences. Shake them up, God, until they choose to join us also.”

I burst out laughing in the middle of the prayer. Marlene elbowed me and said, “Shhh, be quiet.” I said, “This pastor is praying a curse on all the men in this church. I am not going to be quiet.”

Martin Luther, the Father of the Reformation, once wrote, “A law driver insists with threats and penalties, but a preacher of grace lures and excites with divine goodness and compassion shown to us. For he wants no unwilling works and reluctant services. He wants joyful and delightful services of God.”

What is the content of a right motivation to serve God or to give financially? What is the content of a proper motivation for surrendering yourself to God? The content is a clear and inspiring view of God’s mercies shown to you. See, for 11 chapters Paul has held up for people in Rome, the mercies of God. And in particular in chapters 9-11, if you wanted to say, “What is the key word in chapters 9-11,” it would be the word “mercy.” Chapter 9:14-15, “Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’. It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

Or verse 23: “What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory.”

Or 11:30-32, “Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

If Paul was preaching a message on radical discipleship, following Jesus with every particle of your being, if Paul was preaching a message on the lordship of Christ and our need to surrender everything to Christ, Paul would spend 30 minutes of a 40 minute message talking about God’s mercy and what God has

done for you. And the last 10 minutes he would spend on your proper response to the mercy and goodness of God.

See, the Bible really is concerned about right motives as much as it is concerned about right actions. And God does not want you to serve or give from a legalistic motive. From some kind of internal notion that you are going to earn God's favor if you serve or give or lose God's favor if you don't serve or give. The proper Christian motive for a servant is a loving warm-hearted response to a clear view of the love that God has shown you in Christ. God comes and he kisses you with his mercy. And we are so touched, so moved, so thrilled by his kiss that we kiss back.

What are the mercies of God? When I say that Paul was trying to give us a clear view of the mercies of God, what are we talking about? Let me share two from the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a display of the mercies of God, but let me share two. If you will turn back with me to Romans 4:4-5, Paul writes, "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

This is one of the most important and clear statements about how a person is saved in the whole of the Bible. I would venture to say that I don't know many verses in the Bible that are clearer regarding how God saves an individual than Romans 4:4-5.

Two weeks ago I was driving up to my house, getting done with a Saturday morning meeting. I saw Marlene and my son, Daniel, with an open Bible arguing with two women on the porch. I thought, "Uh-oh, there is Marlene and Dan going toe to toe with some Jehovah's Witnesses." I walked up and listened to what Marlene was saying. She was making a very simple biblical point. She was telling these Jehovah's Witnesses that contrary to what their religion teaches, salvation is not by our goodness. It is not earned. Salvation is not merited. It is not something that you have to go door to door and house to house to achieve somehow. Rather, salvation is a gift from God given to the utterly undeserving who receive this gift by faith.

That is what Paul's point is here in Romans 4:4. He draws a simple illustration from life. He says that when a man works his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. In other words, if you do work for someone – if you paint someone's home, fill their teeth, or fix their car, shine their shoes, or teach their children piano – if you do work for someone and they pay you, they are not being gracious. They are just giving you what they owe you. It would be wrong of them to not pay you. Paying a debt is a legal obligation. Paying a debt is a matter of law. Paying what you owe is not grace. When someone pays you for work done, they are not paying out of the kindness of their hearts, out of goodness and mercy. If they didn't pay, they could be hauled off to court. Paying them is a legal obligation.

Now look at the person to whom God gives salvation. Romans 4:5 describes this person in two ways. The person to whom God gives salvation first of all is to the man who does not work but trusts God. Who gets salvation? The one who does not work. The one who God owes nothing. Salvation is not a debt that

God pays because it is the right thing for God to do, salvation is a gift that God gives to the person he doesn't owe anything. You see the whole book of Romans is trying to sweep away from our minds the legalistic thoughts as they pertain to God. Why God gives us anything and why we should give God anything. God gives to the one who does not work.

So it is absolutely abhorrent to the Lord and the opposite of all of his mercy and grace for any of us to ever come before him with a bitter spirit and say, "I can't believe God you allowed this to happen to me after all I have done for you. This is the thanks I get? I have been going to church. I have been serving faithfully. I gave up some of my favorite sins. How could you let this happen to me? This bankruptcy, this illness, this broken engagement, this firing, this not finding me a mate?"

Understand, friend, that if you ever come before God waving a bill you are saying to the Lord, "My relationship with you is based on some imagined legal obligation. In my mind, you owe me something." But Christianity is based on grace and not legal obligation or law. Christianity says that God chooses to give to us out of the goodness of his heart. He gives to the person who does not work. Who has not performed. To whom he owes no debt.

And to completely drive the spear into the heart of legalism, Paul underlines this thought by saying, "But he trusts God who justifies the wicked." The man in verse 5 is described not only as one who does not work, but as a wicked man. See Paul wants to destroy legalism in every form. And so he is going after the idea that we have to be cleaned up to come to God and receive his favor. That exists in all of our hearts. The thought that how can I come to God for his favor, I am not good enough right now, I am not prayed up enough. I just sinned big time. I just lost my cool. I just displayed a horrible attitude. How can I come to God?

We always need to remember that not only doesn't God owe us anything, but we go to God to get cleaned up. We don't go to God after we are cleaned up. We go to God to get cleaned up. We don't go to God after we are cleaned up. A lot of people say, "I am really not sure that Christianity is for me. After all, I drink too much or I am living with my girlfriend, or I am not the religious type. I have done a lot of things that I am not real proud of. I am not sure that Christianity is for me. I believe it, but I don't know if I can do it. I don't know if I can live it."

John Moriarty, one of our assistant pastors, uses this illustration in presenting the gospel to individuals who don't understand it. He says, "Have you ever been fishing?" They say, "Yeah, I have been fishing." He says, "Well, let me ask you something. Do you clean the fish before you catch it? Or do you catch the fish and then clean it?" They say, "Well, you catch the fish and then clean it." John will say, "Well, why not let God catch you and let him clean you up?"

See what the Lord is saying to you and to me is come to me the way you are. I am the answer to your problems. Start with me. You can't handle your problems yourself. You weren't designed to handle life yourself. The reason you are in the fix you are is because you are trying to handle your problems yourself. You have spent all of your life trying to handle your problems yourself, it hasn't worked. Instead of trying to fix your problems before coming to God, how about

this time coming to God with your problems and allowing him and his word in the Bible to provide you with answers for life rather than trying to figure out all of life on your own?

What the apostle Paul was attempting to do, friends, is motivate you to serve by first giving you a clear understanding of the mercies of God shown toward you. God wants to give you a relationship with himself as a gift. You don't earn his favor by being good enough. And you don't lose his favor when you are bad. His favor is a gift.

The apostle John wrote about Jesus this way. He said in John 1:16, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another. Some translations put it, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received grace upon grace."

I was reading a commentary on John 1:16, this idea that from the fullness of his grace we all receive grace upon grace. This commentator, William Hendriksen, said that the idea portrayed is analogous to ocean waves crashing upon the beach. One wave hardly disappears before another arrives. They just keep coming from an inexhaustible supply.

The meaning of this verse is that believers are constantly receiving grace in the place of grace. One manifestation of the unmerited favor of God in Christ is hardly gone when another arrives. Jesus Christ is an ocean of mercy and grace. And to those who come to him, one wave of mercy and grace keeps crashing upon you after another. Wave upon wave.

So Paul so wants to overwhelm you of the mercies of God and out of this wave upon wave of mercy and grace we serve. Out of this clear view of mercy God wants two things from you. First of all, God wants your body. Verse 1, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – This is your spiritual act of worship."

To make service practical, we need to give God our bodies. In the 1st Century, people were familiar with sacrifices in a way that we aren't. They stood by countless altars, whether Jews or Gentiles. They knew how sacrifices went. You picked out an animal. It was either out of your own herd or purchased in the temple. But you watched as the priest killed the animal in ritual manner. You watched the blood being poured out on the altar. You watched the slain animal's body burned up as an offering to your God.

God says, "Here is what I want. I want your bodies not as a dead sacrifice, but I want your bodies as you go about your daily life."

Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*, which by the way if you don't own, it is a paraphrase translation of the New Testament, just great. But Gene Peterson renders Romans 12:1 this way, "Take your everyday ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering." See, Paul is saying, "I want your service to God to be practical."

What does it mean for you and me to follow Jesus? Listen up. God doesn't just want our hearts. You can deceive yourselves on whether you have given God your heart – like the person who says, "I don't give God much of my money,

but he has my heart.” Well, for God to get your heart, he has to get your money because Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If your money doesn’t go in the offering basket, your heart won’t either. We can deceive ourselves regarding giving God our hearts.

So Paul makes our service to God very practical. He says, “Give God your bodies.” I would paraphrase that verse I just quoted and say, “Where your body is, there will your heart be also.” Our bodies are the source of so many of our problems aren’t they? Our bodies trip us up with their appetites. They make us unhappy because of their size and shape. Our bodies drive us to sin by their lusts and cravings. Just go down the parts of your body and watch how they cause you to sin.

Your mouth. You lie and slander other people.

Your eyes. They look away from God and stare at things you shouldn’t be staring at.

Your ears. They listen to gossip.

Your stomachs demand too much food and drink.

Your sexual organs. They have been used for immorality.

Jesus wants you to serve him by first of all giving him your body. You give Jesus your mouth so that your mouth is used to spread the gospel at your workplace, in your family, at your school, in your neighborhood. You give Jesus your mouth so that you start speaking the truth and speak words of encouragement.

You give Jesus your hands so that you are productive and you are serving Jesus by typing or by cooking or by building or embracing someone.

Give Jesus your ears by listening to people who have needs.

Your arms are to embrace the discouraged.

Do you know what the problem is with a lot of people’s Christianity? A lot of people have never given Jesus their bodies. They have embraced Christianity at the level of abstract ideas and beliefs and head-knowledge, but they have never given Jesus their bodies.

Do you know what happens when you give Jesus your body? It says here that it becomes your spiritual act of worship. Giving Jesus your body is the way that you can worship him all week long. See, biblical worship is not just something you do on Saturday night or Sunday morning with your mouth when you sing songs. That is part of worship. But a lot of you would say, I don’t sing very good. I don’t play the guitar. During the week I don’t sit around singing songs to God. How can I worship God when I am in a busy office? How can I worship God when I am sitting at a lunch table with a bunch of other people? How can I worship God when I am in my car or shopping at Kroger? Or walking on the campus of OSU? Or home cooking for my family?

Paul says, “Give God your bodies from the tops of your heads to the bottoms of your feet. And the giving of your bodies to God will be your spiritual act of service and worship.” Every time you face a choice about misusing your body or using it to glorify God and you choose to use your body to glorify God and to serve, you are worshipping the Lord. When you choose to use your mouth to encourage, when you choose to use your hands to help, you are giving God

worship. So wherever you are, in your car or on the campus, at the grocery store – here is my body, Lord. Use it for your glory. You are driving along – Here is my body, God, use it for your glory. Wake up in the morning and you are still lying in bed on your back – Here is my body today, God, use it for your glory.

I once heard a pastor say that his Christian life turned around one day in a crowded train station. He was walking through this crowded train station and had been struggling for weeks regarding God's will in his life. He felt God say to him, "In this place right now give me your body." Clear as a bell. Give me your body. He said that with his toe he drew a little mark on the ground where he was standing and he stood on this spot and said, "Here I am God, in the middle of this crowd, I offer you my body as a living sacrifice." He said every time after that when he was tempted to misuse his body he thought back to that spot where he had given the Lord his body. And he said, "God, I made that decision, to use my body for your glory." We need that in our lives – and X on the floor. "Today I give you my body." So of course service naturally proceeds from this.

You give God your body in teaching children in the church. You give God your body to assist with mailings or data entry. You give God your body when you counsel couples. When you help maintain the church facilities. When you invite an international student over to your house for Thanksgiving you are saying to God, "Here is a part of my body."

God not only wants our bodies, he wants your minds. Verse 2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The Philips' translation has been quoted many times, "Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold." The Message translation puts it real well, "Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit in without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God and you will be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, and develops well formed maturity in you."

You give God your bodies, that makes service practical and you give God your minds. So when the apostle Paul says, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold, don't be conformed to the world," he is saying don't be a chameleon Christian. Don't be the kind of Christian who only acts like a Christians when with other Christians or at church. Don't just blend in with the surroundings wherever you are. Don't be a go-along, get-along kind of Christian. Refuse to conform to your environment. Break ranks with the world. Don't march in step with the culture – whether it's the teen culture, or the country club culture, or the urban culture or the yuppie culture.

Friend, don't march in step with the crowd at school. Don't march in step with the crowd at the office. Don't march in step with the crowd after work. Don't march in step around the lunch table. Don't march in step with your family. Break with ranks of the world. March to the beat of a different drummer. Listen to the drum beat of Jesus. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Don't march in step with the culture.

What do you mean, Rich, don't march in step with the culture? What do you mean, don't let the world squeeze you into its mold?

What the scripture says is fight against the viewpoints, the attitudes, the prevailing perspectives of this world. On your outline I gave you a list of some of the prevailing viewpoints of the world. I think it is so important for Christians to begin to identify those cultural attitudes which are just absolutely out of place, contrary to or opposite of the attitudes of God as expressed in the Bible. You need to be able to put your finger on things and say, "This is not the way God thinks. If I am going to give God my mind, I need to know the way God thinks and the way the culture thinks."

I have listed some cultural attitudes. You can come up with 50 more. Let's just run down the list:

1. If only I had something new – a new job or a new car, a husband, a different spouse, then I would be happy and secure. Do any of you think that way?
2. I deserve to be happy. God owes it to me. After all, I am an American. So many of the most immoral, selfish, radically ungodly choices come from this big lie. I deserve to be happy. I owe it to myself. No – our duty is to obey Christ.
3. I am basically a good person.
4. To be valuable, I must be thin, young or good looking or well liked.
5. Being a mother is a waste of time and talent and intelligence. Is that not the prevailing cultural attitude especially if you are a full time mother? Full time Moms are bashed – that executive at Pepsi who just gave up her management position to care for her kids has gotten kicked around by every feminist in the country.
6. Things, busyness, my job, my house, are more important than relationships.
7. I must always look out for myself.
8. Love is a feeling. You can fall in and out of love.
9. Kids are not as valuable as adults.
10. The elderly are not as valuable as the young.
11. Singles are not as valuable as marrieds.
12. Women are not as valuable as men.
13. Stealing, such as cheating on your income tax, or premarital sex is not a sin.
14. If lots of people do something, it can't be wrong.
15. I should be able to do what I want with my own body in the privacy of my own home with another consenting adult. Whose body is it? Have you given your body to God?
16. So long as I don't hurt anyone, it is no one's business.
17. My spouse (my kids, my career, my church) should be able to meet all my needs. Only Christ can meet all your needs.
18. More and bigger is always better.

We challenge the prevailing thoughts of the culture and we say, "No, I will not march in step with this."

Years ago when I was teaching at OSU my office was in a quad in an old section of a building. Four little offices around a center office. Because I had been there for five years, I was offered a much larger office on one of the main hallways. It had a nice window with a nice view. I thought to myself, "Great, promotion." As I was sitting at my desk, I began thinking about the office move and it occurred to me that I was having a real impact as a Christian on the lives of the three other men whose office also shared the quad. I had invested a lot of time talking with them and praying for them. It occurred to me that their eternal destiny was a lot more important than the square footage of my office.

Now things are not always so plain to us. But the more you soak your mind in God's word, the easier and easier it will be for you to stand up against the prevailing thoughts of the culture.

So let's bring this home and apply it to Christian service. We get wave after wave of grace. One wave after another of God's mercy overwhelming us. In view of all of the mercies of God, we serve God as a joyful response to him first loving us. And you begin to see that service is not some legalistic obligation. It is one of the blessings upon blessings that God wants to give you.

Why serve? Not so you can run up a bill with God. Not so you can prove something to me or the church. You serve because serving keeps your own faith alive. You serve because blessing upon blessing you get to use and discover your spiritual gifts. You serve because it is really nice to contribute. It feels good to make a difference. You need to have your life make a difference. You need an opportunity to participate with others. Blessing upon blessing you serve and develop relationships with others that you are serving with. You serve because it affirms you. You serve because there is a funny paradox in the Christian life that the more you give away, the more you have. That whatever you hold onto with a tight fist you have less of. That the more you open your hand, the more God fills your hand.

Wave upon wave. Give God your bodies. Give God your minds. Give God your service. Let's pray.