

Signing Up for a Tour of Duty

I can hear the water sloshing around and slapping the sides of the bowl as He moved from one man to the next. On His knees, in a place of humility—or what some may call *humiliation*—Jesus washed the feet of unworthy men. The purest hands of all gently and lovingly wiped the grime from filthy feet and tenderly touched the calluses that had developed from the wear and tear of life.

The amazing part was that He didn't do it because He had to. People who *have* to do things always do their tasks begrudgingly. He did it because He *wanted* to. He did it out of love. And if you ask Him, He would even tell you it was all part of what He came to do. It was as simple as that. Jesus considered servanthood to be His purpose. He found His life by giving it away.

Matthew 20:28 tells us, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” If serving others was part of what Jesus was here to do,

and we are to be like Jesus, then serving those in our lives must be a big part of what we are here to do as well.

But most of us, if we're honest, would rather go a month without an allowance than wash someone else's dirty feet—especially for free. We are a reward-driven generation. If there is something in it for us, then we'll give it all we've got. But if you want our time and effort, or you want us to share our belongings when there is absolutely nothing in it for us, then you'd better be prepared to hear us give you a good excuse and weasel our way out of it.

We want comfort and cushy bank accounts. We want popularity and status. Sure, we'll serve God. Just give us the up-front place in the spotlight, please. At the core, each and every one of us is like this. Some of us just hide it better than others. But because we are all like this, the Bible speaks directly to this matter. In Mark 9:35 Jesus says, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

A true servant of God has to surrender her rights. She has to surrender her pride. In reality she has to surrender her *all* as she rolls up her sleeves and takes on tasks that might not appeal to her.

One such girl who stands out in my mind is Amy Carmichael. She was one woman who surrendered her life to Christ and exemplified true servanthood. An Irish missionary, Amy served for fifty-three years in South India without taking a furlough. That's over half a century of service without a break!

As beloved Christian author Elisabeth Elliot put it, "The

preoccupations of seventeen-year-old girls—their looks, their clothes, their social life—do not change very much from generation to generation. But in every generation there seem to be a few who make other choices. Amy was one of the few.”¹

Most of us probably do not have the patience or endurance Amy had. We are not all called to serve God on a foreign mission field, or to serve tirelessly with no break. But we should all aspire to be like Amy in the ways in which she was like Jesus. We should not be afraid to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We too should be some of the few who make other choices.

Opportunities to serve God—and other people—come in various forms. For you, serving could mean teaching a Sunday school class, helping out in the nursery at church, or baby-sitting for someone who cannot afford a baby-sitter but desperately needs one. It could mean going on a summer mission trip or giving someone who doesn’t have a car a ride to Bible study. It could mean cleaning your church, a classroom, or even someone’s home. It could be as simple as offering help to someone who is helpless. Anything that requires you to give of yourself and give to the Lord is a service opportunity.

Most service opportunities require you to stoop just a little—or sometimes a lot. They require you to be flexible, pliable, and willing to be changed in the process. Most of the time servants must take on a task that is “beneath” them. Washing feet was beneath Jesus. He did it to set an example. We need to do it as a means of surrendering our pride.

No servant ever stays the same as she sets out to complete

the task God has given her. Some bring home scars and battle wounds when their journey is complete. Others bring home satchels full of blessings—many times the blessings are a direct result of the battle wounds.

Almost always service means sacrifice. Sometimes servants are called to sacrifice positions, other times they are called to sacrifice their reputation. Sometimes they are even called to sacrifice relationships.

Many times, service requires moving from where you are to where you would never *choose* to be. Other times, it requires you to move from where you are to where you never dreamed you *could* be. The call to service is always an outward call. It calls you out of your box and onto the battlefield. It puts you on the front lines and makes you vulnerable.

Servanthood, though, is not just a call to action. It is not a nine-to-five job, or a position you step in and out of depending on the day of the week. True servanthood is a lifestyle. It begins with a relationship with Christ. You have to know Whom you are serving before you set out to serve, and you have to know Him well. Communication is everything when you are on the front lines.

And so many times before God ever teaches us to *heed* the call, He must teach us to *hear* the call. He must teach us when to stand back and when to step up. Lovingly He teaches us that the results of what He asks us to do are never up to us. He likes to show us how much He can do with the little we are able to give to Him.

God's methods may seem a bit strange at times. He's not a textbook kind of teacher. He teaches us how to serve by actually having us serve. He takes us through training ground after training ground, letting us minister to many different people in many different places before letting us find a place to settle down—if we ever get to settle down at all. Moses' call to service was a call to spend forty years wandering around in the wilderness!

Sometimes God asks us to walk in shoes that don't seem to fit right and go down roads that are dark and dim. He does this to teach us to trust Him, because a servant who trusts her master is always going to be more willing to serve.

When people join the military they sign up for a certain length of service known as a tour of duty. Signing up for service to the Lord is a lifelong commitment. Your "tour of duty" ends only when you cross from this life into the next and you find yourself standing face-to-face with your Master.

And as all servants do, each of us desperately longs to hear the coveted phrase, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21 NKJV). My prayer is that this book becomes a vital tool in helping each of us in our tour of duty so that we may one day join with all of heaven and enter into that very joy.

Notes

1. Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 31.