

Deacons: Servants of the King

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[0 : 00] 3. We'll be in chapter 3, verses 8 through 13 today, 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 8 through 13.

I'm glad that I was able to pull myself together before I got up here because I was crying in tears of gratitude for the faithfulness of the Lord in my life. And the prayers that were prayed over me were exactly the things I needed to be prayed for. And so I'm very grateful to the Lord.

A couple of housekeeping issues I want to present to you this morning. First of all, we actually have this thing where we do like a congregational feedback period before we put somebody forward in leadership of any kind. And we've done that with the majority of the names you've heard, but I want to give you a couple of updates. First of all, we are putting Noah Larson before you as a congregation today as someone we've identified that we would like to serve as a deacon.

And Noah has been attending deacons meetings for some time and so on and so forth. But if you have any concerns or feedback, let's go ahead and start the clock. We'll give you 30 days to come find me and let me know if you have any concerns or questions. We just think that's a healthy practice and want to do that. And it would be conceivable for a lesser known person, we might give you more time, 60 minutes or 60 days, 90 days, whatever. But we feel like Noah is a very known quantity in our church. And so, but if you have any feedback for me, please come find me about that. I also wanted to let you know that our progress in getting, you know, a plurality of elders, which has been an aim of ours for quite some time. Dove Cohen is in the process of getting his ordination finished with sovereign grace. And that's really kind of a necessary part of how we appoint elders at Providence.

We can choose those men, but they have to pass a fairly rigorous set of examinations. And so Dove is pretty far down the road in that process. And we'll keep you abreast of that information as it progresses.

[2 : 15] But he's taken three very difficult four-hour tests each and has a couple more things to do before he is approved in the eyes of the denomination to be an elder. And then we'll walk through that together as a church at that time. I think just to give you like, it's kind of, it's sort of foreseeable how this will play out. Probably December is probably when we're going to begin talking about that.

So today, as Josh mentioned, we're going to be talking about deacons. And this is, as he said, kind of part two of a two-part series on leaders within the church. I've had a quote from John Calvin I've wanted to share for quite some time about this, where he writes, It's a very polite way of talking about something kind of ugly. He says in another place, They, leaders, church leaders, should not stand in the way of Christ alone, having the dominion in his church, or ruling it alone by his word. Those who win the church over to themselves, rather than to Christ, faithlessly violate the marriage which they ought to honor.

And so what we see in this quote is, is sort of the blessing of leaders who will lead us to Jesus, but the danger that some leaders would lead us to themselves instead.

And you know, I've, I've known a lot of pastors for a lot of years, and some who have lost their way, and I will tell you that that saying, never ascribe to malfeasance, what can be, what can be attributed to incompetence.

[4 : 25] You know, of course, we can look out and see men who are as serving as church leaders who are leading people to themselves rather than to Christ.

And I think we always assume that's malfeasance, but the truth is, is that we all lose track of Jesus from time to time. And I think when, one of the things we need to remember about church leadership is, is that a lot of times it goes wrong, not out of any kind of sense of, out of intentional malfeasance, but it's like, okay, if, if I'm supposed to lead you and I've lost Jesus, then all I can do is

lead you to me.

Like, that's all I can do. And, and so it just, it just reinstalls the practice that we just engaged in earlier, which is to pray, pray for those who are put in positions of church leadership.

Almost all of the terrible things that you've experienced or seen happen more because of just sin and Satan and the world and the flesh than they do some sort of guy who goes into the business from the beginning to be, to be rotten.

There's, there's better, more lucrative ways to be rotten. This is, doesn't seem to be the ideal target, you know. I'm, I'm gaming for these maroon chairs.

[5 : 46] Like, my whole thing, like, I'm here to wind up, I'm gonna ruin this church and steal the chairs. Like, it's like, it's like why, people don't enter into ministry to be bad guys, typically. So you need to pray for your leaders and pray that God preserves them and that they have a spirit of humility and a desire for holiness and so on and so forth.

So we're talking about deacons today and I thought before we, we got into the text, we would talk about what is the origin story of the deacons and that is something that Josh has already mentioned.

what's going on in Acts chapter 6 is, is something that I think you need to be aware of in order to appreciate what a deacon does. From the early days of Jesus' ministry all the way into the moments of the early church, people who had been with Jesus responded to their being with Jesus with generosity.

generosity. This is essentially a fundamental to the nature of the Christian life. When you walk through the pages of Jesus' earthly ministry, when you walk through the pages of the early church, what you'll find is that people who actually are with Jesus tend to be very generous.

I think it's because we use money as a backup God. Makes sense, right? It's like, what if he doesn't come through? Or what if I don't know who he is, so I'm going to use, I'm going to hoard wealth as sort of like a backup God because he might not take care of me, he might leave me or forsake me.

[7 : 26] And then they meet the God, Jesus. And a liberality, a generosity just reflexively takes place. And of course there have been poor churches in church history, but you know, those are often the exception more than they are the rule.

The general pattern we see throughout the New Testament is that when Christians gather in Jesus' name, resources multiply. And people give those resources to the local church.

And they give those resources to the local church as an expression of love for those that both live in the church and those that live outside the church. So now we've got essentially sort of baseline understanding of what deacons are about.

I feel like if we don't talk about stewardship, we really can't understand deacons. Because in the end, in Acts 6, deacons need to happen.

They come into being. The deacon origin story is essentially we've got resources, we've got people that could use these resources. How are we going to get these two things connected in a way that honors God and does justice to the gospel?

[8 : 40] people. And so a church without resources does not need deacons. Well, maybe they need deacons to get the resources. I don't know. But these two things are tied very tightly together.

And so it is in Acts 6. There are a group of widows already in the early church. The church has grown substantially. And a number of widows are a part of this body. And they don't have the means to take care of themselves financially.

And so the church has money because people that are around Jesus are generous. And so they do a daily distribution, a daily meal probably for the widows.

And there was some feeling because this was at the early church when all of the socioeconomic classes were being blended for the very first time in human history in some respects. And there were even different ethnicities that were kind of adjacent to each other in Judaism that the Hebrews and the Hellenists and they were starting to interconnect in the church.

But there was some feeling that the more Jewish Jews, let's say, were getting extra. And the less Jewish Jews, the Hellenists, were getting less.

[9 : 52] So there was some dispute and they did what is right to do. They didn't talk about this quietly one Sunday and they didn't build up bitterness. They didn't slander the church.

They didn't deconstruct by the inequity they observed. They just went and said, hey, we've got this concern. Could you do something about this, please? And the elders are like, absolutely. We don't

want that to happen. The gospel is at its core an impartial gospel and so we want to make sure that the gospel is honored in the way that we care for people and so let's come up with a plan.

And deacons are that plan. Deacons were assembled based on their qualifications. They had to be men of good reputation.

It says in verse 3 as Josh read in Acts 6, therefore brothers pick out from among you seven men of good repute full of the spirit and of wisdom. And the whole idea of these qualifications in Acts 6 is simply let's get people, let's get men that everyone would trust to handle the church's resources with wisdom, impartiality, and so on and so forth.

Make sense? Now before we go any further I have to share a joke with you that I grew up hearing. My pastor growing up was the king of making fun of deacons.

[11:09] He had a great relationship with his deacon body. My dad was a deacon. These guys served together forever but my pastor was just brilliant at deacon jokes.

He had so many good deacon jokes but one of the things he would every once while say is let me make this so simple even a deacon can understand. Well, I think it's important to like make this as simple as it really is.

When people around Jesus they become generous. That generosity flows into the church. The church has tons of opportunities to care for people. Who's managing all of this?

The deacons. That's what a deacon is for. I think one way you could describe this is you could say a deacon is someone who ensures the even distribution, the wise distribution, of God's blessings to the church.

And I see the men that serve as deacons now going out of their way every Sunday morning. If someone here is new I can almost guarantee you that they won't leave this building without having met at least one deacon.

[12:18] They've got the instinct to look for. You ever see somebody like this? This is an important kind of person. The person who looks for the people who are being left out? That's deacon vibe.

The person who looks for uneven distribution. It's like this is the person in an ecclesiastical way who would make sure that the nachos on the bottom have cheese on them too.

Right? Right? Right? Like because no one wants a top heavy nacho pan. Someone needs to carefully go in there with maybe like a tweezer and lift up a chip and toss a little shredded cheese in there and so on and so forth.

A deacon is someone who is concerned that all people have access to the blessings that God has put into the local church.

And you can see why both in Acts 6 and also in 1 Timothy 3 that respectability ranks very high. It's essentially you just want people that you can trust to handle God's finances.

[13:31] I personally come at the deacon question with a very heavy emphasis on resources and finances. I don't think I'm entirely off.

I may be overstating that simply based on some biases that I have, but I really believe that one fundamental task of the deacons is to manage the church's treasury.

And to make sure that it is being productive, to be good stewards of it, like in Matthew 23, the parable of the stewards. I think a deacon is a steward of the varied physical blessings in particular within the local church.

And you want someone who is trustworthy. And so in Acts 3, we have men of good repute. And in 1 Timothy 3, we have deacons must be dignified.

And the word dignified there is just worthy of respect. You need to have people you can trust.

Indeed, the rest of the qualifications, and now I am in 1 Timothy 3, the rest of the qualifications that follow in verse 8, are really just about trustworthiness.

[14:46] Not double-tongued. What does that mean? It means they say what they mean, they mean what they say. They're not talking out both sides of their mouth. Not addicted to much wine.

So this is like no vices that could lead them to sudden debauchery, to sort of falling off of the cliff of morality. addiction to alcohol will do that.

Not greedy for dishonest gain. No secondary motives. No side angles for accessing the church's wealth.

No judases managing the money bag. That's kind of meant to be a one-off I think in the purposes of God. One's enough. Now what about verse 9?

It says this is the verse that I find to be one of the most interesting in this passage. It says that deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

[15 : 45] So what does that mean? I did a wedding this weekend and during the rehearsal I sat across from an 80 year old man whom I had met a couple of times before and the first thing this man asked me sits down in front of me I'm just trying to enjoy my salmon and he sits right in front of me and says what is the mystery of God it's like if you weren't older you would be wearing my salmon right now I'm in no mood to tell you what the mystery of God is though I immediately now he's he's a juice for Jesus guy which I'm not a huge fan of so I immediately found the most objectionable pot stirring thing to say because I was already biffed and I said the mystery of God is the inclusion of the Gentiles as equals with the Jews and which is actually biblically true that's Ephesians 1 but I definitely had an ulterior motivation in saying that I was trying to pick on him and he said oh that's very interesting because

I think it's Jesus well you can't pull discussion it just shuts down all discussion obviously he's right at some level and probably more right than me the truth is that this saying they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience is actually worthy of your consideration there are three things that this phrase the mystery of the faith refers to in the New Testament and the one is as I've! the inclusion of the Gentiles the redemptive purposes of God impartiality a brand new concept in the history of the world do you understand what I mean when I say that a brand new concept impartiality across all socioeconomic that's new with Jesus really okay so one of the things that was a mystery hidden for the ages Paul says in Ephesians 1 is that all nations would be welcome into the redemptive purposes of God in Christ elsewhere including we'll see this next week 1 Timothy 3 he talks about the mystery of godliness and the mystery of godliness is something to do with the incarnation of Jesus so that was what my 80 year old dinner mate was getting at the incarnation that's the mystery that the creator of the universe took on flesh and dwelled among us and then the third mystery is we have created a brand new religion and that is one that does not tell you you must get better to get saved which is we have a completely new thing over here with Christianity it's a grace based faith not a works based faith and that is also described in several places as a mystery so when

Paul says that a deacon must believe with a clear conscience in the mystery of the faith I'm not sure which one of those he means but I know this because a deacon is fundamentally a gift distributor he must believe in grace and I know that because a deacon is fundamentally a gift distributor he must believe in impartiality and because a deacon is fundamentally a gift distributor he must be like Jesus who dwelled among the people he came to serve incarnation yeah deacons need to believe in that and they need to do it impartiality of the gospel yeah deacons need to do that too grace yeah deacons need to value that which one is Paul talking about is there a way that all three are the same thing we'll come back next week I have more studying to do I'll let you know now what about verse 10 it says and let them also be tested first then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless what does that mean here is another reason why

I think that deaconing and stewardship are closely aligned because what I think is happening here is essentially let's make sure they know how to steward the blessings of God that they're honest that they're wise that they're impartial and so on but I think that the testing here is a very practical one and it has to do with like let's give them some things to manage let's give them some resources to manage and make sure they manage those things with wisdom impartiality love and so on and so forth so really ideally I don't know how many years ago it was that Providence bought this building but ideally we would have created at that time a group of deacons who saw this building as essentially the church's wealth and said let's manage this asset for the good of as many people as possible let's try to increase the value of this asset let's make sure the value of this asset doesn't decrease this would be our greatest financial asset this building is worth somewhere around two million dollars although it is insured for five million if anyone's feeling arsony i don't think we could post this sermon online all right if this church burns down someone get online immediately and delete that video so this church is worth about two million dollars and we owe about six hundred thousand on it so this is the primary asset this is the primary physical asset of our church and this is something that is its own world to be managed and so on and so forth so we have asked the deacons to do all sorts of crazy things over the years to help in various ways but really as

[22 : 09] I'm continuing to grow my understanding of deaconing and the stewardship of assets and so on and so forth I really want to see a group of people come together to really just own everything

in the financial vertical of our local church this idea that anyone that I would ever want to do all the things no no no I don't want to do all the things I just want all the things to be done that's all there's a difference and I can really see how if a group of people were devoted to taking the finances of a church seriously see we've grown up in such a gnostic and pietistic age we've grown up so suspicious of materiality even though we wouldn't be saved if Jesus didn't take on flesh right like we've grown up with all of this like as long as you love Jesus it'll all work out it's like no Matthew 23 God distributes talents we are wicked and lazy if we don't maximize those talents

God has distributed wealth in our church we are wicked and lazy if we don't manage and maximize that not only because it's God's but also because it does so much good it can do so much good so that would be my as I've studied this I spent a lot of time thinking you know I don't really think I have as much clarity on deacons as I want to and that's what I walked away with deacons really should be managing the inflow and outflow of the church's finances its assets its property its ministry there should just be this highly practical core of people who are caring for these things verse 11 what do we got here their wives like wives must be dignified not slanderers but sober minded faithful in all things well I will tell you that I grew up Southern Baptist and it was very common in Southern Baptist church for a deacon to simply be the man who shows up to tell the pastor what his wife thinks I have seen in many a deacon board essentially men who were following their wives and bringing their wives instructions into the deacon board is that something what Paul's talking about here I don't I don't know here's three options for what this means what does it mean when it says their wives likewise must be dignified not slanderers but sober minded faithful in all things what does that mean well okay so I think the most natural reading of this would be that this verse verse 11 belongs with verse 12 let me read those together to you their wives likewise must be dignified not slanderers but sober minded faithful in all things let deacons each be the husband of one wife managing their children and their own households well so I think the most natural reading is just that as children are held up as a sort of proof that a deacon is the kind of guy who is competent so knows how to lead and knows how to manage the things that

God gives them I think that's the most natural reading it seems to be the one that requires the least amount of twistiness it simply would fit verse 11 and verse 12 together and you've got essentially household and qualifications of deacons are does this deacon manage the people in his life well so that's probably the simplest reading may or not be the right one the next one would be that Paul assumes that the ministry of a deacon will invariably involve his wife's participation so deacon wives must have certain qualifications as well that one makes a lot of sense to me too after all if deacon started out as ministry to the widows well you know I mean I'm sure you know it would be nice to have your wife with particular ministry of deacon and saying wives that go with their husbands that serve with their husbands in kind of an

Aquila and Priscilla way need to also have qualifications that's possible and then the third reading would be that Paul believes that both men and women should serve as deacons and so he is providing a list of qualifications for female deacons well I will tell you it is not super concerning to me for women to be deacons I would also tell you I don't see that that clearly as the first meaning that jumps out of this text that's not what I see when I read this text I think that reading would be an attempt to justify something that you would like to see true in the Bible there are better texts if you're going to argue for women deacons than this one I guess is what I'm saying so what do I think Paul is saying here I think what Paul is saying here is probably either option A or option B either wives and the character of wives is another comment on a man's leadership or

[27 : 29] B deacons will often have their wives as part of the ministry and therefore their wives must be of a certain! Am I dodging the question about whether women should serve as deacons?

Yes! I personally have zero problems with this I am realizing I just do not have a firm opinion on this Now this is where plurality of elders would be wonderful and by the way the denomination offers no guidance on this at all because if I had a few elders and everybody just agreed this is what we're going to those areas and be like fine this is what we've decided to do but as for whether women can be deacons or not whether God wants that or not I am literally undecided I apologize for that I feel like I've gone a long time in ministry to have an opinion that is unformed but that's where I'm at so I think it's this text though I don't think it's super complicated I think it's either option A or B what's going on with verse 12 let deacons each be the husband of one wife managing their children and their own households well well I think one of the things I just draw your attention to is if you're trying to understand what a church is supposed to be you got to notice how in both the qualifications for

elders and what the church is most like church is a household this is a beautiful thing to me in the very next section which we'll look at next week

Paul actually says I'm writing this so that you know how to behave in the household of God so one of the things going on here is just we really have to be a church that is exceedingly expressively expressively unapologetically for the home the home in the church can never compete with one another they can never compete with one another because they have to compliment each other in order for either to do what they're called to do so I am one that has always said like far be it from anything happening in the church to ever compete with anything that's happening in your home there is always a way men leaders of to serve both the church and your family those two things are not in contradiction I do not want to and I've gone to great lengths as as a husband and a father to never pit those two things together and I can promise you that if you aspire to leadership at Providence Community Church I will be your greatest advocate to help you make sure that those things complement each other and not for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus now remember we use these passages all the time for examination and I suppose I've done that a little bit so far but we can't sleep on this idea that if we don't encourage men to serve we'll have nobody to examine so encouragement is a part for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus let me go through these two reasons these two blessings that Paul offers out to deacons who serve well the first is a good standing a good standing the first thing to see is that it's okay for you as a human being! to have some regard for your own dignity honor respect and reputation that register it's okay for you as a human being to like want to be respected it's okay for you to have some desire for a good reputation if wanting to be respected was a bad thing Paul would not hold it forth as a reward for being a deacon so that's that's job number one the truth is we've got the we're just in that classic territory where it's a good thing it's just not

[32 : 25] God desiring a good reputation is good desiring money is good desiring fitness is good desiring to get married is good God would bless and sanction all of those desires but he would require you at all times to submit them to him and to keep them subordinate to him and yes there may be times when God calls you to throw your reputation on the fire and stand with him as you watch it burn there are times when this is what God calls you to do but let it be a thing you value that you throw on the altar not something that you don't care about at all we should desire to have a good standing we should just go about getting a good standing in God's way and we should surrender our good standing to God just like Jesus did when he in Golgotha or when he in Gethsemane surrendered his desire to not be reproached to not be scoffed to not be naked and ridiculed and doubted he surrendered it he put his reputation on the altar and watched it burn and what did

God do in return did God say see those reputations are you shouldn't want to have a good standing what did God do for Jesus when Jesus surrendered his good name well what does Philipians 2 say that he gave him a name above all names and so there are certain pathways in life that appear to be in a demeaning direction that wind up being massively glorious and in the time when Paul was writing 1st Timothy 3 choosing a title so diakonos deacon it just means servant think about this this is power and honor culture like this is choosing a pathway where you you have on your name tag servant would have been in that culture fundamentally demeaning see we are so built up on gospel presuppositions that we have some respect for people who serve but in that day it was not so and so

Paul is helping these men at least men perhaps women know hey if you decide to go down the pathway of servanthood and you're gonna you think that you will you will be demeaned and look down on because who would want to be a servant I want to be an overseer I want to be over not under and Paul's like no no no no remember that we live in a new economy created by Jesus Christ who was crucified dead buried and raised and seated at the right hand of the father and given a name that is above every name upon which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is lord so Paul's saying like don't think that being a deacon makes you a less than it actually gives you incredibly good standing and there was kind of one category for exception for servanthood in the ancient days you were kind of a nothing just generally if you were a servant there's one exception is if you were serving the servant of someone really important right and then you were considered a big deal deacons those that aspire to deacons you are God's butler you are

God's house manager you are God's steward you are God's servant that's a pretty big deal that's a pretty good standing deacons who serve well in that role will gain a good standing think about it this way we could have someone join our church who's a faithful Christian he's a CEO or a tech founder super wealthy super educated whatever and the day that man if he did become a deacon he would gain standing in the kingdom of God to become a deacon is to gain standing and then we see in addition to gaining standing

Paul says that they will gain great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus as I mentioned last week if you want to stir your faith and feel greater confidence in the truthfulness of the gospel get out there and serve there's a study that has kind of rocked my world ever since I became aware of it a number of years ago and it measured the number of clergy paid clergy to church attenders over the history of several decades over the period of several decades and did you know that back in the 1960s the ratio of clergy to attenders was 300 to 1 so you had one paid pastor and you had 300 members and you know what that ratio is today it's 1 to 75 what's happened think about this back then the average pastor taught at least three times a week often four so he often led a Sunday school class he often preached a sermon he did a Sunday night service and a Wednesday night devotional prayer meeting or so on and so forth this is how I started out this is what I did when I started out and so you had a pastor extraordinarily busy how was he able how were men back then able to manage churches with 300 attenders just with one clergy now think about the consequences of this shift if you manage a business if you're involved at any level of HR you understand the outsized cost of payroll in any area including church right it is expensive to hire people it is expensive so think about what's happened just to the church's finances the big church over the last four decades we were once humming along with one paid pastor for 300 members 300 attenders it's different and now we have to pay a pastor every time we have 75 attenders so to speak think of think of the financial consequence of that think of all the money that's not going out the door anymore so what happened friends really what happened is the development of the entertainment and recreation industry that pulled massive volunteer labor out of the church and on to put them on the lake essentially what wound up happening was is that there was a massive shift away from the church body doing the majority of the ministry work and the pastors doing the majority of the teaching and so one of the consequences of this is that the finances of the church have just been completely backward for decades now and the other consequence is of course overworked pastors who are even more likely to stumble into foolishness and so on and so forth well overworked isn't quite the right way doing a bunch of stuff that they might not be mostly called to do and also because pastors are doing all these other things now they're basically just majority of pastors anymore are just paid to be the kind of church members there were in the 1960s 70s and 80s just the average church member now from the 60s or 70s is now sort of hired to do the work of the ministry so there's a financial consequence to that there's a consequence to pastors but honestly friends the biggest consequence is that

Christians who do not serve are not very strong they're not very anti-fragile they're not very rigorous they're really easily disrupted and disturbed and tossed to and fro now you know full well that I've had a long history of cars some of which are a bit sketchy and friends honestly I think I want to just challenge you just carefully if you told me that you have a great car but it can only go 20 miles an hour you're like well I don't know how great the car is you're like I mean it can go 20 miles an hour and it's just like it just hums along and it's wonderful but I can't go too fast I can't push it too hard because then it all falls apart friends many people think of their faith in those exact terms the only reason they have a faith at all is because they are doing absolutely nothing in the world with it they're like I need massive amounts of rest

[41 : 25] I need massive amounts of breaks I need massive amounts of spiritual food because my car can't my relationship with Jesus can't sustain highway speeds it's like well that's that's probably not true and secondly a real concern if it is you see serving is in many respects the greatest gift God has to give us in terms of giving us what Paul mentions here for deacons a greater confidence in the truthfulness of the gospel and if you will serve if you will serve God will keep you help you to see that you're on the right side of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 Jesus tells a parable it's not a parable it's a prediction in verse 31 when the son of man comes to his glory and all the angels with him then he will sit on his glorious throne before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he will place the sheep on his right but the goats on his left then the king will say to those on his right hey come you

I'm very tired I'm sorry come you who are blessed hey you come who are blessed by my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world now you know this story probably what separates the sheep from the goats for I was hungry and you gave me food I was thirsty and you gave me drink I was a stranger and you welcomed me I was naked and you clothed me I was sick and you visited me I was in prison and you came to me and then the righteous will answer him saying Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink and when did we see stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you and when do we see you sick or in prison and visit you and the king will answer them truly I say to you as you did it to the least of these my brothers you did it to me and those are the sheep and then we get the goats in the next section and Jesus is like you guys aren't in and here's why when I was naked you didn't clothe me when I was in prison you didn't visit me and so on and so forth and they're like when did we see you like this and he's like when you did not do it to the least of these how do you have confidence that you're not a goat without serving?

I don't know serving doesn't make you a sheep it just reveals your sheepiness to yourself it just reveals that God is at work in you when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10 I worked harder than any of them nevertheless it was not I who worked but Christ who worked in me Paul is celebrating something he sees God doing in him and through him this is how serving gives you great confidence here's another way of thinking about it when you serve you see the fruit of the spirit in your life Galatians 5:22 but the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self-control against such things there is no law and what I think people are thinking is if I really avoid a ton of commitments and difficulties and really go out of my way not to be around people who provoke me and annoy me and bother me then I can have the fruit of the spirit I can be patient when no one's around to test my patience like yeah your car is an awesome 20 mile an hour car no if you want to see whether you have the fruit of the spirit you have to engage in ministries that test the evidence of the fruit of the spirit this is what Paul is saying when he says deacons gain great confidence they serve and they see God serving!

through them friends there are aspects of Jesus personality you will never experience until you start caring for other people like Jesus cares for them until you surrender to a life of service not pulling service opportunities from a menu that have been carefully curated according to your likes interests and abilities but hands God just like I have and so many a blank check and says here you decide how much you decide when you decide where is the safest way to live it produces the most confidence that I am not running in vain as Paul would say and here's one other thing I'll leave you with serving will help you make more sense of your story than just about anything else why has God brought me through the things he's brought me through why is my life like this I read recently of a guy who grew up feeling like a total oddball because he didn't have any interest in sports he was completely unathletic his dad was frustrated that he wasn't athletic and so he just grew up feeling like a total oddball he loved art and classical music and chess nerd and he just always felt so insufficient but you know he did his best he knew

[46 : 45] God was calling him to serve so he went through life serving and doing what he could and one day God called him to move to a country in Eastern Europe where ballet and opera and chess and math are everything and suddenly this guy found healing for all of these hurts he had had and all these insufficiency that he had for all of these years because not not immediately but eventually God put him in a place that said see this is why I raised you this way this is why your story has the contours it did now the problem with us is that we want that to be the first experience in serving but that's something we get down the road after we become habituated to serving but the truth is is that the thing I'm finding as I get older is is that among all the varied gifts God has for me in serving one of them is is that he is still making sense of my story he is still making sense of this or that question I have about my past this or that struggle this or that sin this or that disappointment this or that trial or adversity he's still making sense of all of that but it's almost always within the context of putting someone else first for communion thank you for your patience for communion

I just want to leave you with Philippians 2 so if there is any encouragement in Christ any comfort from love any participation in the spirit any affection and sympathy complete my joy by being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord of one mind do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing

to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father so as you come for communion today we gather in the name of Jesus who did everything we're talking about and not only did he do that so that he could be our model but he actually did that so that he could buy you redeem you and fill you with his spirit and it's that very spirit you'll encounter when you go out to serve your brothers and sisters so in faith in Jesus in faith in his provision for you through the gospel would you come now and partake of the table and partake