

Serve Strong
Serve Strong Series Week 1
Philippians 2:1-11
April 29, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision: Glad to be back in PBO!

New here great week to join us, kicking off a brand new series of messages called “Serve Strong”

And here’s the tension or issue we’re going to drill down into:

In order to thrive, all of us need at some point someone to serve us: good parenting includes plenty of times when the parents serve their kids and make sacrifices for their well-being

Maybe you had a teacher or a coach who served you by pouring in some extra time or energy into you at a key point in your life

And if we DON’T have those experiences of a few key people serving us in some way especially as kids or teens growing up, we end up as adults with these massive developmental gaps

But then as we become adults we have this **conflicted relationship with the whole idea of serving**

whether you’re a Christian/church person or not, most of us have one of these 3 relationships with serving

A very small percentage of us are **naturally gifted servers**

do you know someone who’s a natural at serving? I’m not one of them, but I’ve known a couple--they’re wonderfully kind people, aren’t they?

If you’re one of these people, thank you for how you serve others so naturally and graciously, it makes the world come more alive around you. Thank you.

That’s one extreme, but here’s the OTHER extreme: some of you straight up think serving is weakness. One author I read researched how different people related to the world around them

And for some of you the way you were raised or how you think about it, there’s two types of people in the world: there are **Vikings and there are Victims**

And you’re either the Viking who’s winning or you’re the Victim who’s losing.

And serving isn’t what Vikings do! Winners in life aren’t the ones who serve, victims serve

you work hard or you hustle and make it so that you don’t HAVE to serve ANYONE!

If you’ve got a worldview that’s essentially got just those two categories: Vikings or Victims, serving doesn’t make any sense.

Some of you are likely Vikings or Victims kind of people and/or you know someone who's had a Vikings or Victims mentality, right?

So we've got a small percentage of natural servers, we've got a percentage of us who are Vikings or Victims people

And then there's the rest of us for whom serving comes under the category of '**shoulds and oughts**'

You watched enough Sesame Street as a kid or maybe went to church and you know I SHOULD serve others. I know it's kind of a good thing that I OUGHT to do.

But there's only so many hours in the day and there are so many needs out there in the world
Plus some of us have gotten burned out or exhausted in our efforts to serve or meet needs

Or maybe we felt like someone took advantage of us along the way

Or maybe we're just really, really busy and who's got time with everything else you've already got on your schedule?

So we've got 3 basic groups of people:

-gifted servers (small percentage)

-Vikings or Victims mentality (a much larger percentage of us)

-should and oughts people--which is probably most of us here, especially in a church setting where at some level we know we're supposed to be nice to people or something

And into this mix of people over the next couple of weeks we're going to throw out a service opportunity that we do twice a year around here called "Chatham Serves"

Where, as we mentioned before, instead of our typical worship service, we line up a bunch of service projects and invite you to sign up and serve somewhere

Some of you gifted servers LOVE this Sunday, you wish we did this every single week.

Others of you, more Vikings or Victims people, you roll your eyes and say dismiss this entirely, who'd want to get up on a Sunday morning to go do a bunch of do-gooder service projects for people you don't know even if they DESERVE it or not?!?

And then for a good number of the should and ought folks, we're a little annoyed by this whole thing

we know we SHOULD do this, we're glad in THEORY our church does this, we might even tell our friends about this cool thing our church does when we cancel the normal service and go out and serve

but when it comes right down to it, it's not convenient, it's work, we're not always sure where we fit, maybe we don't have tons of handyman or handywoman skills—ugh! Chatham Serves!

For these next couple of weeks, we're going to invite everyone into a richer, more rooted, more life-giving framework to think about serving

And then we're going to invite everyone who will be here on May 20th to jump in on Chatham Serves and serve with great joy

And to start with today, we're going to talk about how Jesus shows us what real serving is. Real serving doesn't start from a position of weakness but a position of strength.

YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG TO SERVE

That's what we're going to see as we turn to Philippians 2. Bible/no Bible/screen

New to the Bible, Philippians is a letter written by a man named Paul who wrote many of the letters that make up much of the New Testament to the church he helped start in Philippi, a city in ancient Rome that became a center for the early church movement

Paul writes to many different churches and it's pretty clear from this letter that the Philippians were one of his favorites as he thanks them profusely for how they've encouraged him

And the word "joy" or "rejoice" comes up over and over and over again in this little letter

And in Philippians 2 he's going to encourage them to embrace the role of a servant by pointing them to Jesus

But to start with, he's going to rattle off a list of experiences that he knows that they've already had as they've started to follow Jesus together as a community:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

In other words, SINCE you've been encouraged by your union with Christ—that's one of Paul's favorite ways of talking about what it means to be a Christian, to be joined or united with Christ

We live in Christ and Christ sets up shop inside each of us when we become a Christ-follower

Since you've experienced tremendous comfort from Christ's love for you, since you have in community this common sharing in the Spirit, since you now have tenderness and compassion

GIVEN all of this, Paul says, make my joy complete by being like-minded, like-loved, one in spirit and mind, having the same goal

Paul is giving a command here that he wants the people he's writing to to obey. But there's an important principle in the Bible that's full of commands that we need to pay attention

And that is that there are ***no naked commands in the Bible***. Some of you remember that I've said that before because we don't say naked very much in church!

There are NO naked commands in the Bible. Every time you see a command in the Bible—"do this, don't do that"—just before or just after there is some sort of statement that frames that command in light of a larger reality:

You'll see something about who God is—God's amazing love, His amazing grace, His mercy, His wisdom, His goodness towards us

OR you'll see something about who you are because of God's love for you: you're forgiven, you're adopted into God's family, you're the recipient of God's blessings, you're holy, you're chosen, you're a son or daughter of the most high God

OR you'll see a promise to hold onto: at one point Jesus says to someone, "do this, and you shall inherit eternal life." If you do X then Y will result. That's a promise.

Here, Paul is talking about how they are to relate to each other and it's going to get more intense here in a minute

BUT FIRST, just a quick reminder: LOOK at all the spiritual resources you've been given by Christ! You've got this limitless supply of encouragement from your union with him

You've received his boundless love, you SHARE in his Spirit together

You've been given all these resources from God through your relationship with Jesus Christ, so NOW I want you to take those resources and learn how to love and serve one another in these ways

And he goes on to describe in a little more detail what this might look like:

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Okay, so we could spend the whole rest of our time right here, right?

Do NOTHING out of selfish ambition or vain conceit—not anything!

INSTEAD in humility value others over yourself, not just looking out for yourself but looking out for others

Everyone good on that? Check? You got all that under control? Me either! Miles to go before I get there!

And if you're a Viking or Victim kind of a person, you don't even want to do this! This sounds utterly ridiculous.

Or it's the kind of thing that sounds nice and sweet in church but doesn't actually work in the real world

there are real people out there who will really take advantage of you if you don't take advantage of them first

Paul the author here KNOWS that this sounds a little ridiculous and he knows it's the kind of thing that sounds nice in church but you're skeptical that it could actually work in the real world

And so he grounds this teaching in a real-world, real-life example

He's going to say, "I want you to look at what happened with Jesus and walk in and live out the Jesus way"

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

MINDSET, so key, right? In our small group this week we were talking about this passage and one woman in our group used to be a kindergarten teacher

And she talked about how one year she had a couple kids that just drove her crazy. Until finally she started a practice of getting there early, sitting at their desks, and praying for those for just a couple of minutes before school started

That changed her mindset and it changed everything about how that day went.

In your relationships with one another, Paul says, I want you to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus

From here, Paul is going to quote what was likely one of the oldest hymns or songs of worship that the early church had

As you relate to each other, I want you to have this same way of thinking as Jesus had when he did this:

***⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;***

***⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.***

***⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!***

My dad was a 19-year-old sophomore in college who wasn't sure what he was doing with his life

So he dropped out of college and joined the Navy, then went back to college and ended up spending most of his 21 year career in the Navy as an officer

My dad taught my brother and me a lot about what it looked like to follow Jesus. And one of the ways he did this was in his willingness to serve

In the Navy, there are a couple of different styles of uniforms: dress whites, dress blues, khakis. But for all of them, you wear your rank and privileges literally on your sleeves!

There's ribbons and markings that show very clearly where you stand in the pecking order

And my memories as a kid were every night my dad would spend 15-20 minutes ironing his uniform for the next day, he was very proud of his uniform and he worked hard to maintain a high degree of professionalism

But my dad always knew that the greater honor was found in serving rather than in being served

And so my dad always kept his most important work uniform folded up in his desk drawer: **COVERALLS, not** overalls, coveralls

Slipping into these, my dad could get dirty, get in the trenches. At one point, he was overseeing a renovation project and he'd get involved with the contractors laying fiber optic cable, knocking down walls

Slipping into those coveralls, my dad would *cover up* all the awards and medals and rank that he had worked so hard for

And climb down and serve. He would show that there is no job that needed to be done that was unworthy or beneath him.

During that renovation project he spent a LOT of time in his coveralls, getting good and dirty

And at one point during that stretch I was out with my dad one evening and we bumped into another officer who worked in the same building as my dad did

And my dad joked on himself about having come from a long day on the renovation project

And this fellow officer shook his head at my dad and he said,

"I think there's something wrong when an officer in the United States Navy is in coveralls and on his hands and knees in a renovation."

I was 13. I vividly remember that conversation. My dad was serving. And one of his peers didn't like it. He thought it was beneath an officer to be the one on his hands and knees serving

But my dad knew this passage. My dad knew this Jesus. And he knew that this was the Jesus way

Paul tees up this hymn with this line: have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

If you've got a Viking or Victim mindset, this is a call to replace Viking or Victim mentality with something much more risky much more life-giving

If you've got a mindset that says only the weak people serve and you're going to avoid serving because that's a sign of weakness, that's going to be at odds with the mindset of Christ Jesus

If you serve because you don't like yourself very much, because you think you're kind of worthless

If you serve because you think that's all you're good for or the only reason why people would want you around is because you serve them, that's going to be at odds with the mindset of Christ Jesus

that's actually Viking or Victim mentality also, you're just the victim in that story

If you serve out of guilt or obligation, out of shoulds our oughts, that's also going to be at odds with the mindset of Christ Jesus

This hymn tells an account of what Jesus did

Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or leveraged for his own advantage

If you're new to Christianity, this can get a little confusing—from the very beginning Christians have asserted that Jesus was not a mere human being but God who actually puts on flesh

God himself come to visit us, come to rescue us, come to make this world right again

And so you've got God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons in perfect relationship

This sounds confusing until you look at the world he created and you see that the whole thing runs on right relationships, EVERYTHING that exists is a relationship of other things with multiple parts

like water is one THING but made up of 3 parts: H₂O, two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen, combined into one substance—grass, leaves, trees, your body, even beavers!

Everything that exists exists as a combination of relationships that work together

And the Christian account or description of what's gone wrong with the world is God created a world to run on PERFECT relationships but then we rebelled against the source of those perfect relationships

And so now our world is marked and destroyed by broken relationships: families fall apart, friends gossip and lie to one another, businesses exploit employees and customers, nations go to war for selfish reasons, the cells in our body break down or over-replicate and create cancers

Jesus is God put on flesh to plunge into a world of broken relationships to make things right again

When just the right time came, he agreed with his Father that he would put aside all the privileges and wonders of being God

And he put on the COVERALLS of a human body to redeem human bodies and the rest of the created order

He comes as God in the flesh knowing who he is, where he's come from, where he's going, what he's here to do. *He comes in strength to do what only the strong can fully do: serve.*

But he doesn't put on flesh and put on a big flashy show. The various Roman Emperors at various times and in various ways claimed to be gods or descendants of the gods, that was part of how they justified their use of power

But Jesus doesn't appear like one of those Caesars,

He takes the form of a poor servant. He's born into a poor household, not a palace. He never has much money. His followers are mostly made up of the poor and marginalized people

And as he serves, he lives a life that towers above every other life in history

Men and women were originally made in God's image, now the perfect image of God has come to show us what it means to live like it.

And what he does and how he does it changes more lives than any other life in history

Everywhere Jesus goes, there's life in his wake, even when there's conflicts and people don't like him! What they're pushing back against is this invitation into the life of God

And how does this happen? How does he change more lives than any other life in history? By humbling himself

And Paul traces this **descending arc**:

Jesus was **Equal with God** but he sets that aside and instead put on->

Human Likeness but not just any human likeness, he avoided coming as an emperor or king he came as ->

Servant who not didn't just serve but ->

Humbled himself through obedience to God all the way to ->

Death on a Cross—even death on a cross! This was the worst possible death!

Shameful way to die, you didn't talk about crucifixions in polite Roman company, it was too horrible

Now if the hymn ended here and if the story ended here, the Vikings or Victims people would be totally right!

See what happens to people who are humble? They're crushed. People who serve lose. If you're not aggressive and strong in this world, you get exploited and beat down

Jesus was the nicest guy in the world and where did it get him? The worst death imaginable

And if the story ended there, with humble servant Jesus being crucified

then from my perspective I'd say that he's THE prime example supporting Vikings or Victim mentality, and you'd be totally right

But just as Jesus gets as low and as humbled as he can possibly get, there's the turn. And the descending journey turns into a radical ascending journey:

**⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Anyone ever been bungee jumping before? I've never been. But if I did go, here's what I'd want: I'd want YOU to come with me and I'd want YOU to jump FIRST

Because if YOU jump first and you survive it, then I can be more confident that if I jump I'll survive it.

This turn is essentially telling us that Jesus jumped first, and the bungee cord of God's grace and mercy and power held, it didn't break.

Jesus spent his whole life obeying God and trusting God, all the way to his own sacrificial death, Jesus jumps into the deepest, darkest, worst hole he could have possibly jumped into BECAUSE God tells him to do so

And what does God do? God shows up. God is faithful. God pulls him out. The bungee cord of God's perfect love holds, even into the depths of death

And God not only pulls him out, but crowns him, establishes him as Lord over all the cosmos
Lord and King over heaven, and earth and even under the earth, the realm of spiritual darkness has to acknowledge what's true: this is the king

Throughout the whole Bible, God calls us to trust him by obeying him.

And what we see in Jesus is someone who FINALLY DOES IT PERFECTLY—and what's the result? Glory. Beauty. Hope. Real Power. Real Power used rightly

And then he looks at you and he looks at me and he says, "I just jumped. I've proven you can trust God. His grace and mercy and power held.

Now it's your turn. Follow me as I lead you into God's ways—into the way of SERVING."

It's a service that can ONLY come through first knowing you're strong. Jesus was under no illusion that he was less than the Son of God.

It was THAT STRENGTH that carried him all the way to the end

It's a radical serving that comes from strength and certainty about who you are, where you're going, and what you're here to do.

My dad put on coveralls which covered up his rank publicly, but he knew he was an officer
And when my dad bumped into that fellow officer that night who questioned whether it was a good thing for an officer in coveralls on his hands and knees laying cable
Which one of them was more confident more secure in their rank and place in the world: that man or my dad?

My dad. Totally. 100%. He was confident enough in himself and his place in the world that he didn't have to be artificially propped up by his ribbons showing

He knew who he was, he knew his place in the organization
But more importantly because he knew Jesus and knew how Jesus served, he was strong enough to put on coveralls, get messy, get dirty, and do whatever needed to be done.
it's not that he didn't care about being an officer or that it didn't matter—it's just that being a SERVANT mattered more

As we were talking about all of this in our small group this past week, we came to this point in our conversation where I realized that so much of this really does have to do with exactly what Paul talks about here: mindset

If you've got a scarcity mindset, where resources, hope, love, respect, are all super-limited and scarce then embracing humility and serving doesn't make much sense
But if you've got an abundance mindset, where resources like love, hope, and respect are all super-abundant and rock-solid and secure, then you're much more free to serve others

So what's the source for a healthy and holy abundance mindset? It goes back up to the top, exactly where we started this morning

if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...

When God is your source for encouragement, comfort, love, and power in and by His Spirit, then you can have a real, rooted abundance mindset that frees you up to serve strong
Jesus was able to do crazy things here because he didn't need anything here to prop him up! He was drawing all his strength from a deeper, truer source!

And his strength empowered him to serve strong all the way to the darkest day in human history

And so this morning as we close, I want you to give you this morning's Take-WITH, your wildly important take-home question to think about, pray about, and do something with

What needs to change about your mindset in order to free you to serve strong?

The Scriptures invite us to live a free life, free to serve the people around us—to serve from a position of strength, to be humble from a solid and firm and strong place

Here today, not a Christian, so glad you're here! Invitation here into boundless resources that make us strong—strong enough to live this life without having to be propped up by the things of this life

I invite you to consider Jesus's invitation to you to know boundless love and encouragement and sharing in his same Spirit

Others of us, we're on board with the whole Jesus thing, but there are other things that fight the battle for our mindset, aren't there?

How might you draw on the mindset of what Christ has done and the blessings of Christ to re-frame your life, your challenges, your opportunities to serve?

And from that we want to invite you to join this church community as we sign up for and engage with **Chatham Serves**.

Look, people TALK about serving the community ALL THE TIME! There's a pandemic of people who are all talk and no action—this is especially true in churches, isn't it?

This is a tangible way for us as a church to not just TALK about loving our neighbor BUT TO ACTUALLY DO IT—for us collectively to put on the same mindset as Jesus Christ who came not to be served but to serve

And so this week and over the next couple of weeks we'll be drawing on all the rich resources of Christ so that we are not just exhausting ourselves in service

But so that we're full to the brim with the love and power and wonder of God

THEN, with those resources and that mindset, we want to be people who are set free to serve strong, just like Jesus, and we're going to invite you to jump in and serve, because at the end of the day we're a church built around Jesus

And there's just no way to be a Jesus-church without serving, just like he did.

Now in order to help you remember that the goal is not just to serve but to serve strong, we've got not only a question for you to ponder but a parting gift to prompt you to pray this back up to God

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