

# Life of the Servant #3 'Serving Members Make a Serving Church'

by A.W. Tozer

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*The church's purpose is to serve the Lord and the world, and its members must serve with practical service, including worship, song, prayer, teaching, and serving the poor and the needy.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:40, Mark 10:45, Acts 13:36, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:4, Colossians 3:23-24, James 2:14-17, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Service", "Church Community"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that a church's effectiveness in serving is directly tied to the individual service of its members. He reflects on the biblical example of David, who served his generation by the will of God, and stresses that the church is not a mystical entity but a collective of people who must actively engage in service. Tozer warns against the church becoming complacent or distracted by worldly activities, urging members to focus on their calling to serve others in practical ways. He calls for a commitment to worship and service that reflects Christ's love and compassion, encouraging the congregation to act selflessly in their communities. Ultimately, Tozer challenges the church to remain dedicated to its mission of serving both God and humanity.

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## Transcript

Serving Members Make a Serving Church - February 1, 1959

Life of the Servant series 3 of 3

I want to give what I hope will be a brief talk on the serving church. I have a text here which has been a favorite of mine, often quoted, and woven in and out of my sermons regardless of what the text is. But I decided to preach on it this time, Acts 13:36, "for David, after he hath served his own generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his Fathers and saw corruption."

David, after he served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep. Now I pointed out in the two previous sermons, this is a trilogy of sermons. I pointed out that the most beautiful biography was this: he served his generation and fell on sleep. Last Sunday, I pointed to the fact that, as a man is a trinity of spirit, soul and body, so the church is a trinity of spirit, soul and body. That the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the church, that her tastes and her joys and culture and her growth and knowledge and appreciations, are

her soul and the body is the organized group through which the indwelling Holy Ghost works.

Today, I want to give some conclusions drawn from these facts, that the church is here to serve. It's not here to play, it's here to serve. And I begin by saying that the church serves only as its members serve. I suppose I'm three-quarters Baptist. I don't know. The Baptists say I am. But I can't quite follow along with what I've heard in some quarters, that there is such a thing as a mystic, invisible church. I've never come across it.

The church is composed of people. If, as they say, the simplest form of a local church is where two or three are gathered, in my name, I am there in their midst. I accept that as being a factual statement. But if this is true, then if you take the two or three away, you don't have any church. It takes the two or three to make the church and those two or three have names, their people who have telephone numbers, social security numbers, and names and they weigh so much and they look a certain way, they're people. And the church is composed of people and if you take the people away, there isn't any ghostly mystical church hovering around waiting to be embodied. The church is people.

We try to dodge out from under our personal responsibility sometimes by saying, well, the great church is serving. The great church doesn't exist. The great mystical church is a figment of human imagination. The church may not always be identified. But wherever she is, she's people. And if there are no church people there, there's no church. And if there is church people, then there are individuals. Keep that in mind. Even the Holy Ghost said that there were about 120 in that upper chamber. And the Spirit of God came to bring the church into being there were about 120. They were individuals and they named some of them. So, the church is composed of people and if the church is going to serve as I have previously declared it should, then it can serve only as its members serve.

The Holy Spirit is the central nervous system of the church you know, and He can work only as He gets the obedience of His members. He can work only as He has the intelligent, Bible-taught cooperation of His members. And the failure of the members is the failure of the total church. And as the individual members serve, automatically the church is serving. The church is serving where they serve. The church is witnessing as and where they witness. The church and the individual members are one and the same thing. You cannot withdraw I repeat, the people away and still have a church. Church takes two. Jesus Christ in the midst, and people in whose midst He is.

Now, the churches don't know, a lot of them, why they're here. We don't know why we're here. I read a good many, that is, I scan a good many magazines. I rarely read any, but I scan them and if I see a good article, I read it. But I learned from the brethren who are writing the articles, that we don't know why we're here. We're dressed up and have nowhere to go and nothing to do. We're not sure of ourselves.

And so the result is that the churches are looking around to see what others are doing. Then they're copying what others are doing and doing it as they say, for Jesus sake. No matter what is done. If the church picks it up, the church brushes it off and dips it in holy water and says now we're doing this for Jesus sake, and it's alright. You're doing it for the world, but we're doing it for Jesus. But the point is, they're doing the same thing. And if that little stripe animal out in the woods, was around your house, you couldn't make him any more desirable by saying that he was there for Jesus sake. He's still what he is brother. And you can't you can't change him by putting a holy name on it. And as long as the church does what the world does, the church is worldly.

In the last mail, I'm going to do something this morning. I rarely do, but I got two pieces of mail. I think they came yesterday. They came the same day anyhow. And one of them was addressed to the social chairman of the church here. I don't know who that is. If McAfee wasn't going to New York, I think we ought to probably make him social chairman. But this comes from the Kenosha Cornhuskers. And they want to come in and put on a social for us, the idea is to raise money.

And now I don't want to be satirical, nor unkind. These are nice boys, a picture of a fella here with a cowboy suit on and a guitar and I like him. He looks nice. And if I met him, I'd like him and I'm sure he'd like me. And I'd be friendly to him and good to him. So, this isn't to be unkind. It's only to say that because the church doesn't know what it's called to do, people from the outside look in and suggest things. They want to put on a social here and they say that we can have our choice of almost anything, square dancing, they say, showing them all the grips and holds they need to know. And then they said if you don't like that, then ballroom dancing, waltzes, foxtrots, two steps, cha-chas, rock and roll and polkas. And if you're a little more ambitious, then they will mix it for you and give you the Virginia real hokey-pokey, heel toe, class pans, mixer, bunny hop and the Grand March. And they promise you that along with a grand March. They will give each gal a cowbell all during the evening. And singing. It says imagine your crowd, arms around each other's shoulders and singing Old MacDonald had a farm.

I can just imagine Brother Chase singing baritone and we'd be all around each other there singing Old MacDonald had a farm E-I-E-I-O. Well now Brethren I'll tell you, I think that's harmless and if you don't know any better, that's all right. You don't go wrong, you know, there. It's clean. And it certainly beats the low down, dump stuff that the cities know.

But what I'm trying to make out is that you see people, because the church doesn't know what she's called to do, people are trying to tell her what to do. And it's humorous to you and me taught in the Bible as we are, but lots of churches take this up. They don't know what they're called to do. They haven't the remotest idea. And so if somebody suggests they have a bunny hop and learn all the grips and they learn them and get a little extra and put it in the kitty for the pastor's salary, and for what they call benevolences. Well Brethren, it's a lack of information, you see. It's a lack of instruction. I hope you won't think I'm bitter about this.

I want to read a passage to you. And I want to ask you, if the churches were all like this, whether I had got this letter or not, listen. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and it names them. And they ministered to the Lord and fasted, and the Holy Ghost said unto them, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work we're into I've called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost departed and went and so on.

Now if the churches were doing this, would any Kenosha Cornhusker boys write and say, could we come in and put on the show? They wouldn't. They'd stand in respect. If it could be said of this church and all other churches, as it was said of them in Solomon's porch. They were all together in Solomon's porch and no man dareth join himself to them. They were a holy people. The flame was still on their forehead, and a sense of another world was on them. Nobody is going to suggest that they ring the cowbell and sing McDonald's Farm, a harmless thing. If anybody wants to do it, I repeat I occasionally turn the radio on and hear somebody sing Old MacDonald. I don't mind it. But I say that's not the church. That's not what we're called to do. That's not why we're here. That's not our business. That's not our job. That isn't the world we live in. We live in another world, an elevated world, a world of another kind all together.

Now, I want to read a second thing to you which also came in the same mail. I read it only because I want to show you that if you take a biblical direction and stick to it, it pays off. This comes from a missionary mother, not of our Alliance. It's from the Newfoundland and Labrador Outpost Mission in Happy Valley, Labrador. And this lady says, Dear Brother, Tozer, greetings in Christ's name. On the afternoon of December 24, my youngest son Daniel, was suddenly thrust into eternity, as the missionary plane which he was piloting was caught in a whiteout enroute to Happy Valley from Northwest River, where he had flown early that afternoon to carry Christmas mail and parcels to hospital patients and children at the Grenfield Mission School.

Just before leaving home at 1:30, that afternoon, he read a sermon by you entitled, "The Process of Becoming in the December issue of the Pentecostal Evangel. Perhaps the last words he read before entering eternity. While working at United Airlines in Chicago, in 1956 and 1957 in preparation for his ministry up here, he often attended your church and told me that he received more spiritual food than in any other church he had ever attended. Thus, when the magazine came in the mail, he eagerly read your sermon, and I am sure it was a grand climax in preparation for death, which was to meet him a few hours later.

Then there's a little more about it. And it's signed by the mother of this fine boy and here's the picture of the boy standing before his airplane. It says Christ for Labrador with Wings. Daniel McKinney. He's in heaven now. When he was here in Chicago, he came here, I don't know him. He was evidently one of the students that comes and goes. I don't know him, but Brother McAfee, you helped him to learn to love a great hymn. And instead of McDonald's Farm, McAfee led him in singing the great hymns of Watts, Wesley and Montgomery and Faber. And instead of the bunny hop, I seriously taught the great things of the truths of God and that young man warmed up to. And now as a missionary when he saw my name, he grabbed that and read it, got into his plane and said, I'll see you at sundown. He never saw sundown. A snowstorm brought him down.

Brethren, which is it? What are we called to do? Are we called to play, even harmless play? Are we called to put on nice deals, even the harmless ones? Or are we called seriously to pray and to live, and to teach and to witness and to worship and to sing, and to create or have God create about us an atmosphere, where a young serious-minded student can walk in and say, I never got so much help in all my life. He was a Pentecostal boy, remember. He never got so much help in all my life. And then go away to die in a snow storm taking food and medicine to babies. I don't know why. I do know what you think of it. I know we're together on this Brethren. We're together on this.

We know where we're going and we know what we're called to do. And we know why we're here. And you'll never regret that you gave of your money to keep a church like that going. And you'll never regret that you stayed by and helped through the hardships that kept a church the stands for what this one stands for, alive and moving that will never bend or surrender to the Cornhuskers. God bless them and love them. I'd like to pray with them and talk with them and give them a New Testament. I don't dislike him. But I just say they don't know who we are. They're judging us by what they've seen. And it's not their fault. It's the great churches fault. They're judging us by what they've seen in other churches, not all of us, but churches.

Now, we know what we're called to do and we're trying to do it. And it's a solemn commission that's upon us as individuals. If we wait for concerted action, that is everybody, we will never get anything done. Always somebody has to go rise and do something or somebody alone. And then, another will come along

and another. But if we wait for any theoretical, concerted action, nobody will get anything done.

Now, I'd like to point out that we can serve no generation but this one. Yesterday's generation is gone. Tomorrow's generation has not been born. But today, all around us, is our own generation. This is the big day of our opportunity. And we are called to practical service. I'd like while I have emphasized as every true Bible preacher ought to do, the beating heart of the church, which is the fullness of the Holy Ghost, the presence of Christ, worship and love. That's the beating heart of the church. But that's not at all. You haven't discharged your obligation when you've come here of a Sunday morning and sang a Watts hymn and read the scripture together and listened to an exhortation and made your offering. You haven't discharged your your obligation. That is only the Sunday worship.

John Ruskin, the great English art critic and philosopher and Christian, seriously questioned whether we ought to call this service at all? He said, do you mean that you go and sing a song and read the scripture and enjoy yourself and have fellowship with happy people in the church. That's service? "He said, "we call that Christian service?" He doubted whether it was service. Well, I don't doubt. I think it is. I think it is the heart of the church.

I think it is to the work of the church what your engine is to your car. I think it is to the work of the church, what your heart is to your body. It's the throbbing vibrating center of it all. And that religious group that tries to work without worshiping, will soon be doing the Devil's work. We've got to be worshipers first in order that we might be workers. We work out of our worship. But our danger is and there's always a danger in everything. Don't forget it. And the holier it is, the more dangerous it is. And the further into the throne of God it is, the more temptations the Devil throws around.

So, this I'm talking about is worshiping and having the Lord and the Holy Ghost here and, and staying by the cause of missions and sending out and putting our hands-on men and women and sending them out to all parts of the world to preach the gospel. That's so important, my friends, but even that can become a source of temptation.

Don't forget that there's other kinds of service too and Jesus did it. He went about doing good. And we're called to practical service. Not only the beautiful things, worship and song and prayer and teaching, not only those things, but there's feeding and clothing and helping and praying and scrubbing and cooking and peacemaking, and all these things that we're supposed to do as Christians. I said, and I repeat it that you having all you have and living under the circumstances you do, living on the high level you live, every one of you ought to have somebody in Korea, or Austria or somewhere, that you're feeding; at least one in addition to your emissions in your church and your taxes. You ought to have at least one.

Woe be to us that we live in a favored land like America and eat ourselves into obesity and early heart attack. And dainty feet never touch a bare floor. And then they are hungry from birth to death in many parts of the world, I believe it's the business of the church to serve. And I think that when we fundamentalists and evangelicals forgot that we were called to feed the poor and give a cup of cold water to the one who was in need, I believe that we forgot something very wonderful.

Dr. Wilbur Wilson's brother Diked Wilson writes me sometimes. I don't know much about him. I only know that he's a very brilliant and very wonderful Christian man. And he wrote me and sent me a mimeographed sermon. I think he's a layman. I didn't read it. I only read maybe the first four lines. But I saw what it was. It was a plea, that God's church might serve God's people. That we might serve the poor and the needy and those who are needing help. I believe him. I'm going to read it when I get to it. But I see the direction he's

moving. And I'm for it.

Brethren, let us fight to escape the trap of being well fed, well dressed, respectable, cultured. And the very poor are afraid to under our doors. The churches everywhere are doing it. We say we're going where the people are, and I suppose that's right. I'd like to tell you that if it could be done and arranged, I wouldn't mind one half of this congregation was of another race than mine. I would preach to Indians and Mexicans and Filipinos and Negros with the greatest delight, yet we're moving to another part of the city and why? It is not because we won't but because our friends won't. They move in and they don't want integrated churches like this. So, we're going to sell this one to them and bid them Godspeed and pray for them and move out.

Brethren, I hope the day will never be when we will be a typical urban church. Bird singing in bushes beside our lovely church and the lawn stretching away. Nobody of any offensive color near us or any other tongue or language. We will be the typical American babbitt main Street, bourgeois, Christians without any knowledge of the sufferings and groans of others. I don't mind telling you that if I thought we'd ever fall into that trap. I'd rather go down and offer my service as Assistant Superintendent of a rescue mission and bath the sores of bums off the street. I am not fitted, that is, I'm not fitted and trained and I don't run in that direction. I have a ministry that's wider and bigger than that. So, I'm not going to do it.

But I say that if I thought that we would ever settle down to a smooth, lovely suburban church, judging our prosperity by the length of the cars out in front, I'd take the job with a mission. And I'd lead a drunk woman up the street and set her in a seat and preach the gospel to her. I'd rather do it. Jesus, the Christ of God had nowhere to lay his head and his people suffered and went about in goat skins and sheep skins and the skins of kids the best they could and died not dramatically; not as they die in movies and shows, but die hungry and weak and bruised and beaten; die before the fire and the lion for Christ's sake.

No, my friends, you and I have got to keep the cross on our lives. We're going to move we're going to build but we're going to keep the cross on our lives. And we're going to keep just as clean in Oak Lawn as we'd been at 70th and Union. And we're going to keep our emphasis on serving mankind, getting the gospel to the ends of the earth, keeping Jesus Christ in the midst, high and lifted up, keeping filth out of the church, and letting nobody in that isn't born again. We're going to keep that standard and split-level houses and picture windows aren't going to change it. We're keeping that standard as long as I have anything to do with it and knowing you, I know we're going to keep that standard. Long after I have ceased to have anything to do with it. He served this generation by the will of God.

So, remember Brethren and let's fight to escape the trap of well-fed, well-housed, well-transported American bourgeois Christianity. Let us serve. He served his generation by the will of God, served it as he could, served it as he knew how. Paul came and served it as he could. Jesus served it the way He could. We will serve it as we can. Let us gaze and gaze upon Jesus. The artists have made that picture of the cross so beautiful, we want to stand and gaze. But I say unto you that nobody ever looked at a man dying on a cross with pleasure. Nobody but a sadist. For the man dying on the cross, his tongue hung out and he couldn't get it back in after a few hours. The jaw droops, his eyes bulged and blood dripped everywhere. Finally, the cold blue came around his mouth to show he was dying. And instead of noble words being spoken from that cross, the hoarse whisper came from a dry throat.

You and I are called to bear the cross my Brethren. We're called to witness to that kind of Savior. Not the Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, Chairman of the Board Christianity, but a cross-carrying,

God-loving, people loving, serving church. That's what we're called to do. Are you with me? As our colored brethren say, let the church say amen.

I recommend that we begin this week, start this week doing an unselfish act of humble service in Jesus Christ's name to somebody. Sending out a gift to somebody you know that needs it. In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me. Let the dispensationalists do what they want with that. I'm afraid that means you. But the dispensationalist can dodge that all they want to and put that somewhere else, I am afraid that means us. We can make that the nations of the earth and their treatment of the Jew. Maybe it means that, but I think it means a little more.

Jesus called all the Christians, my brethren and we are the brethren of Jesus and He's the Son of Man and we're redeemed men. So, He is our brother, our elder brother, and we're his brethren. As much as you do it unto the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me.

Here's an illustration. If you don't mind my getting a little sentimental. I've got a daughter at Nyack and of course she has been as our youngest, our pet and our sweetheart. And maybe some of you might not like her, but we do and she's been that kind. She doesn't hesitate. Now she went through a little period when she wouldn't kiss me. She's ashamed to but now she'll walked right up at nineteen and give me a big fat kiss. Well, suppose something happened to her out in New York. And some friend out there who didn't know her but knew me immediately went to her rescue and needed to put his money behind her. Immediately put his service behind her and his wife joined him. Don't you think I'd sit down and write out a letter of deepest gratitude? And say, and as much as you have done it unto this little one, you've done it unto me. Don't you think my wife with tearful eyes would thank God forever for that kind of people.

Do you remember when a carload of our people, our children, our girls and boys were driving through from Nyack on Christmas Day and Cliff Westergren had driven all night and dozed at the wheel. The car went off the road, struck a bridge, and a steel beam went the whole length of the car on the inside, you remember that? You remember how they were picked up by the police and taken to the hospitals. And a preacher by the name of Joel Winkler, took on our kids Remember that? He went to visit them. He opened his house to them. His church, people took them stuff and went to see them and prayed with them. And out there in that little Ohio town. They had a home there. Do you know what we did as a church? We took an offering and sent to their little church from our larger one. You know what else we did? When Mr. and Mrs. Winkler came to the city of Chicago here to a convention? We got them a fine room in the tower room and one of the big hotels and said, here this is a present from us to you in as much as ye did it unto these, our kids you did it unto us.

Don't you think that Jesus Christ when we serve his people, that we're serving him? Don't you think those He loves who are for a little time away from Him? That is, He's there at the right hand of God and they're here. Don't you think you serve Him best by serving them? Yes, this Church must be a serving church Brethren, and we can't serve as a body we can only serve as people, individuals.

Therefore, let us as individuals serve our generation, serve people, serve regardless of color or race or tongue. Serve and see to it that we don't become bloated and fat and oily and be like Ephraim who waxed fat and kicked and disobeyed God. Let's keep lean godliness on us. Let's keep stripped down so that we're always just a little bit hungry and with just a little bit of sacrifice in our heart, and just a little of the cross on our doing. You do it, we do it. Even we do it in some large percentage, but doesn't have to be 100%. Just let there be a good, large group doing it. And Hell can't destroy this church. For the gates of Hell cannot

prevail against.

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