

# The Cost of Service

by John Hunter

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*The sermon explores the true cost of Christian service, urging believers to emulate Christ's humility and selflessness in their lives.*

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 5:12, Matthew 25:21, Luke 15:11, John 8:29, John 17:14, 1 Corinthians 9:19, Philippians 2:5, Philippians 2:7

**Topics:** "Christian Humility", "Sacrificial Service"

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## Description

John Hunter preaches on the importance of following Christ's example of humility and service, emphasizing the need to make ourselves of no reputation and be willing to be made by God. He contrasts worldly success with God's definition of success, highlighting the simplicity and obedience required in serving God. The sermon challenges Christians to let go of self-glory, imitating Christ's sacrificial life, and embracing a life of service and humility.

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## Transcript

"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

Many Christians today are busily engaged in serving the Lord under the wrong terms of service. In some cases they regard the service itself as the object of their Christian life; the act is made the end and not the means to an end. As long as they are engaged in a busy round of church activities, they are satisfied with their service. As long as they can point to membership of this society and that society, on the committee of this group and that group, their consciences are at rest -- they are busy serving the Lord.

This chapter is an attempt to analyze Christian service in its simplest terms, and then to see how we fit into God's plan.

First, let us see what service is not.

America today, more than ever before, is a land of big business. Millions of dollars are invested in the training of staff, in research in the preparation of the product, analysis of market, advertising of goods, etc.

Yet big business is not a philanthropic society; all these dollars are invested and spent with the ultimate object of acquiring a return. As long as returns are greater than expenditures, then the company can make a profit and survive. But if the returns drop for too long, the company will have to fold up.

If we looked at Christian service as a big business, what tremendous activity we would find! There is expenditure of millions of dollars, training of staff, advertising of goods -- but there the comparison ends. The visible results in many fields of Christian service are pitiful compared with the expenditure. From a business point of view, much Christian service in many churches is practically useless -- unless the ultimate aim is to keep the members on the move.

But what fruit is there for Christ? Much of this misguided service comes from imitation of the world. Jesus said: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

The Lord's methods were so different from the accepted standard of His day. He was revolutionary in His ways, His works and His teachings. Today we tend to copy the best ways of the world in our techniques, but He broke away from accepted techniques and tradition.

The whole secret of the Lord's life of service is hidden in Philippians 2:7.

See, first, these words: "But made himself." All things were made by Him, and the last thing He made was "Himself of no reputation." He was rich, He was Deity, and yet He emptied Himself of power, and He stripped Himself of His glory. He took the first step -- "He made himself."

Secondly, the verse goes on to say "He was made." We must be careful not to miss the absolute simplicity of this. Many of God's great lessons are very simple; in fact, so simple we overlook them. This verse is an excellent example.

The words, "He made himself," are in the active voice in the English grammar. This means that He was the one who did the actual making. He initiated the process.

Conversely, the words, "he was made," are in the passive voice in the English grammar. This means that other people did the making. His hands were off His own life. He was the one who was made.

In other words, having taken the first step of "making Himself," He was then subject all His life to "being made" by others (all, of course, under the divine will of Almighty God).

Notice how limited He was. He was born a helpless baby, dependent on his parents. He was made a refugee as an infant, and was made to flee to Egypt. They made Him carry His cross at the end. All through His blessed life, He was subject. He had taken His hands off His own life, and He was going to take the consequences.

But how wonderful is Philippians 2:9. The ultimate end to His subjection was exaltation -- above every name -- with every knee bowed and every tongue confessing. Our hearts cry, "Hallelujah!"

Why was this passage in Philippians written? As an encouragement or a "happy ending"? Verse 5 contains a command: "Let this mind be in you." This is no trivial request but a divine command from Almighty God. The example has been shown, the pattern has been proved. God has been satisfied, and now the word comes to you and me: "Let this mind be in you." We, too, have to take these steps that the Lord took.

First, there must be a moment in our lives when we realize God's perfect plan of service, when we are willing to humble ourselves and to "make ourselves." We must deliberately take our hands off our own lives and, regardless of the consequences, accept the second step of the perfect plan of God -- become

willing to "be made."

This comes as a costly challenge to every man or woman because all the glamour and the glory is gone, and we are left with the chill of obedience.

In the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-24, we can see how the two stages in the boy's life are revealed in verse 12: "Give me," and verse 19: "Make me." At first it was all "give me" -- all for self. Later on, as God worked in his heart, he speaks those precious words -- "make me. . . ."

Many of us are like the son before he came to God in our service. We are "give me" Christians, always doing and going and getting. But Philippians 2:7 is very clear; there are just two simple steps: make ourselves nothing; then be made.

As Christians we so often seek to gain a reputation as a good organizer, a good singer, a regular attender, a cheerful giver. The trouble with gaining a reputation is that we want to keep the reputation that we have gained. So in the end, our Christian service is concerned with doing things so that I will live up to my reputation! Christ made Himself of no reputation -- dare we!

Paul followed Christ. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. . . . To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all mean save some. (KJV)

Here is the secret of Paul's service -- "I made myself" (verse 19) and "I am made" (verse 22).

Just as the service of Christ ended in the exaltation so, too, will ours.

His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." (Matthew 25:21).

To the one who, like the son in Luke 15, has said, "Make me . . . ." will come the words of the Master, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

We must realize continually how completely different is God's plan from the world's plan. The world's way is doing; God's way is being made. To obey God we must take our hands off our own life and then ask God to do with us just what He wants.

Why are so few of us prepared to do this? The answer is simple -- it hurts, it costs, it humbles, it denies self -- it is not "natural." If we want to bear, however, we should be ready to step aside and let the Lord Jesus, who lives in us by the power of His Holy Spirit, take over the doing and the making and the being.

It costs to be a committed Christian. If I honestly take my hands off my life and say, "Lord, make me what You will," I am opening the door to possible disturbance and difficulty.

If you are a parent, God may want your child for the mission field. If you are younger, your ambitions may have to go.

God took everything when Nate Saint and his companions prayed this prayer. They had committed all to Him, and there were no strings left for them to pull. But God had a magnificent plan whereby He shocked

the Christian world out of its lethargy. Certainly there will be a great Auca harvest, and more certainly there will be a divine, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

Which would you rather do -- grow old, fat and prosperous as a "give me" Christian with no real fruit to show, or live a glorious adventure in the uncertainty of being made by God, losing things, and realizing no reputation -- being a "fool for Christ's sake."

Emotionally, every one of us would say: "Me for Christ" -- but the thing wants considering in the cold light of the cost. Many will say it, but few will take the first step of "nothingness" for Christ's sake, to follow Christ's example and to obey the command: "Let this mind be in you."

When I was staying at the Firs Conference Center in Bellingham, Washington, I was intrigued by the sunlight each morning. Through the window I saw shadows cast on the road as the sun shone through the tangled mass of fir tree branches. As I studied these patches of sunlight scattered on the road, I suddenly saw something I had learned at school. Among all the varied shapes were a few perfect circles. If the sun is allowed to shine through a hole, whatever shape the hole may be, as long as it is a "nothing" with a complete circumference, the image cast by the sun is always a perfect replica of the shape of the sun -- that is, a perfect circle.

As I looked I remembered the words of our text: "He made himself nothing . . . Let this mind be in you." If I am prepared to make myself nothing, to empty myself, then He, shining through me, can reproduce Himself in this dark world below.

The question is, "Dare you so hand over your life to Christ that, as you make yourself nothing, He may move into your entire being to make you according to His own plan and desire?"

The main difficulty in this study is the simplicity of the thought. In our busy world today, we are apt to dismiss a thing as trivial if there is a very simple explanation to it.

We are impressed by the achievements of the "Rocketeers" and the others who put things in orbit, while we take for granted many of the simpler precious achievements of other men.

Philippians 2:7 is divine simplicity, but too many of us are like Naaman, the military leper who at first refused to make himself of nothing by bathing in the poor waters of Jordan. We still cry -- "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" (2 Kings 5:12).

We fail to remember that it was only when Naaman made himself of no reputation, that God made him clean!

The world's idea of success is not God's idea. At the end of three years' perfect ministry the Lord Jesus had but twelve apostles, one of whom betrayed Him, one who denied Him, and all forsook Him. From the world's point of view He was a failure, but He could say: "I always do those things that please him" (John 8:29).

He had made the great stoop, had made Himself nothing so that God could take and make Him. His perfect obedience was the answer to it all.

It may come as a shock to some of us that Philippians 2:5 is not a request, it is God's command: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

In other words, if we don't do this then we are disobeying God. The surrounding materialism is such a burden and a barrier. It is so easy to follow the pattern of other much admired Christians and go their way, letting their mind be in us instead of following the mind of Christ. We use this so often as an excuse for not making ourselves of nothing, avoiding thereby the cost, and the shame, and the ridicule.

We should call to mind the names of many missionaries, and servants of God who "made" themselves of no reputation, so that God could move into their lives and use them as He willed.

Like Paul they so often went down in the world's estimation, yet they had a greater joy in their nothingness than others had with their possessions.

But God is still no man's debtor. The more you have given, the more God is sure to bless you, even if only to maintain His glorious promises.

"MAKING"

"All things were made by Him," we read.

Without Him nothing can succeed.

And then we read the awful claim,

He made Himself a thing of shame.

He made Himself, and then "was made,"

What agony is here conveyed.

That He, whose power was ever true

Was made, was made for me and you.

Was made a homeless babe to lie,

Was made a homeless passer-by,

That He who gave each bird its nest

Could say -- nowhere His head could rest.

His Word says He was made a song

By those the drunken and the wrong,

That His dear eyes were made to cry

For those who saw a loved one die.

It says they made Him bear His cross.

His cross -- our joy and hope -- His loss,

And then they made Him hang in shame,

They made Him and despised His name.  
What wondrous love is here displayed-  
"He made Himself -- and then was made,"  
There was no other way, I know,  
They made Him unto death to go.  
Lord, teach me now this lesson true,  
The truth revealed, displayed thro' you,  
That if I would full blessing know,  
Then I must also that way go.  
I, too, must make myself of naught.  
Then -- must be made by Thee and taught  
That not my way nor thoughts must be  
But what Thou, Lord, wilt make of me.  
John E. Hunter

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