



# Shaping the Heart

## Spiritual Formation & the Christian Life

Service and submission are essential to all the “one another” passages of the New Testament. They enable and inspire genuine community.

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### Service

**In service, we actively and willingly employ our gifts and resources to meet the needs of others so we might train ourselves in the selflessness of Christ.** The discipline of service is not merely about others; it’s also about us. In a twist of irony, when we meet another’s need, our need to grow in Christlikeness is also met.

#### *The Value of Service*

1. *Service strengthens the weak and frees us from resentment.* Those who are “serving the Lord Christ” (**Col 3:23-24**) do not worry that their service goes relatively unnoticed by others. At the end of the day we serve an audience of “One.” Mundane tasks, therefore, become some of our greatest endeavors because we serve others as if serving Christ himself (**Mt 25:40**). And so, when we “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (**Col 3:17**) there’s no chance for resentment to creep in, since what we do is done for Christ and not merely for the sake of others (**Eph 6:6**).
2. *Service weakens the strong and frees us from arrogance.* Those in positions of leadership and authority can easily view their status as more important than it really is, or tacitly permit others to do so. Jesus challenges “greatness” by showing us that the way up is really the way down (**Mt 20:25-28; Philip 2:3-8**). “Greatness” in Jesus’s kingdom is measured by selfless service. The terms “minister” or “pastor” originally meant “helper” or “shepherd”, but have come to be seen as a badge of honor or a title of prestige. Yet Jesus emphatically cries, “It shall not be so among you” (**Mk 10:43**)! To be “great” is to live as a servant. There’s no room for superiority or conceit among God’s children because there’s room for only one King in the kingdom.
3. *Service frees us from the pitfalls of pretense and performance traps.* With our singular orientation toward Christ, we serve with pleasure at the feet of others where the only quality that matters is humility (**Jn 13:14-15**). With service, we refuse the call of honor and recognition and become free to consider others better than ourselves; eager for their success rather than merely pursuing our own (**Philip 2:3-4**).
4. *Service helps us find our “fit” in the Body of Christ* (**Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:10-11**). In one sense, all of the spiritual gifts are gifts of service, so we no longer need to be in control, since “each of us needs all the others” in the body of Christ (**Rom 12:5**, NLT).



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*"Be filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:18, 21)*

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### Submission

The idea of submission is not viewed as a cultural norm or accepted virtue. However, Scripture tells us we live in a kingdom "not of this world" (**Jn 18:36**); a kingdom set into motion by Jesus's example of submission. The very Incarnation of God in Jesus is an act of submission (**Philip 2:5-8**). Moreover, Christ voluntarily submitted to flogging, public humiliation, and death, all of which are part of a greater submission to his Father's will (**Mt 26:42**), which is a demonstration of God's redemptive love (**Rom 5:8**). *The discipline of submission, therefore, is the voluntary yielding to another for the sake of love and in accordance with God's will.*

1. *First, submission necessarily assumes the presence of others and, therefore, is a "social" discipline or practice.* Consequently, in submission we consciously reject the notion that we're above others. Instead, we accept that we are all "one in Christ Jesus" (**1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11**), "submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ" (**Eph 5:21**). All believers are called to be "slaves to one another" (**Gal 5:13, NRSV**). Thus, the discipline of submission is always mutual in God's kingdom because:
  - a. *The Gospel equalizes all relationships under the authority of Christ.* Whether husband to wife, parents to children, or slave to master, all human structures have only relative authority in relation to Christ (see, **Gal 3:28; Jn 19:11a**; see **Rom 13:1** on relative authority).
  - b. *Every "one another" injunction in the New Testament assumes parity in relationships for their proper operation.* All "one another" passages imply the notion of 'without distinction on the basis of social status or personal preference.' Christians are enjoined to accept one another (**Rom 15:7**), be hospitable to one another (**1 Pt 4:9**), be devoted to and honor one another (**Rom 12:10**), live in harmony with one another (**Rom 12:16; 1 Pt 3:8**), bear with one another (**Eph 4:2; Col 3:13**), be kind and compassionate to one another (**Eph 4:32**), carry one another's burdens (**Gal 6:2**), forgive one another (**Eph 4:32; Col 3:13**), build up one another (**1 Thess 5:11**), admonish one another (**Col 3:16**), and encourage one another (**1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25**).
  - c. *Every believer is called to self-denial, submission, and service to others.* Since this call is equally applicable to all believers (i.e., it is not truer for some than for others), then the discipline of submission – "voluntary yielding to another for the sake of love and in accordance with God's will" – logically applies to every believer without regard to social status, economic ability, sex or gender, title, church office position, education level, office held, et al.
2. *This is not to say there is no order in this other-worldly kingdom.* **Heb 13:17** and **1 Pt 5:2-5** clearly says there is. Although **Heb 13:17** is addressed to those who follow their leaders, the text says more about leaders' responsibilities than about the followers'. In addition, **1 Pt 5:2** is a call to service, not status or posturing above others. Moreover, on the heels of this call to service is a call for everyone ("all of you") to express humility "toward one another" (**1 Pt 5:5, 6**). Clearly this new kingdom is governed by mutual submission and honor to all. Any order that does exist arises from a recognition of the unique spiritual gifts given to individuals and a respect for their spiritual maturity gained by an abiding walk with Christ. There is no hint of superiority or authoritarian rule among the subjects of Jesus's kingdom precisely *because everyone is a subject.* "It shall not be so among you" (**Mk 10:43**)!
3. *In submission, we cry for help from those whose depth of experience in Christ can direct us toward spiritual formation.* The weight of authority comes not from individuals who speak the truth but from the Giver of truth as we submit to the God of truth under the prayerful and loving direction of those who have a deep and abiding walk with Jesus.