

# A Servant of the Gospel



## Learning by Living (Part 3)
## by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you on this week's very personal theme based on my own life: "Learning by Living."

In my two previous talks, I have spoken about God's calling as I have experienced it in my own life. I have emphasized two things: first of all, the one who calls you is faithful, He will do it. If God calls you to do something, He will by His grace enable you to do it. You can rely on His grace.

Second, I pointed out yesterday that when God saves us, He also calls us. A calling is not really something separate from salvation, it is a part of salvation. And when He calls us, He calls us with a holy calling which is not based on our works, on our ability, our education, our social connections but it is based on His purpose and grace. And the key word there is grace. Remember, grace can never be earned.

I said yesterday that grace begins where your ability ends. So God is not calling you because you are able to do something. Nearly always He calls us to do something that we are not able to do. But God calls you to do something that He will enable you to do that you could not do if He did not enable you.

And I said that it is a holy calling. It is something that we have to dedicate ourselves to. We have to be in a certain sense like a athlete, who goes into training, who devotes all his life, everything he does, his diet, his exercise, his sleep, his friendships, his reading material, his mental attitudes—they are all directed toward the one objective of being the best athlete, the one who can jump the highest, or run the fastest, or do some other thing like that. This calling demands all our commitment, our energy, our time.

Now again I am going to illustrate some of what I said a little bit from personal experience. As God's calling began to work out in my life; and I had mentioned that God called me specifically to be a teacher of the Scripture in truth and faith and love. And He went on to say, "Which are in Christ Jesus for many." Well, as God's calling began to work out in my life, I realized something that is not always obvious, that I was called to be a servant. That was kind of a shock to me. See, I happened to have the benefit of a very excellent education. I occupied a very privileged position in the academic world. I

came from a good family. And I was more used to being served than serving. Of course, five-and-a-half years in the British Army, in the Medical Service helped to change my attitudes. But nevertheless, I really had not grasped to the full this fact, that anyone who is called into the "ministry" is called to be a servant.

You see, we have a lot of words in the religious field that mean certain things but because of their religious associations we tend to forget what they mean. Like we use the word "minister." Well, minister is simply a servant. But when you talk about a person being a minister, you think about somebody rather dignified, standing behind a pulpit, and more or less telling other people what to do. That is not really the right picture. And then we have in most, in many circles, the word "deacon." Well, deacon is a very religious word. But all it means is a servant.

You know, I've thought sometimes that many churches would be different if they would rename the board. Instead of calling it the Board of Deacons, call it the Board of Servants. I think somehow their whole attitude and the spirit in the church could be vitally affected by that one change of language.

Now I want to illustrate what I have been saying from a statement made by Paul, or rather two statements that he makes in Colossians 1. First of all, in verse 23, he says:

> "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

Paul says he has become a servant of the Gospel, of the truth of God's Word. Then in the next two verses he says something further. He says:

> "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave to me to present to you the word of God in its fullness."

Notice he says there, "I have become its servant," where "its" refers to the church—"I have become the servant of the church." So Paul was doubly a servant. First of all, he was a servant of the Gospel of the Word of God, and second, he was the servant of the church of God's people.

Now we need to see, first of all, what it means to be a servant of the Word of God. It means we are submitted to it. It directs us. We do not tell God what He should have said in His word, God tells us. See, I have met countless people in religious fields who've had the attitude, that really they have to correct God, that His Word needs adjustment, that some of its statements are beyond believing and that others do not apply to today and more or less they get rid of in their life and experience, anything that does not suit them in the Bible. Well, I will tell you one thing, such people are not servants of the Word. They are trying to be masters of the Word but we are not called to be that.

And then on the basis of being servants of the Word, we are also called to be servants of God's people. But it is so important that we keep those two in the right order. We must first be servants of the Word, then servants of God's people. If we become servants of the people, rather than of the Word, we will get into trouble. See, the clear example in the two brothers: Moses and Aaron. Moses stuck to the Word of God; whatever God said, that was it. But when Moses was away from the scene, Aaron became a servant of the people. He did what the people wanted rather than what the Word of God told and he made this awful idolatrous image of the golden calf and it plunged Israel into disaster.

You see in trying to please the people, rather than obey the Word of God, he brought disaster on himself and his people. I have seen this in the ministry. We have to hold fast, absolutely, unswervingly with loyalness and obedience to the Word of God and where God's people want something different, we are not free to cater to them. Let me quote just two statements by Jesus. In John 14:21:

> "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

And in John 14:23:

> "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."

That is the test of love for Jesus. It is obeying His Word and His teaching.

I want to take, in closing, a simple illustration from John's gospel about getting our priorities right, putting our service in the right order: service for God and His Word first, then service for God's people. This is the dramatic scene of reconciliation between Jesus and Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, after they had caught that miraculous catch of fishes. It says in John 21:15–17:

> "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' [Now they used two different words for loved used

there, in the original text. So one is represented 'truly loved,' the other is just 'love.' Jesus asked, do you 'truly love' me and Peter said I 'love' you.] Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' [The weaker word. You see he had learned not to boast. You remember he said three times he would never betray the Lord and then he betrayed him three times?] Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep. The third time Jesus said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' [And Jesus came down to Peter's level at that time, because Peter would not come up to Jesus' level.] Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord you know all things; you know that I love you.'"

I want you to see there the qualification for caring for God's people: feeding the lambs, tending the sheep. What is it? It is love for Jesus. You see, that has to take preeminence over every other commitment and loyalty in our lives. No matter who the other person may be, there must never be a time when that person becomes more important to you than the Lord Jesus. If you are a pastor, it could be a congregation. If you are a wife, it could be your husband. If you are a member of a family, it could be some other person in the family. But Jesus says, "When it comes to choosing between Me and your closest relative, your dearest friend, you have to hate them and love Me." That is a hard saying for some people. But it is absolutely true and to the point.

The secret of success in Christian ministry, in serving the Lord, whatever area of service you may be in, is giving Jesus and the Word of God total, unreserved, preeminence and priority. Nothing else must come before the Word of God.

See, if we are just motivated by love for God's people, I will tell you two things that are liable to happen and I am speaking from experience: first of all, we will be disillusioned at times. Because God's people are not always totally faithful, believe me. If we are just basing our motives on what the people are like, there will be times when we will become sadly disillusioned. Secondly, when the people want to do wrong and we yield to them, we will be doing harm to ourselves and the people. Just like Aaron, he yielded, the people made the calf, brought disaster upon himself and the nation. So remember, Jesus and the Word of God must have total priority in our lives.

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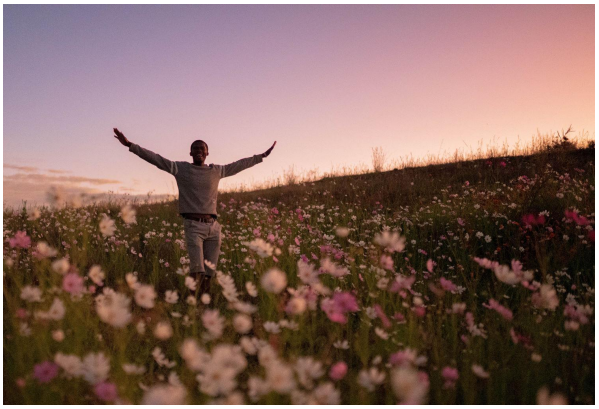

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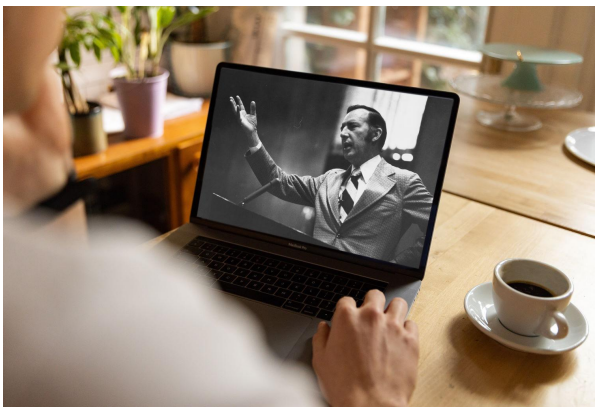

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