

Our theme this term is “How do you measure up?” and we have been using the results from the Willow Creek Reveal research project to help us evaluate where we are in our spiritual growth, both personally and corporately. We saw that believers fall roughly into four stages of development. We begin with **Exploring Christ** and after making a commitment and being baptised and filled with the Spirit we begin the second stage **Growing in Christ**. The third stage is described as **Close to Christ** and the final stage to which we are all aspiring is being **Christ-Centred**.

We have looked at the importance of helping each other. We don't seem to be able to grow and develop on our own, we need Christian brothers and sisters to build us up. Last week we looked at being church focussing in on our Sunday meeting and how we can make improvements. These are aspects of our **Spiritual Context**. From there we will be looking at the three principle ways in which we express our faith in action - '**Spiritual Behaviours**' - as Reveal calls them. These are serving, giving and mission.

Today we are considering **Growing in Serving**. So let's turn in our Bibles to **Matt 20:20-28**.

The mother of James and John just didn't get it! Any mother wants her children to do well to succeed in life but she didn't see that in Jesus way of life, the *way up is the way down*. The Kingdom of God is 'the upside down Kingdom' because normal concepts we know so well from our world, just don't work in God's world. Many long for their moment of fame (X factor, Big Brother, Britain's Got Talent) others look for popularity, success, power, influence, importance or standing. This is all heading in totally the wrong direction. We must rid ourselves of all such worldly attitudes. The way to grow, to develop, to move forward in the Kingdom is **by humbling ourselves**.

Peter and James both quote Prov 3:34 (Gk translation) that says “*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” They then go on to exhort us to ‘humble ourselves before the Lord so that he may exalt us at the proper time.’ As I said, the way up is the way down. But if we look for promotion, are proud of our achievements, want to be exalted, then hear what God's Word says “**God resists the proud**’. Prov 3:34 (translated from the Hebrew) says God “scorns the scornful.” There are those in life who scorn others, who look down at those less well off, less competent than themselves. But know this that God looks down on those who look down on their fellow human beings out of pride and arrogance, and says “What do you have that you have not received? Who are you to take arrogant pride in anything you have been enabled to accomplish?”

In our passage Jesus says that to sit at his right and left hand has already been determined by the Father. We can only ever be what God has prepared us to be. We need to know what we have been called to be and to do, and to be content with God's calling on our lives. Just as giving is not about seeing how much we can get from God by applying Luke 6:38 - so we don't humble ourselves in order to be exalted. Jesus' words in v 25-27 are seem to me to be

somewhat tongue in cheek.

We humble ourselves because JESUS humbled himself. He came to die, to be a ransom for many, to give up his life so we might have life. **Phil 2:5-11**. He did give his life in order to seek honour, or even exaltation at the right hand of God, but that is where God chose to set him and give him the name above every name. How differently we think. How base and selfish so many of our motives are! And worst of all we put this on our children.

We can push our kids to achieve, press them to do well, to promote themselves, to get good grades. We tell our children "I am so disappointed you didn't do better." We can wound our children's spirits and put horrific worldly motives into their hearts. Our society praises and encourages what is frankly not worthy of praise. Where will our children learn their values? It is up to us to teach our children godly values and attitudes. What do our children need? They need to know they are sinners. But they also need to know they are loved whatever they do. I could go into a lot of detail about how to discipline and train children, but that will have to be for another message.

The most important things we all need to learn is how to serve others. Jesus shows us his heart - "Even as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." If anyone had any reason to be proud, self-satisfied and to look down his nose at others and expect people to run around at his beck and call to serve him it was Jesus Christ the Son of God. But 'the Son of Man', as he preferred to call himself, came to serve not to be served and lord it over people. Serving is what he does. When he washed his disciples feet it was not just a pretence for their benefit. No that was who he was, what he did. It was the most natural thing for Jesus to do - to serve. He grew up helping his mum and serving his younger brothers and sisters, after his father Joseph died. As oldest brother he could have demanded his younger siblings do what he told them and do all his chores while he sat lazily bossing everyone around. Such behaviour would never even have entered his mind! He came to serve not to be served. Servanthood, servant-heartedness was Jesus nature. Whatever his hand found to do got stuck in. He never looked around to see what other people were doing - if something needed to be done he got on and did it, and never even criticised those who stood watching him without a thought of helping him. So how can we be more like Jesus?

The stages of serving are like this. When Exploring Christ we start out very much as **Consumers**. What is in this for me? But when we start Growing in Christ we begin to look for jobs to do and ways to **Volunteer**. But we do this to give us a sense of belonging. Now there is nothing wrong in either being a consumer or a volunteer, but these are stages of growth; we don't want to get stuck at either place. When we get Close to Christ we are discovering our God-given gifts and take on regular serving responsibilities; we become a **Worker**. But this service can be spoiled with mixed motives. A Christ-centred believer serves just like the Lord did, because that is what you are and so is what you do. The Christ-centred believer is a **Servant**. Unlike Mrs Zebedee James and John and the other indignant disciples, they get it. They know they are unworthy servants who have only done what they ought to have done. (Luke 17:10) and don't look for any praise, or appreciation or exaltation!

So where are we on this continuum? I hope, that unlike Mr Zebedee, you 'get it' and that this message has helped you see Jesus and find a deeper longing inside you to be as much like him as possible. Is it possible? Yes. He never called us to be and do what is impossible. All we need is the desire, he provides the power.

Questions for Groups

We can never take others (especially our children) further than we have gone ourselves. So where do we see ourselves at present on the Continuum. Are we Consumers, Volunteers, Workers or Servants? What do you to be the challenges of making a step along the continuum from where you are now to the next step in terms of serving?

If you have parents of school-age children, get them into groups to talk and pray about their own example of serving and whether they are putting ungodly attitudes onto their children. Get others who have grown up children or no children into small groups of men only and women only to talk and pray about how we may develop in servant-heartedness.