

Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States

SPR 102
SERVING SUNDAY SCHOOL, VISITATION AND BIBLICAL
APPLICATION

Servants' Preparation Program
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LECTURE ONE

THE CALL FOR SERVICE

Introduction

Someone may ask: Am I invited from God for service? Is the invitation from an angel or from a vision as Jesus was revealed for Paul? "As Paul was nearing Damascus on the mission to destroy Christians, suddenly a brilliant light from heaven spotted down upon him and God appeared to him." (Acts 9)

What was Jesus' plan for the invitation? Was it a random invitation or studied? And was the preparation for the servants built on one stage or many stages?

From the bible study, we observe that the call for service is based on four levels:

1. Choice
2. Communion
3. Training
4. Evangelism

The choice was not random but was building on what Jesus Christ knows from special qualifications in those who were invited.

- The communion is a chance for learning through.

- During the practical training, the disciples spend a whole year in communion and in preparing for service and when they came back from service; they told their stories for Jesus. After being prepared in training for service, witnessing the crucifixion, living the resurrection and the Pentecost, finally, Jesus send them saying " go to the whole nations and baptize them....etc"

* So, we should be fulfilled with the Holy Spirit and God's grace, know his words and to examine our private and public life to evangelize

1- The Stage of Choice

"Afterwards he went up into hills and summoned certain ones he chose, inviting them to come and join him there; and they did. Then Jesus selected twelve of them to be his regular companions and to go out to preach and cast out demons." (Mark3:13&14)

The choice here was defined to certain ones and it was not a random choice. The choice was built on what Jesus saw with his examining eyes from special qualifications in each one of them.

In the story of David becoming a king, although David's brothers were stronger and taller than him, God chose David. "But the Lord said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. "(1 Samuel 16:7) The Lord does not look at the things man look at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. God knows every one's heart and every one's special preparation.

Examples for special preparation:

The Consecration

In Luke 5, after the miracle of catching the fish, Peter and John left everything they had behind and followed Jesus from that day. Also, a Levi tax collector, who was sitting at a tax collection booth, left everything behind and followed Jesus after hearing Jesus saying to him "Come and be one of my disciples"

The Sacred Zealous

Jesus saw the zealous in Peter's heart and may some people may regard it as rashness or recklessness but God shape it for the kingdom's glory

The Love

Like love that abides in John's heart. Although some people saw that he is the son of the thunder, but God made him the disciple of love.

The Religious Background

Paul had a broad religious background that prepared him to argue with the Jews and to gain a lot of them for Christ. In the beginning, Saul used his religious zealous against the Christians, but then God appointed him as chosen instrument to preach in the whole nation. God shaped his religious background and his zealously to gain people for the kingdom. Paul became fervent in his preaching, and the Damascus Jews could not withstand his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

2- The Stage of Communion

God invited and chose the disciples to be with him (Mark3:13). Here, to be disciples for God is to follow his ways and to share him every day in carrying our cross through the individual and collective communion in the Church.

There has to be private relation with God everyday through praying, reading the bible and taking communion as well as a collective communion with our brothers and sisters, to learn with them and from them.

The disciples' communion with Jesus was a chance to learn from him. They learned when the crowd gathered around him. They watched Jesus when he was praying with

tears, laughing with the crowd and kind with children. They saw how he takes care with every single person individually like visiting Zacchaeus. They learned from Jesus when he dealt with the woman that was caught in adultery. They learned from Jesus how he behaved during his visits. They learned from practice like when Jesus send them in practical training and they came back joyfully saying that even the devils obey them in His name. Jesus rebuked them saying that they should be joyful that there names are written in the book of life and not by doing miracles. Here, they have been taught that the earthly joy is perishable and that the real joy is eternal in heaven.

The disciples learned from their master through the sermons. Like the sermon on the mountain and through their individual relation with Jesus. He told them a lot of things that pertain to the kingdom of God.

The disciples have been taught the real meaning of service through their discussion with Jesus about who is the greatest among them. He taught them whoever wants to be the first in the kingdom has to be the last on the earthly life.

Jesus brought a child amidst them and told them that they need to be like the little children to enter the heavenly kingdom. Little children are brilliant because they do not remember the past and they don't relate to the future. They have the capacity to forgive and forget.

3- The stage of the practical training (Mark 6: 7-13)

This stage was approximately a year after the preparation of service and the communion. Jesus started to send the disciples two by two and he established the fundamental principles for the spiritual and the earthly work:

A- The spirit of oneness

Jesus sends them two by two and they came back with a brief to him. Jesus also gave them signs as a group to realize that they are one body and different parts in that body. Each one of them has his own gifts. Peter's personality is not like John and Andrew also has his own personality and gifts. No one better from the other and each one compliment the other. Thus, God planted the spirit of the oneness in them

B- The spirit of faithfulness

“ Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food”
Matthew 10:9

Jesus was training them practically on depending totally on God and to have faith on Him.

c- The spirit of simplicity

Jesus taught the disciples to be simple in residing, eating and wearing clothes “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. “ Matthew 10:11

C- The spirit of peace

“And when you go into a household, greet it” Matthew 10:12
The disciples were the disciples of the king of peace.

D- The spirit of firmness

We are the children of God so, we are the peace caller and God is our defender and God gives us the spirit of wisdom to balance between firmness and simplicity
“And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” Matthew 10-14

4 - The Stage of Evangelism

After the disciples had sufficient training, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the Pentecost, they carried out God’s commandment to preach the gospel in all the nations. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them all the things that I commanded you.” Matthew 28:19

From here, we examine that the evangelism executed by:

- Faith
- Baptism
- Repentance
- Gospel

It is very important to know and memorize God’s commandment and to be aware of our behaviors

“Obeying these commandments is not something beyond your strength and reach, for these laws are not in the far heavens, so distant that you can’t hear and obey them, and with no one to bring them down to you; nor are they beyond the ocean, so far that no one can bring you their message; but they are very close at hand in your hearts and on your lips so, that you can obey them” Deut 30:11

The theoretical faith is not enough but we have to be the light of the world and to show
the fruit of the spirit.

LECTURE TWO

BUILDING UP THE SPIRITUAL PERSONALITY OF THE SERVANT

References: books of Father Matthew el Meskene from the serving "Beloved, I pray that you prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (John 2:2)

There is no doubt the successful personality of the servant leads to the success of the service. Therefore, the servant should be prepared spiritually, psychology and devotionally. From the components of the physiological success of the servant are in the following:

1- The right goal

The successful servant is the one who has a specific spiritual goal and believes in it and finds his happiness in achieving that goal. The existence of clear goal is the first block in building the servant's character. Even if the personality of the servant is weak or the servant was raised in an unhealthy home with family issues. The servant's personality succeeds around a clear goal.

The best advice for the servant that complains from is to start putting a clear goal and should not be to achieve any special interest. If the servant's goal is to achieve his or her own interest or for self glorification, then they should correct that goal to be the least and to glorify God.

There is no better goal than the sacrificial love for God and others.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" Matthew 22:37

The true servant has deep feelings to commit all his life to Jesus Christ who saved him and loves him eternally and unconditionally. So, if the king sacrificed his life for us, is it not for the servant to sacrifice himself for Jesus the King of Kings?

Jesus Christ was clear in his goal. Since the beginning of his service, Jesus always repeated his goal.

Jesus always talked about his hour of come" The son of man must suffer many things and be ejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised the same day" Luke 9:22. Jesus rebukes Peter when he tries to swerve Jesus from crucifixion. During the supper, Jesus said "Nevertheless not my will but yours, be done"

Jesus' happiness was in completing his mission of salvation. Jesus bared the humiliation for us and to accomplish his goal of salvation.

Jesus Christ's clear goal preserves him from drifting to become an earthly king. "My kingdom is not from this world." Thus the clear goal preserves the servant from drifted away and loss.

2- The model

The servant can have his ideal and there are a lot of examples of saints who sacrificed themselves in service like Saint Paul, the apostle, who lost everything and consider his loss nothing compared to gaining the knowledge of God and serving God. Another example is Stephen who was stoned to death.

There could be a danger of shifting the goal of the servant from serving others and honoring those saints to the eagerness to be like them in their famousness. Jesus Christ is our high model. Therefore, it is important for the servant to always put Christ in his mind, heart and words as the highest model for the sacrificial love

Look for Christ as he walks doing good deeds and the people crowded him and he was always engrossed in merciful acts and the sacrificial love without one moment at himself. Jesus always looked at the cross that was prepared at the end of his service

Look to Jesus when he was speaking with his disciples in love and pity and Judas was sitting among them.

Look toward him as he is humiliated and carrying his cross to Golgotha to complete our salvation the will of his father who sent him. Thus there can not be another example showing full sacrificial love except Jesus Christ.

If we lost our highest model, our will would swerve from running toward the right goal and living in holiness toward deviation and lust. So, we always have to look to the person of Jesus Christ as our highest model in his actions, wisdom, and his love without limit, his bearing the pains, his compassion and his strong personality.

3-The active will

When the goal and the model is clear for us, our will would be active and we would have lovely zealously. How can we see Jesus on the cross stained in blood and not act for his sacrificial love.

If the servant's will and his zealousness becomes weaker, the servant starts to find ways and excuses to escape from the service and to give up from responsibilities. The servant needs to review his goal and to follow his model.

The servant who always puts his goal and model, Jesus Christ, in every step he takes, has a flaming will and zealous inside his heart for the service. He would insist with joy to complete the service no matter the conditions that oppose completing the service. For when the will is strong, the emotions take control and vice versa when the will is weak because the servant misses his goal and model, the servant falls into tepidity.

4- The spiritual work

If you want to strengthen your will, you should know that there are no means of building a servant's character that can help you more than the actual work. The service under the supervision of a successful pioneer or a spiritual and wise father especially in the spiritual service, is the best blessing the servant can get for building his character. The servant who serves not because his or she loves teaching but from the love for giving to others. That service will reconstruct the servant's character and strengthen his or her will and

The continuous service during the servant's whole life is the measure of the right goal and the veracity of the model that he or she followed and it also measures the strength of the servant's will by which the servant control his or her emotions.

The service is a blessing that reveals to the servant his own psychological weakness and strengthens his or her character.

LECTURE THREE

BASIC FOUNDATION IN SERVICE

References: Special sermons

The successful service starts and continues based on important main points:

- 1- Consecration of the heart
- 2- Fulfillment of the spirit
- 3- Fatherly spirit
- 4- Carrying the cross

The consecration of the heart

Without the consecration of the heart, the servant might fall in either problem:

A. *Quickly giving up on the service* in which the servant pity him/herself from the services' burdens which leads to laziness in the spirit, then, the devil tempts the senses into the sin.

B. *Pride in self*. From its characteristics in being joyful from getting praise from people and taking the credit while jealous when others are praised, and having the feeling in which the service would never succeed without me.

Sometimes, the servant get distracted with many services in private as well as in public but still the main motive is self *satisfaction* and praise and not to the glory of Christ.

+ The committed servant says in him/herself : "Glory from people, I would not accept and my real glory is in completing the service that God assigned me to do." Remember the promise of God "whoever serves me, God honor him"

The fulfillment of the spirit

The servant has to learn from every experience he passes through and the practices of the service. To benefit from the lesson plan, pray for the lesson and those who you serve. Read books that would help you during your planning for the lesson.

To benefit from visitation it is important to train yourself on the skill of active listening, avoid the earthly issues and always talks words from the bible. There should not be visits without praying and reading the bible.

Fatherly spirit

The Coptic servant is a father because he feels that he is responsible for his children before God.

He have compassion on them, bear their weakness and faults, share them in their pains, carry their loads, pray for them and sacrifice himself for them.

An example is Moses who argued with God to not destroy his people. Moses was a true example of a spiritual father for his children.

The servant is not an employee but he serves God's children, so the servant's love for his children is not conditional. For example, I love this person because he is kind and calm. This is a normal love. The level of love that the servant should reach should be unconditional love. For example, I l still love that person no matter what he did from evil things. This kind of love never fails and keeps no records of wrongs.

A true story

A faithful servant works with a non Christian coworker at the same place. The coworker does not like the Christian and he bothers him in words. At one of the days, the boss ordered the coworker to finish huge tasks in small period of time. The coworker cursed the boss and he was very angry. He got frustrated thinking about the requirements he has to finish in a very limited time. Then all of sudden, the faithful servant intervened with love and offered him a help. He stayed with him to the midnight working on the tasks in the office. Then, he took what work remained to work on it in his home. They both could accomplish the tasks in time and the boss thanked the non Christian coworker and was very proud of him and pleased of his work. The employee went back to his Christian coworker saying to him" I never expected that I was going to love you in any moment but now, I truly love you".

Carrying the cross

Carrying the cross has two dimensions:

The inside dimension: which is killing the pride and the continuous meditation on the cross which takes away the worldly lust and pleasures from your heart

The outside dimension: the infinite love. Jesus opened his arms for six hours on the cross and he still opens his arms to us. The sacrifice in this story is a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for his children