

Serving in Multicultural Ministry
Reader 1
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Uncovering the Meaning of Servant of the Lord

The biblical testaments harmonize together into one united narrative of which God revealed His identity and salvation plan to all humanity. Scripture interprets Scripture as its own testimony. Thus, the sacred writings contained in the Bible reveal a completely Spirit-inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative text. The Word of God holds guiding truth for a believer's walk. Students of the Word exegete and interpret Scripture to unlock its meaning. Against the backdrop of scriptural exegesis and interpretation, the meaning of servant of the Lord comes forth.

Exegesis answers the question, what did the biblical author mean? Tate (1997) defined *exegesis* as the process of examining a biblical text for what its original readers understood it to mean in a given context. In doing so, it considers the grammatical aspect of word meaning (lexicon) and order (syntax) looking at relationships for meaning. Words or phrases take on a variety of meanings depending on the author's intent. Additionally, exegesis examines the historical-cultural aspects through biblical geographical, social, political, archeological, political, cultural, philosophical, and religious views or events from the time of writing (Bernard, 2005). Working in tandem with exegesis, Tate (1997) explained that interpretation draws out implications from the text for contemporary readers and listeners. Interpretation depends on thorough exegesis combining grammatical and historical aspects with illumination from the Holy Spirit for understanding. The Holy Spirit does not contradict His own Word, rather reveals meaning.

The fusion of exegesis and interpretation leads to hermeneutics. Simply stated, *hermeneutics* reflects on a past event and culture to understand its meaning in a current situation (Braaten, 1966). Hermeneutics = exegesis + interpretation. Theological study offers 19 hermeneutical principles ranging from the dispensational principle to numerical. Three of these principles (first mention, context, and typical) will guide exegesis and interpretation of servant of the Lord to study the subject's deeper meaning.

Exegeting and Interpreting Servant

Two words frequently surface when mentioning the concept of Christ-centered servitude in the New Testament: *diakonos* and *doulos*. This author (2013) previously wrote that a *diakonos* servant (Matt 20:26) shows the qualities of a minister who seeks nothing more than unselfish ambition to God's service as His subordinate in all humility, love, and submission. Further, a servant waits on and carries out the commands from the King: "The greatest among you will be your servant" (23:11). Working in conjunction with *diakonos*, a *doulos* servant (20:27) revealed a bondservant who gives up self-interests and will to advance God's mission as a slave for the sake of Christ. This enslavement brings joy, devotion, obedience, yielding, and sacrifice: "Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and

the servant of all'” (Mark 9:35 NIV). Christ followers must hold the beliefs and show the actions of both diakonos and doulos. A third word, *pais* (Greek), gives even deeper meaning into the subject of servitude. Thayer (2009) defined *pais* as one whose "agency God employs in executing His purposes: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show justice to the Gentiles: (Matt 12:18 KJV; Isa 42:1). This passage fulfilled what the Prophet Isaiah foretold about the coming messiah, Jesus. It also precedes diakonos and doulos in the Book of Matthew and announces the reason behind servitude (Matt 20:27; 23:11). To understand servitude, what do the first mention, typical, and context principles uncover about the characteristics of a servant of the Lord for believers in Christ?

First Mention Principle

Hartill (1947) stated that the *first mention* about a subject comes from God about truth related to a subject that stands connected in His mind. The first mention of servant (Hebrew: עֶבֶד; ebed) occurred in Gen 26:24, in which God referred to Abraham as His servant: “And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham’s sake.” A critical point about the name servant of the Lord relates to the fact that God Himself identified Abraham as His servant and did so in a possessive form, "my servant" (26:24b). Scripture showed that Abraham followed God’s will by leaving Haran to follow the Lord's command to go to a land God would show him (12:1). Ancient peoples held land, family, and inheritance as significant elements in their society. Land sustained a farmer's livelihood, while it represented the urban dweller's political identity. Children inherited the family land. They worked it to sustain their livelihood, care for their family, and ensure the family lineage. The land, family, and inheritance linked together (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000). When Abraham left his father's house and kindred upon God's command, he forfeited everything familiar from Haran to go "unto a land that I will show thee" (12:1d). Instead, he placed his future in the Lord's hands and followed Him. For the Lord to name Abraham servant brings to mind characteristics of obedience, submission, trust, and faithfulness. These traits tied to God's covenant and resulted in Abraham gaining a new identity, everlasting inheritance, and divine security.

Some of the Old Testament servants of the Lord included Abraham (Gen 26:24), Moses (Exod 14:31; Deut 34:5; Josh 1:2, 13), Joshua (Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8), Hezekiah (2 Chron 32:16), Isaiah (Isa 20:3), Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon (Jer 25:9), Zerubbabel (Hag 2:23), prophets as a group (2 Kgs 17:13; Amos 3:7; Jer 7:25; 26:5), and the faithful ones of Israel (Isa 49:1-6). Upon closer examination of their character traits as His servant, Scripture revealed its attributes. The servants of the Lord accomplished something particular for Him. Moses led the Israelites from Egypt. He served as God’s instrument to demonstrate His acts (Exod 14:31) and gave His commands (Josh 1:13). God called Moses His servant even after death (1:2). Caleb had

a different spirit than the children of Israel. Caleb fully followed God (Num 14:24) as opposed to the Israelites who tested God, did not heed His voice, and provoked (spurned or despised) Him (14:22). God called King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, known as the wicked one in Rabbinical literature (Jewish Encyclopedia, 2011), His servant because he worked for Him. Nebuchadnezzar would strike the land of Egypt (Jer 43:10c-11 AMP).

Looking at the different people the Lord called His servant, common traits emerge that profile their character. First, each followed God and did something specific for Him that suited His overarching salvific purpose for humankind. Second, God assigned major endeavors to them, which involved extraordinary shifts and changes to their everyday lives and to those in their family household as well. They turned 180 degrees to heed God's voice and carry out His plan. Third, they came from different backgrounds from nomad to king. God used people regardless of their background or location. Last, God called them His servants despite their personal flaws or weaknesses in their nature. Moses murdered someone and had a temper, King David committed adultery, and King Nebuchadnezzar took Judeans into Babylonian captivity and tortured them. God showed mercy to their repentant hearts, though they did undergo His judgment.

Context Principle

What does the study of servant of the Lord's context further determine about its characteristics? The *context principle* considers a subject through the context of the immediate passage, chapter, book, testament, and Bible (Hartill, 1947; Segraves, 2001). Words, phrases, or passages before or after a word influence its meaning, too, as do surrounding events, conditions, and audience. For example, servant of the Lord first appears in Gen 26:24. The Lord appeared to Isaac and reaffirmed the covenant He made with His servant Abraham. The passages prior to verse 24 open more understanding about servant of the Lord.

A look at the chapter revealed that events occurred at the time of famine. God directed Isaac to sojourn temporarily in Gerar. There, the Lord appeared to Isaac and told him He would favor him, give him all these lands, and confirm the oath He swore to his father Abraham (26:3-5 NIV). He emphasized that Abraham obeyed Him; did everything He required; and kept His commands, decrees, and instructions (v. 3). The Lord spoke again to Isaac in Gen 26:24, "I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake" (KJV). Earlier verses from chapter 26 showed that the Lord's servant Abraham had an obedient character based on His actions.

By widening the examination of servant to other chapters from Genesis and books of the Old Testament more definitions surface, all influenced by context. From Genesis to 2 Kings, nine variations of servant occur excluding servant of the Lord. These occurrences reflect meanings contrary to servant of the Lord:

- Slave, Servant of Servants (Gen 9:25): Noah petitioned a curse as a servant of servants; lowest servant, or slave of slaves. A servant of servants can apply to an individual or whole people when subject and tributary to another.
- House of Bondage (Gen 13:3, 14): The Lord delivered Israel from the house of slaves in the land of Egypt.
- Consummate Host (Gen 18:3): Servant denotes someone who welcomes his guest with all humility and offers his best, ready to take care of and serve the guest (cf. Gen 19:19a), Lot perceived himself to be a servant, but his character did not match Abraham's).
- Servant of the House (Gen 24:2): A servant in this context served the household.
- Subjects of a Chief (Gen 26:15): This passage showed collective servants who served a person of importance.
- Man Servant (Gen 41:12): Slave in this context, indicated a manservant who served someone else.
- Polite Address to Equals or Superiors (Gen 43:28): Servant showed a manner of addressing one's superior to show respect.
- Subject to Forced Labor (Gen. 49:15): The intent of servant here meant that the person possessed a new knowledge based on actions, whether good or bad actions. This might fit with knowledge gained based on revelation or conviction.
- Servant of the King (1 Sam 18:5): A slave denoted a paid member of the king's army who held respect in the eyes of the people. In 2 Kgs 8:13a servant of the king carried a negative connotation: "And Hazael said, What is your servant, only a dog, that he should do this monstrous thing?"

The context principle indicated that a servant of the Lord belonged to the divine Master, rather than a worldly (Gen 24:2). A servant of the Lord carried an exalted stature, honorable in God's eyes rather than dishonorable (2 Kgs 8:13). God esteemed the title, rather than the respect people gave men of war (1 Sam 18:5). The title transcended a polite address (Gen 43:28). This type of servant voluntarily submitted to everything God required and kept His commands, decrees, and instructions. God did not force obedience (49:15). Further, the servant carried out the Lord's requests based on faith in God's covenantal promises for Israel, generation to generation. The Lord's scope of authority went beyond a master's household (24:2) As opposed to the cursed servant of servants (9:25; 26:15), the Lord blessed His servant with ensuing spiritual and physical prosperity.

Typical Principle

The *typical principle* pertains to a type from the Old Testament that clearly revealed itself in the New Testament to show a divinely appointed illustration of some scriptural truth (Hartill, 1947; Segraves, 2001). Continuing to follow occurrences of servant of the Lord, the most significant presents itself in Isa 42:1-8. The unidentified "my servant" type in Isa 42:1, prefigured the antitype Messiah: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my

soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isa 42:1). Jesus Christ, the Lord's Servant fulfilled these words foretold by the Prophet Isaiah in Matt 12:18. In this prophecy, God assured the helpless servant Israel that He will bless them through His Servant to come Who will rule over the earth (Isa 42:8-9). His servant will bring justice, a divine mishpat, to the nations with salvation (42:1, 3-4). He will do so gently in truth: Neither will He break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax (v. 3). But, He will prevail in establishing it. Isaiah 42:4 in the Amplified version detailed the meaning of establish, "He will not fail or become weak or be crushed and discouraged till He has established justice in the earth."

Seeking the Pillars of Truth

The Bible is the Word of God with truths for daily living. These truths provide individual believers and the collective Body of Christ with subsequent meaning that shapes their understanding for God's intentions as His servant. It also beacons their walk with guiding principles to serve Him. What truths, then, did God have in mind on the subject of servant (Hebrew: עֶבֶד; ebed) in Gen 26:24? Think of the following pillars as the answer to this question. These pillars of truth apply to Christ followers as His servant, His beloved:

- Pillar One: A servant of the Lord belongs to God through covenant.
- Pillar Two: A servant of the Lord submits to His commission.
- Pillar Three: A servant of the Lord places the future in His hands.
- Pillar Four: A servant of the Lord follows God in faith.
- Pillar Five: A servant of the Lord speaks gentle truth.
- Pillar Six: A servant of the Lord trusts Him, with the absence of fear and discouragement.
- Pillar Seven: A servant of the Lord prevails with His commission.

God exalts His beloved with the title servant: The Most High bestows them with a name of honor. With this title, though, comes responsibility. Every believer must journey in faith like Abraham and walk as the Servant Jesus to promote the cause of the Gospel to all nations. It takes nothing less than faith and trust in God to serve. Heed the Lord's words to Joshua, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh 1:9). Submit, follow, trust, and prevail in faith as servant of the Lord.

Jan PhD,
2014

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My Servant David: Leadership Lessons for Multicultural Ministry

What can leaders in multicultural ministry learn from David, one whom God called His servant? From his beginnings as a shepherd, God chose him to rule over all Israel. His Spirit filled David with wisdom and understanding to equip him for service. Considered a type for the Messiah, David humbly served, felt persecution, and experienced exaltation for the God of Israel. Unlike Christ, he had a sinful nature succumbing to moral failure. God's mercy did not depart from David, however (2 Sam 7:15-16). Regardless of successes and failures David remained a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). This character study illustrates his traits as a servant of the Lord and provides application for them to pastoral leadership in a multicultural church.

Character Study of King David

God chose David conditioned on his heart rather than outward appearance (Ps 89:20). He took him from a shepherd in the sheepcote to prince over all Israel (2 Sam 7:8). God gave His servants special assignments—David's rule held critical significance for the messianic Kingdom to come. The Lord covenanted with David that He would build him a house to raise up His seed for an everlasting dynasty (2 Sam 7:12-16). Jesus, the son of Abraham and the son of David (Matt 1:1; Acts 13:22-23), fulfilled this covenant with His kingship, which traced to the seed from the House of Judah (Acts 13:23).

David did not rule immediately, rather served the reigning king, Saul. Because the Lord was with David when His Spirit came upon him, David behaved wisely in all he did (e.g., 1 Sam 16:18; 18:14, 28). Saul recognized the spirit upon David and thus feared him (18:12). All Israel and Judah loved him, though, including Saul's son Jonathan. As David rose in service and showed even more wisdom through the Lord, Saul conspired against him. Despite Saul's attempts to slay David, God protected the future king and sustained him (e.g., 21:9, 9; 22:1, 23). David went on to rule over all Israel because he depended on the real King of Israel in faith and subservience while following His will.



Lessons for Leadership in a Multicultural Church

Pillar One: A Servant of the Lord Belongs to God Through Covenant

The Lord chose David, a shepherd and youngest of Jesse's eight sons, to rule over all of Israel (1 Sam 16:12; 2 Sam 7:8). He selected David based on his heart. God still looks for a leader after his own heart—apart a person's background, race, ethnicity, gender, or age.

Pillar Two: A Servant of the Lord Submits to His Commission

David yielded to his commission from the Lord without hesitation. He submitted to serving King Saul as his armor bearer, valiantly facing Goliath, and fighting Israel's opposition. Sometimes leaders encounter conflict when unifying the diversity of cultures. Leaders should stay the course, and let the Lord of hosts fight the battles (1 Sam 17:47b).

Pillar Three: A Servant of the Lord Places the Future in His Hands

Jealous over David's accomplishments, Saul sought to kill him. (23:1-9; 26:20). God did not deliver him to Saul (23:14), but kept him. Carrying out the vision of a multicultural church requires endurance for the future. God keeps His covenantal leaders: "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (Ps 32:7 NIV).

Pillar Four: A Servant of the Lord Follows God in Faith

God viewed David a man after His own heart, because he did everything the Lord wanted Him to do in faith (Acts 13:22c; Heb 11:33). Leading a multicultural congregation calls for a servant who will walk by faith to follow Jesus' mandate for unity (John 17:20-23).

Pillar Five: A Servant of the Lord Speaks Gentle Truth

The narrator repeatedly described David as "wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with Him" (1 Sam 18:14 KJV). Given the chance to kill Saul, David heeded the directives from the Lord not to stretch forth his hand against him (24:6). After David explained his innocence, Saul said that David was a better man repaying him good for evil (v. 17). Leaders should minister according to the Lord's wisdom, loving their enemies, and praying for those who persecute them towards unity in diversity for Christ (Matt 5:44).

Pillar Six: A Servant of the Lord Trusts God

Even under trials and testings, David enquired of the Lord for direction (e.g., 23:2, 4; 30:8). He did experience fear, but God comforted him and built his faith. In a later trial, David "But

David found strength in the LORD his God” (1 Sam 30:6 NIV). God wants His leaders to lean on Him, rather than fear and address the challenges of multicultural ministry on their own.

Pillar Seven: A Servant of the Lord Prevails with His Commission

The Lord directed Samuel to anoint Saul as leader who would have authority over His people Israel (9:16-17); however, David was 30 when all the elders of Israel anointed him as king. Prior to this, only the tribe of Judah recognized him as king. Uniting a church across cultures requires patience for God’s hand to prevail and operate on His time.

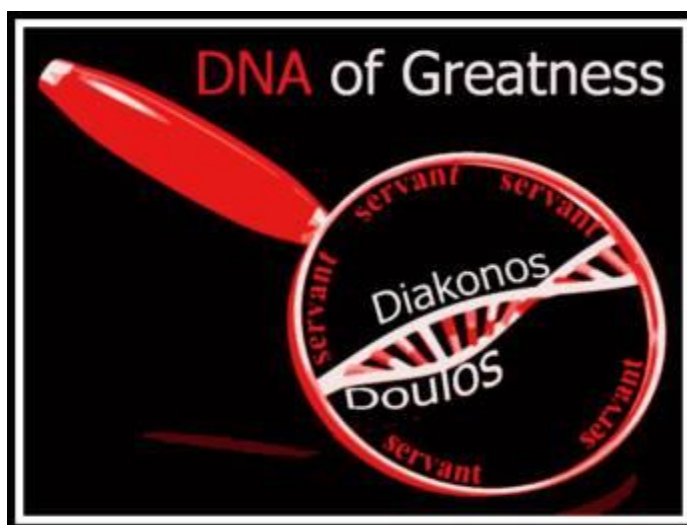
Taking Up the Charge

David’s character presents an intriguing portrait of the human embodiment of a leader. From a confident young man in the pasture ready to battle for the living God (1 Sam 17:26) to a dimming ruler who made Solomon king over Adonijah (1 King 1:7-8), David served the Lord to the end. Though David led through losses and victories, frailties and faith, he kept his sights on God. David’s last words to his son Solomon concerned keeping the charge of the Lord God so that He could accomplish His promise to the royal throne for a successor to rule over Israel (1 Kgs 2:3-4; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:29). Likewise, leaders must take up the charge to serve the fulfilled King Jesus from the House of Judah. Walk in His ways and do wisely to unite His people.

Jan Paron,
2014

DNA of Kingdom Greatness

A magnifying glass enlarges an object for the viewer's eye. Typically, a magnifying glass provides two to six times the original visual power. When you view print through a magnifier you see larger and sharper letters and words. This enlargement enables you to negotiate textual meaning. Using this same principle, let's enlarge the word great for a clear image of its DNA.



Investigating Greatness

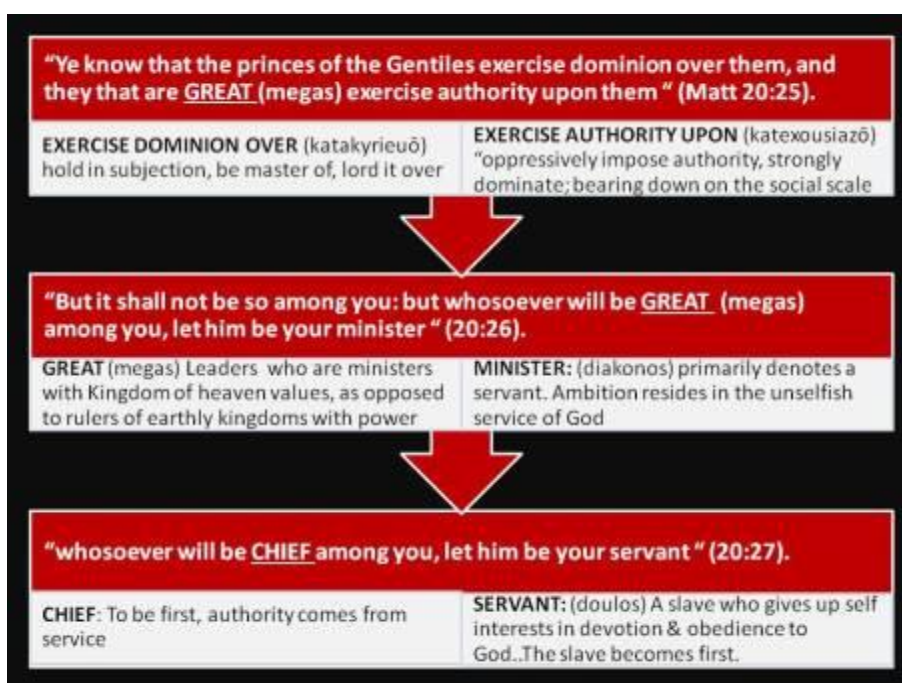
“But having called them, Jesus said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and the GREAT ones exercise authority over them. But it will be not so among you. But whoever desires to become GREAT among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to become first among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Matt 20:25-28 LITV).

In the still of worship, I heard the Lord under His Spirit's unction.—“In ME, you find freedom. In ME, you find all you need. In ME, you live. I AM THE LIVING GOD.” In that instance, the Lord enlarged, and then revealed the meaning of greatness! The Lord defines greatness by the manifested Promise from the inward interior, rather than the visible worldly accomplishments on the outward exterior. God came in flesh as Jesus to minister and ransom Himself for many (Matt 20:27; John 1:14). Jesus, God with us, desires to dwell in His beloved through the presence of His Spirit's infilling (Acts 1:5; 2:38). We find freedom in Christ by chaining our will to Him. With this newfound freedom, God's Spirit reshapes and renews our character to Kingdom greatness as servants of Christ. He exchanges the old DNA of great as ‘ruler’ over the nations with ‘lordship’ (Greek: *katakryieuō*) and ‘authority’ (*katexousiazō*), for the new DNA of great as a ‘servant’ (Greek: *diakonos*, δῆκονος and *doulos*, δοῦλος). Servant

includes two different traits: minister and bondservant. Simply stated, one with DNA of Kingdom greatness has leadership backbone by both.

The first trait shows the qualities of a minister (*diakonos*; Matt 20:26). A minister seeks nothing more than unselfish ambition to God's service as His subordinate in all humility, love, and submission. A person who ministers waits on and carries out the commands from the King. "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt 23:11).

On the other hand, the second reveals a bondservant (*doulos*; Matt 20:27) with Kingdom criteria as first. A bondservant gives up self-interests and will to advance God's mission as a slave for the sake of Christ, approaching enslavement with joy, devotion, obedience, yielding, and sacrifice. "Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all'" (Mark 9:35).



(Photo Credit: Matthew 20:25-27 KJV Chart, Jan Paron 2013)

Common DNA of Greatness in Koinōnia

Partakers of Christ must activate their common DNA of greatness to strengthen koinōnia and create synergy for mission. Synergy occurs when the combined effect of two or more people is greater than the sum of their efforts. Members in koinōnia must converge in one mind and one accord, representing the authority of the name of Jesus in greatness. Think for a moment about geese in a shared flight formation. When geese stay in the V formation they move faster, more efficiently and go a longer distance as a team. Geese even share leadership this way. When the lead goose tires, it flies back into the V formation for another to take its place. All these different actions contribute to the synergy and subsequent success in completing their destination. Both

traits of greatness in koinōnia, the two being diakonos and doulos, contribute towards the faith community successfully following God's vision and mission for humanity. One trait without the other weakens the whole of koinōnia. When the common DNA of minister (*diakonos*) and bondservant (*doulos*) merge, they form a strong and unending chain that binds koinōnia to shared purpose in Christ. We become one in totality as ambassadors for Christ, seeking to reach all tribes and nations for the cause of the Gospel (2 Cor 5:20a).

Closing: Endued with Power for Greatness

The Amplified version of Matt 20:18b reads, "All authority (all power of rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." The name and authority of God is Jesus. Jesus commanded His disciples to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4) until they "were endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49 KJV).[1] Jesus was going to transfer the power of God to His disciples through the Promise. The Book of Acts further tells, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The same applies to today's believers. What's on the inside, the indwelt Promise through baptism of the Holy Ghost (as part of New Birth), empowers us to represent the Name in greatness with our outward expression. Reverend Terry Black says, "When we signed on to this Holy Ghost thing, and when it began to fill us, something began to take over in us that's more powerful than us. And, it has the ability to take over our weakness and supernaturally accomplish its divine purpose in our lives"[2] He describes it as 33 A.D. When 33 A.D. takes over, greatness becomes a reality in our lives to bring synergy to God's vision and purpose...Amen! Let all God's people say so be it.

Jan Paron,
2013

Endnotes

[1] Jan Paron, "Heating Pad Prayer," PerSpectives 12, n.p. [cited 3 March 2013]. Online: <https://specs12.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/heating-pad-prayer-for-unity-of-the-body/>

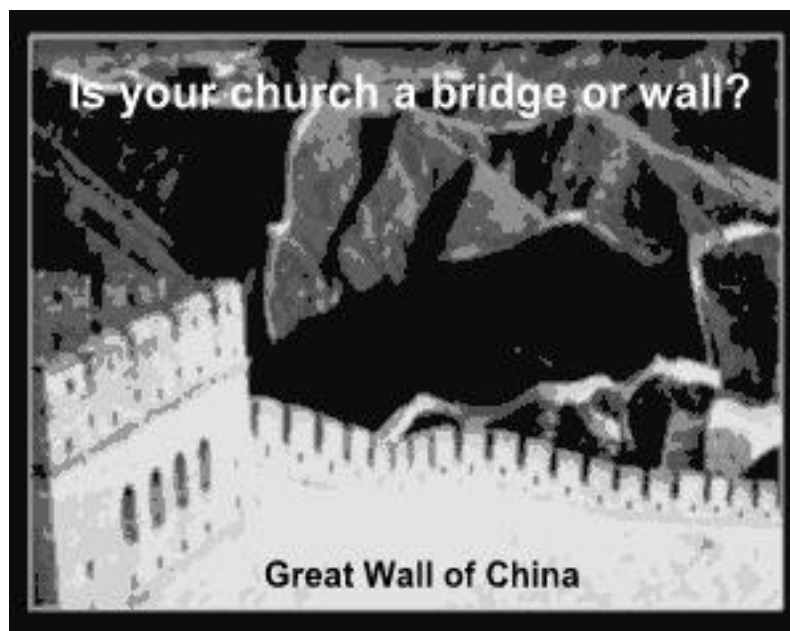
[2] Rev. Terry Black, Sermon, 3/2/13: 33 AD, (Alsip: Lighthouse Church of All Nations, 2013).

Seeking the M.O.S.A.I.C. Church: Is Your Church a Bridge or Wall for Access to the Gospel?

When Jesus said “go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:10 NLT), He viewed *all nations* from an eschatological standpoint with inclusive intent (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47). His vision for a Kingdom map of all nations began at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) and extended to the entire world (Matt 24:14). What distinguished His map was the target population: Jews and Gentiles – eunuchs, foreigners, outcasts and the poor – without limitations imposed by the temple’s partition wall (Mark 11:17; cf., Isa 56:3-8).^[1] Jesus barred none, seeking to destroy the “dividing wall of hostility” erected by the Law and “setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations” to create one new humanity in Him through the cross (Eph 2:14-16 NIV).

Wall versus Bridge

Inclusion, in its simplest form, shows action for access to the elect for reconciliation with God. The local church can either erect a wall or extend a bridge to support inclusion to *all the nations*. While both may be visible or invisible, each causes different results. A wall restricts a person’s or people group’s access to reconciliation by concealing, hedging, controlling, preventing or prohibiting access. Contrariwise, a bridge opens entry to reconciliation by connecting, networking, opening and routing through a passageway. Regardless of the type, each results in a different end. The local church is to function as a bridge with the purpose of connecting the lost to a loving Father, through grace in Christ.



The Gentile Wall

The early church was not exempt from walls. In fact, Rodney Woo, in *The Color of Church*, refers to the Gentile Wall, erected by Jewish Christians, which threatened inclusion of Gentile people groups from Christianity. Jewish exclusionary actions rooted themselves in traditional identity found in the Law.^[2] Temple restrictions that maintained purity and sanctity setup the Gentile Wall of the early church. These controls dated back to Moses and carried over to the Second Temple period.

During Jesus' ministry, the temple establishment raised visible barriers that clearly demarcated exclusionary boundaries and consequences for its violation. Archeologist Clermont-Ganneau's found a limestone block with the inscription, "Let no Gentile enter within the barrier surrounding the temple; whosoever is caught shall be responsible for his subsequent death"^[3] Josephus describes similar warnings, "Upon the [the partition wall of the temple court] stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that holy place'"^[4]

Apostle Paul met heavy resistance from the Jewish Christians community as he called for abandoning Mosaic customs and practice of circumcision. So severe was the reaction to his teachings that Jerusalem Christians rioted against him (Acts 21-22). Paul continued in confronting the Gentile wall throughout his ministry (i.e., Acts 15; Gal 2).

Breaking Down the Wall

If the most segregated hour of Christian America still is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning,^[5] then the local church must tear down the Exclusionary Wall brick by brick. Exclusion poses a cross-cultural barrier, segregating a wide spectrum of people from access to and unity in the Gospel. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, in *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* echoes this view. He says that "diversity is far more than culture, race, and class. Age, disability, sexual orientation, lifestyle, and religion are important aspects of diversity discussions."^[6] What are the bricks that make up the wall?

To become a bridging church requires intentional actions for inclusion and impartiality. It begins with reflection and realignment of praxis for access to reconciliation. In order to bridge, you reach. Before you reach, you learn. You have to learn about other cultures and how to adapt ministry in a relevant way to reach them as you build bridges. Most critical to the process is dependency on God. Rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Acts 1:8 says that, "What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world"(MSG). The Spirit's infilling empowers and guides the bridging congregation to cross seen or unseen and known or unknown boundaries that separate people of different backgrounds from grace.



Building a Bridge: Five Biblical Actions

What reconciling actions support the infrastructure of the bridge? Consider the following as starting points.

1. **Shows impartiality and inclusivity across cultures.** "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34 KJV; cf. Gal 3:28, Rev 5:9). One who shows impartiality demonstrates actions of acceptance and respect — unbiased, unprejudiced and equitable — towards all others. Inclusivity works in tandem with impartiality. Having an inclusive attitude in leadership goes beyond engaging race, class and gender, rather one consistently keeps extending grace to all persons and people groups central to ministry.
2. **Gives access in a welcoming environment through ministry methods and activities that invite a broad base of people across culture** (Luke 10:25-37; 14:2-14; Rom 12:10-13; 1 Pet 4:9). Access through invitation comprises many aspects. A welcoming environment balances both internal and external missional focuses, as well as invites people in the context of their culture. Learn ways that cultures receive each other, taking into consideration meeting and greeting, names and titles, body language, touching, distance, eye contact, etiquette, food, conversation, hospitality, etc. Your intent is to fully understand another person's perspective to guide your ministry methods. Think outside your own frame of reference.
3. **Holds an eyes of Christ perspective by viewing persons or people groups without cultural superiority or judgment** (John 13:34; Gal 3:1-29). Perhaps humanity holds an ethnocentric viewpoint due to its worldly nature. "Ethnocentrism is the perceptual prism through which cultures interpret and judge other groups" It is not always intentional,

rather “learned at the unconscious level.”^[7] The fruit of the Spirit runs counter to ethnocentrism. Viewing others through the eyes of Christ and showing His love builds bridges of reconciliation, and voids racial or cultural superiority.

4. **Nurtures culture by celebrating and encouraging the presence of a variety of persons and people in all activities**(Gen 1:31; Acts 17:24-29; Rev 7:9). This action first addresses the internal attitude towards culture different from yours. The internal nature drives external actions. This reminds me of the story of the woman who knelt behind Jesus at His feet. As she stood her tears fell on His feet, and she then wiped off the tears with her hair. She also kissed Jesus’ feet and put perfume on them. The Pharisee judged the woman because she was a woman of the city who was a sinner, while Jesus commended the woman for her faithfulness and forgave her sins (John 7:37-48 NLT). He let His grace flow in love with acceptance and respect. Likewise, the church sets unlimited boundaries for grace.
5. **Respects diversity by recognizing differences as diversity and not as inappropriate responses** (Jas 2:8-10; Col 3:11-17). What you encounter in a person externally (see, hear and touch) comprises the ten percent of visible culture. The external works in tandem with the internal, not so apparent culture (beliefs, values, thought patterns and myths).^[8] A person responds to a situation according to the internal and external. Likewise, you act according to your own. One’s assumptions pose barriers in ministry. Even when you understand cultural characteristics and/or know the person, you must exercise love, discernment and peace. Seek understanding. Promote restoration.

“For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us” (Eph 2:14). Let our mission be constructing multiple bridges to create new and creative pathways for reconciliation.

Jan Paron,
2012

To ponder...

- What walls does the local church erect, visible or invisible and known or unknown, that detract from reconciling the lost with a loving Savior?
- What are some of the challenges to breaking down the walls to reconciliation?
- Is there a relationship between church atrophy and cultural exclusionary practice?

Endnotes

[1] “Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’ But you have made it a ‘den of thieves” (Mark 11:17; cf., Isa 56:3-8).

[2] Rodney Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville, B & H Publishers, 2009)

[3] Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archeological Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), loc 1919. Charles Clemont-Ganneau found a limestone block in 1871 that delineated guidelines to the public. The block was 85 cm wide, by 57 cm long and 37 cm deep. A fragment from a second inscription found outside the wall around Jerusalem’s Old City has similar wording.

[4] Evans, *Jesus and His World*, Loc 1920. Josephus, J.W. 5-193: cf., b.124-28; Ant. 15.417; Ag. Ap. 2.103.

[5] Martin Luther King, Jr., “An Address Before the National Press Club,” in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 101.

[6] Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible’s Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2009), loc. 110.

[7] Larry Samovar, Richard Porter and Edwin McDaniel, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2000), 10.

[8] Weaver, cited in Culbertson. Center for Intercultural Learning. (n.d.). *Iceberg model of culture*. Retrieved on August 18, 2012, from <http://www.international.gc.ca/cfsi-icse/cil-cai/magazine/v02n01/doc3-eng.pdf>

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The Ministry of Reconciliation

As ambassadors for Christ, the body of believers upholds the ministry of reconciliation to the multitudes. Ambassadors represent Christ's redeeming work at the cross in New Covenant ministry to advance reconciled fellowship in Him. This fellowship exists in two forms: horizontal reconciliation and vertical (See below chart.) — Horizontal reconciliation crisscrosses the household of God, binding brethren-to-brethren in one accord and like-mindedness in Christ (Rom 12:16). As such, reconciliation supports the very unity and oneness Jesus prays for in John 17:22, "that they may be one, even as we are one" (KJV). As opposed to horizontal reconciliation that focuses on relationship between believers, vertical dwells on fellowship between God and His elect through Jesus Christ to unite them as one with their heavenly Father.



(Paron, 2012, Ambassadors for Christ)

For the purpose of restoring and maintaining full reconciliation, both vertically and horizontally, God gives us this ministry. Ambassadors for Christ must extend grace and bring others into harmony with Him through their word and deed, whether directed to the brethren from the household of God or a single person (2 Cor 5:18). No person or people group should feel alienated from God or fellow brethren. Oneness in Christ always must prevail.

To Ponder

“But all things are from God, Who through Jesus Christ reconciled us to Himself [received us into favor, brought us into harmony with Himself] and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation [that by word and deed we might aim to bring others into harmony with Him]” (2 Cor 5:18 AMP).

- How do Christians, as ministers of **reconciliation**, support unity of the Church?
- In what ways does the **ministry of reconciliation** affect diversity in the local church?

Jan Paron,
2012

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