

## Shepherds and Servants – Servant Leadership at the Chapel

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1 Peter 4:7-11

What kind of phrase is “servant leadership?” Is it an oxymoron? Is it a catchy theme to books on managing people? If you do a Google search on servant leadership, you will get 2,180,000 hits. There are essays, books, web sites, academic centers, speakers, and YouTube videos all about servant leadership. And tonight we’re not going to speak to a single one of them. What we are going to speak to is the character of Biblical servant leadership found where it matters most – God’s Word.

In scripture, the word “deacon” is a form of the Greek word "diakonia" and is literally rendered in English as "service" or "ministry." It is a concept that we are all familiar with and as we grow into adulthood, and a part of roles that we all play. As parents we serve our children, as employees we serve our employers, and as husbands or wives we serve our spouses. In the restaurant industry we are served by waiters and waitresses. On airplanes we are served by flight attendants. We often refer to our military personnel as “serving” their country. So we all are familiar with a variety of forms of service even in everyday life.

But what is it that defines the essence of roles of service? I am sure that we could all tell horror stories of terrible service we have received. We recognize it when the essential elements of good service are missing. It would be patently obvious that simply putting on a uniform of a Marine would not make me one. As soon as you put me into real duty it would become quite evident that I could not serve in that role. You see a person can have a title and be placed into a role, but if the character and quality of service is not there, they are really not fulfilling the capacity of the role. We are all familiar with the passage in James that says “faith without works is dead.” I would argue that similarly roles of service in the church without the true character and Biblical qualities of service are effectively and spiritually dead.

This morning we developed a Biblical model for our diaconal ministries. It was important foundational work and that helped provide structure and definition around diaconal roles. But we would be remiss if we did not also discuss the character and quality of diaconal service as well. Beyond the model, it is important to look at the biblical character that is to define ministry to the church. So that is our purpose tonight - to provide a scriptural basis for character of diaconal leadership and roles within the Chapel.

But before we begin looking at our passage this evening, let me first review the primary points of the diaconal model we studied this morning.

1. The deaconate functions in roles of service to the body so that there may be unity and a common care for all.
2. The deaconate functions under the authority of the Eldership as assigned to the office and/or specific tasks of service.
3. The deaconate is to be scripturally and spiritually qualified to serve.
4. The deaconate serves to enable the ministry of the Elders to pray, preach, and shepherd.
5. The deaconate serves to enable ministries and mercies within the church.
6. Deaconate appointments were officially recognized before the church.
7. The deaconate is an example of the same merciful and sacrificial love that Christ showed in calling and redeeming His people
8. Diaconal service is first a ministry of caring for people in the local church.

So having established the model this morning, we move to the quality of ministry that is to characterize those in diaconal leadership and roles. Rather than looking at the spiritual qualifications out of 1 Tim. 3, tonight we will turn to 1 Peter 4:7 and look to a passage that defines the character of ministry to one another within the church. This passage does not directly speak to diaconal ministry, but it does provide a pattern of character for those who serve the body. So as we study this evening, we will be making specific application of the general principles of the text to those who serve in diaconal roles. Our goal is to not just see the “who and what” of the ministry, but also to understand the “how”.

Let’s read the passage starting in 1 Peter, Chapter 4 verse 7 through 11. *“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Let’s pray as we begin this evening.

Where this morning’s text was addressed to a church that was experiencing the pains and challenges of rapid growth, Peter’s letter is addressed to those who were about to go through increased personal difficulties and greater persecution because of their faith. This is evident in verse 12 of Chapter 4 where the readers are warned of fiery trials that were on the horizon. Because of this, Peter writes to encourage them in their faith that they would endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

Imagine the challenges to serving one another in the midst of difficulty and hardship. Not only were they to be tested in their faith, but their response to these trials would have impacts to their body life. In other words, their ability to love and minister to one another was about to be severely pressed. Loss of income, physical persecution, public insults and humiliation, and even death were the potential price of their faith. So in the face of persecution, Peter encourages them to prepare for suffering by having the same way of thinking as Christ. If you look back to verse 1, you can see that they were to identify in their suffering with Christ and with persecuted brothers and sisters as motivation to live for the glory of God. Rather than diminishing their love for one another, the trials of persecution and suffering were meant to strengthen and unite them even as they looked toward the ultimate hope of their salvation.

The passage opens with a striking call to remember this hope. **There was to be a fervent watchfulness** as they looked with heart and mind to the second coming of Christ. They were to remember that Christ's return was at hand. In terms of faith and service, they were to be encouraged to live and serve in a way that kept Christ's return in mind. How much more so in this present age and in light of a lack of suffering, should we at the Chapel press hard to keep at the forefront of our minds our hope of glory and thus strive to willingly serve one another?

In light of Christ's coming we are **first to live and serve with a clear mind**. The idea here is to live with self-control and a sober or accurate assessment of self. For those in diaconal roles and leadership, this is a call to carefully and clearly examine one's service to the body. To look at motivations, to listen to inner thoughts and attitudes, and to evaluate words and actions in light of the example of service that Christ modeled for us. They must have an accurate evaluation of their heart and be able to work to bring about godly change. The spiritual character of a deacons' or deaconesses' life should not be in question. Their walk and talk is to be marked with the evidences of grace and a transformed life as they serve others.

Why is this important? The answer follows in the text. For every believer, and especially those qualified for spiritual office, this call for self-control and a clear mind allows them **to serve with unhindered prayers**. Peter's connection of right living to the effectiveness of one's prayer life is especially relevant for Elders and Deacons. The end of verse 7 in this passage echoes the warning to husbands in Chapter 3, verse 7 where they are to live rightly with their wives so that their prayers may not be hindered. As Christ's return draws near, we are to take a high view of our spiritual lives so that we may effectively pray for others. For those in diaconal ministry, this is a call that must be heeded if you are to serve well or biblically lead others in service.

Moving on to verses 8 through the beginning of 11, we see that ministry to others **requires faithful stewardship**. This is the heart of the passage. The call to serve is defined in specific terms. The response to the call to those who minister within the church is to be expressed through genuine love and the use of God-given gifts. There are four areas of faithful stewardship that Peter defines. These are the critical qualities that are to be evident in the lives and service of those in diaconal roles.

The first of these is **serving with genuine love**. The sense here is of a deep and unselfish love for the body of Christ. The Greek word for “deeply” here has the idea of the stretching and straining of an athlete running or preparing for a race. The earnestness of our love for others is to be demonstrated in a way that stretches and pushes us. At times, our love for others, like the physical exercise of an athlete, will be difficult and hard. We may find ourselves hitting the wall, at the end of rope. Listen to me here. **True service rarely comes when we feel like it**. We must remember that in the body of Christ, genuine love often means serving others in ways that requires personal sacrifices. And as a redeemed people with the cross as our model, we should understand that the greater the sacrifice, the greater the expression of love.

Peter also notes that genuine love **is blind to the faults and mistakes of others**. When you serve with imperfect people, they will fail at times or may not live up to your expectations. The spiritual question at play here is how do you respond to the imperfections of others? I believe that for those in diaconal leadership and roles this can be especially hard. First, we all tend to measure others by our own standards. Particularly in the area of our spiritual gifting, we can struggle to overlook a lack of passion or participation in others. We must be careful not to expect others to think like we think, have the same level of enthusiasm we do, or possess the same depth of abilities God has given us. When we have genuine love for others, we are able to minister and lead in a way that reflects Christ-like love and a care for others regardless of their faults or differences.

The second area of stewardship seen in the first part of verse 9 is to **serve with warmth**. Our ministering to one another is to be evidenced with loving hospitality. The hospitality Peter is thinking of here likely extends to the use of homes and possessions to show love to others. But in more general terms, **the quality of our care and ministry to others is to be marked by kindness**. In terms of diaconal service, we should be thinking of serving our brothers and sisters in Christ with loving hospitality. But diaconal service is also about being friendly and warm to visitors, guests, and those outside the church we interact with as part of ministry. In addition, diaconal service may often exhibit a desire to extend warmth and hospitality through ministries of mercy to those in need. It is a willingness to share time and resources without concern for the cost. At the heart of diaconal service is an expression of love and warmth to others in a way that reflects who we are in Christ.

A third area of stewardship in ministry to others is seen at the end of verse 9. Look at your Bibles. What does it say about the character of ministry here? It says we are to **serve others without complaint**. Wow! It's easy to read this and think, does he really mean that? Did Peter realize how hard that would be? It's not just enough to serve others with love and warmth, but we are not to complain or grumble in our service. **This may be the hardest test of our love for others**. To serve and sacrifice with joy even when things don't go the way we want or we have to deal with the imperfections of others. Even if our complaints are not verbalized, we all think those thoughts. We must be on guard that we do not disgrace Christ and the church by a complaining spirit. And we must also watch that attitudes of complaining and grumbling do not become a heart of bitterness that keeps us from finding joy in ministry to others.

As I prepared for this message I was reminded that I often struggle not with words of complaint, but with thoughts. I may be able to regularly guard my tongue, but that does not mean that I don't silently talk to myself and grumble about my rights being violated. I know that thinking the thoughts is no better than if I had spoken them. We all do it, don't we? And sometimes it's over the smallest things. These sinful thoughts bounce around in our heads distracting us from the joy of serving others and ministering to needs in a way that pleases God.

Let me encourage you as I encourage myself to be careful about listening to ourselves. C.J. Mahaney challenged me recently in his book "The Cross Centered Life". I encourage all of you in diaconal service to read it. He quoted D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in noting that **much of unhappiness in life comes because we listen to ourselves instead of talking to ourselves**. When we listen to ourselves, we most often hear thoughts of discontentment, self-pity, rationalizations for sinful thoughts, and justifications of our rights. Instead, we should be talking to ourselves. Reminding yourself of who you once were and now are in Christ. Reminding yourself of who you serve and why. Reminding yourself of the great mission and ministry God has given you in service to the Church. If you want to find joy in diaconal service, listen to yourself less and talk to yourself more.

The fourth and last area of stewardship in ministry to others is found in verse 10 and in the first part of 11. Here Peter encourages the church to **serve with gifts of grace**. Christ has equipped and graced the church with gifts which are to be used in service to others. Brothers and sisters, your gifts are to be used to serve. The word for serve here actually comes from the same Greek word for deacon. **Good stewardship of our gifts is not optional**, it is required. We are responsible to use the gifts that God has given to us for the benefit of the church. Whether it is gifts of speaking and ministering the word or gifts of service to others, the gifts we have been given are not our own. They belong to Christ and the church. And the grace that God has given to the church is to be used in service to it.

We should also note here that **we are not to serve on our own strength, but through the strength that God supplies.** Diaconal work can be hard. It can be emotionally draining. It is often service without recognition or thanks. If you are in diaconal service at the Chapel, you must look to Christ and the cross for satisfaction and strength. If you are discouraged, think about Christ who is our model of self-sacrifice. If you are weary of ministry, look to Christ who suffered and died on the cross. Let me also encourage you to be careful who you speak to about your struggles. Look to those who will encourage you to walk in faith and trust God. Seek out those who would pray for you and lift you and your ministry up before the Lord. At a practical level, work with your ministry or flock Elder to see if there are ways you can manage your ministry and use your gifts more effectively. We must never forget that in our ministry function it is Christ that works through us.

Peter closes this section of his letter at the end of verse 11 by encouraging his readers to **be firm in purpose** when ministering to others within the church. What is the reason that we are to love and minister to one another? Why the high standards in serving one another? Why has God graciously provided gifts of service to be used in the body of Christ? Here is the culmination of Peter's encouragement in this text.

First, the purpose is firm **in its breadth.** The scope of this kind of ministry as we wait for the Lord is not narrow. It is to be in everything. These instructions do not apply only to certain ministries. They apply to all. Peter uses the word everything to encompass all the ministries of the church. Nothing is exempt. There is no situation that is so unique or ministry that it is outside this overarching purpose. We must submit the flesh and sinful nature to the diaconal work of Christ in and to the church. We must be faithful in service to the body and commit ourselves to being godly stewards of the gifts we have been given.

The purpose is also firm **in its intention.** That through the ministry of the church God may be glorified. Peter breaks out in praise and offers a closing benediction. He reminds us that it is to God that all honor and praise belong. We are not to seek personal praise in our ministry. In all that we do, we seek the praise and honor of Christ. When the focus of our ministry is about representing Christ and giving Him the glory, we become conscious of the implications of words, actions, and decisions we choose. And it transforms and elevates even the most mundane diaconal role into something with eternal value and significance. There is no trivial or unimportant diaconal role when done for Christ. All that we do in the breadth of ministry can be done for the glory of God.

**What a great passage to move us into thinking about application.** So what are the implications for Clearcreek? Well as far as a diaconal model goes, there are only a few passages in scripture to guide us. These include the Acts 6 passage from this morning and the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. Therefore much of our model of diaconal ministry at Clearcreek falls into the realm of wisdom and principles developed from what we see in scripture. The essentials of which are the clear designation of the diaconal office and the general separation of diaconal and elder responsibilities between serving and teaching.

For those of you concerned that we are about to announce sweeping changes in our diaconal ministries, let me put your mind at ease. Our diaconal model is sound and our focus around these ministries is to clarify, emphasize, and strengthen. At our Elder's retreat last spring, we spent a good deal of time discussing and refining our understanding around the roles of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses. What I will share with you the remainder of this evening is a consolidation and synthesis of several hours of conversations into minutes of general overview.

Please understand that I cannot provide all the details tonight. So you may have a few questions. That's OK. There are two reasons for this. One, this is already a long enough message and I have no desire to set a record for the longest sermon at the Chapel. Second, and perhaps more importantly, I simply don't have all the details. This is a new ministry and we are in the early stages of developing the details. While our model and emphasis may be taking clearer shape, current scope and responsibilities should largely remain the same. But if you have do you have questions or concerns, feel free to come talk to me or your Elder to discuss.

So here is the big picture of where we are heading. First, we have in mind to emphasize a higher view and extent of the diaconal role at the Chapel. We will have a greater focus on spiritual qualifications to identify and move deacons and deaconesses more intentionally into ministry leadership and office. While it may not always be visible, Deacons especially will be working more closely with Elders in support of specific ministries and we will look to them to provide greater functional leadership. A high view also means that we will take the work in all areas of our diaconate ministries seriously. We will work more intentionally to strengthen and encourage our diaconate to sacrificially serve with a spirit of joy and gladness. We will train, teach, and discuss the Biblical character of ministry and hold one another accountable.

Second, the Elders believe it wise to establish an Elder for Diaconal Development. This, as many of you know by now, will be me. It is a new role and to some extent represents a new ministry. The Chapel Diaconate Development ministry will serve to develop and encourage Biblical servant leadership within Chapel ministries. It is a ministry aimed at emphasizing and strengthening a heart of service to others in a way that reflects Christ's love and the glory of the Gospel. And it is a ministry aimed at drawing our hearts together and toward God in unity and love.

To further define this, let me share with you the vision for this ministry that has been approved by the Elders. *"Our vision is to intentionally provide and facilitate opportunities for Chapel diaconal leaders to grow in encouragement, love, and care for others; within the spheres of corporate and flock ministry whereby physical and practical needs of ministry are met; with a desired result that draws people to joyful sacrificial service and is a reflection of the power of the Gospel to the lost."*

Within this vision we have defined several principles or values that orient this ministry. These values are at the heart of this ministry and will guide all that we do.

- We value the importance and primacy of the Elders responsibility to prayer, teaching, and shepherding the flock.
- We value the role and importance of diaconal leadership to meet the practical and physical needs of ministry within the Chapel.
- We value the role of teaching to develop a heart of sacrificial service and communicate a Biblical philosophy of diaconal ministry.
- We value the body of Christ and the critical role of diaconal leadership in sustaining the light and life of ministry within the Chapel.
- We value a diaconal ministry that has a practical emphasis of Christ's love to people.
- We value a diaconal ministry that is a visible expression of Christ's love to both the Chapel and the lost.

Much of the role, as the title of this role implies, will be to develop the overall mission and strengthen the diaconate across all ministries. This will include teaching and edifying within the Chapel on the importance and Biblical function of the diaconate as opportunities permit. Our aim is to provide teaching events for communicating our philosophy of diaconal ministry, shepherding and encouragement, and strengthening of our diaconal leadership. Additionally, I will be working and coordinating with other Elders to organize and develop diaconal leadership and service in the spheres of corporate and flock ministries.

Much of this role will be to communicate and encourage a Biblical philosophy or approach to diaconal ministry. This will include organizing and facilitating teaching and meetings intended to develop diaconal leadership and discuss attitudes and obstacles to ministry. Much of the work will be to engage and work with Elders and diaconal leaders to organize their ministry teams and orient them toward joyful and sacrificial service. Similarly, I will be working with the Elders to ensure that we are consistently organized and poised for diaconal service within our flocks. And lastly, this role will work to plan and coordinate overlapping spheres of diaconal care as needed.

It may also be helpful to define what the role or model is not. While there will be an Elder for Diaconal Development, there will be no ministry team or committee. While we may gather deacons and deaconesses together from time to time, there is no intention here to form a Deacon Board or leadership team. We remain committed to the Biblical model of the diaconate serving under the authority of Elders as assigned to specific roles and tasks of service to the Church.



To that end, the deaconate at Clearcreek will consist of those who are in specific roles, in positions of leadership, in Elder support, or have been assigned to diaconal office. The fact is that many of you are engaged in roles of service to the Chapel. This may include ushers, facility maintenance, nursery workers, and event coordination and assistance to name just a few. These are important and needed roles of service without which we could not function as a church. But not all roles will be titled or require the office of Deacon. This will be reserved for those who are spiritually qualified and will use their gifts to serve as assigned by the Elders.

It makes sense that while many of you serve in diaconal roles, not all will seek or may be qualified for the office of Deacon or Deaconess. By necessity, the majority of our deacons and deaconesses will be those in leadership roles. As we move forward, we will put additional emphasis on requiring those who serve in leadership roles to be Biblically qualified for the office of Deacon and Deaconess. In addition to those in leadership roles, others who are Biblically qualified may be called and assigned to specific diaconate tasks in support of ministry and service to the body of Christ at the Chapel.

Another point the Elders agreed to was that as we move forward in developing our diaconate, we will work toward a more consistent enlistment and approval process. This includes more intentional development of people to move into diaconal roles as well as more formal recognition of those who hold diaconate offices, much as we do with Elders today. We believe this is consistent with the practice of the early church in Acts 6 and supports a high view of the diaconate office.

Over the months to come, I will be working with each of the Elders to identify those in diaconate leadership and those qualified for diaconate office. It is our intention to publically recognize these individuals, those currently in diaconal office and those we formally assign to diaconate ministry moving forward. We want the congregation to know who our diaconal leaders are and what they are responsible for doing. Similarly, as people step out of the diaconate office, we will communicate this to the Chapel family as well.

Another key development defined over our Elder's retreat was the areas of diaconal service. We see diaconal ministries functioning within two spheres of service; corporately and locally within our flocks. In other words, diaconal ministry functions either in the sphere of corporate ministry or within our flock groups. The corporate sphere includes children's ministries, church events, facilities, and other church-wide areas of service and mercy. The local sphere includes ministries of mercy to flock-members, flock organization, and Elder support to the flock.

Within these two spheres our model of diaconal service falls within three primary roles. These are roles of mercy, ministry management, and Elder support. If you combine the two spheres and three roles you have six general areas where diaconal service functions. The following chart depicts these areas and examples of diaconal ministry.

	<b>Corporate Level</b>	<b>Local (Flock)</b>
<b>Mercy</b>	Hospitality, Chapel Care	Flock Needs
<b>Ministry Mgmt</b>	Finance, Children, Youth, Facilities, Music	Flock Organizer
<b>Elder Support</b>	BILD, Counseling	Deacon running a flock

It is our desire to work at maintaining and strengthening a vibrant diaconal ministry at Clearcreek that is a clear and ever present example of Christ's love. We believe that diaconal ministry is critical to enabling Elders to pray and teach as their primary ministry. We believe that Biblical diaconal ministry demonstrates our mutual dependence and interdependence upon Christ who is our model of sacrificial service to the Church. As Elders, we want to emphasize the value and joy of sacrificial service in expressing the glory and power of the gospel to both the church and to the lost. Diaconal service is a vital expression of unity and humility within the body that results in genuine concern and care for one another.

Let me close by reading **Philippians 2:4-8**. Here is another passage to reflect on as we consider the character of diaconal service. Listen as I read. *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* Christ is the model of sacrificial service to the Church. This is the high standard of serving as a deacon or deaconess in the Church. Let us serve and minister to one another well in the grace that God supplies.

Let's close in prayer.