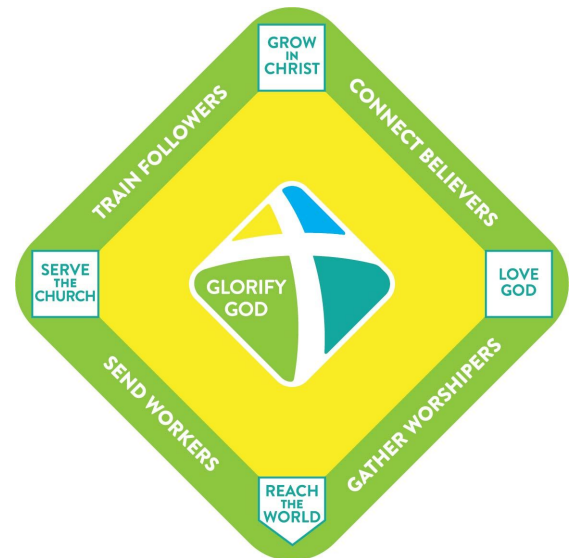


Serve the Church

John 13:1-17

Our discipleship pathway at Oakwood is a baseball diamond. Jesus wants followers, not fans. He wants all of us to get in the game! The four bases are an invitation to be players in the kingdom of God. It starts with **first base - loving God** with all you are. That's what the fall sermon series, Rejoice in the Lord - was all about. We need to fix our joy in Christ alone, delighting in Him above all.

We gather to worship Jesus but we don't stop there - we let our devotion grow into discipline so that we can **pursue maturity in Christ. That is second base.** By getting connected into a small group at the church, we seek to grow ourselves and challenge those around us to become more and more like Jesus. **Third base is serving the church**, and that's what this series is about. If we are going to be fruitful for the Lord we need everyone who is a part of Oakwood doing your part.



Then we head for **home plate - sending workers** into the harvest fields to reach the world. **Love-Grow-Serve-Reach.** And in the center of it all is the glory of God. At the center of all we do is the ultimate purpose to honor and please the Lord. The cross is the primary way that Jesus brought glory to the Father, and the Gospel is the fuel of our worship, discipleship, service and mission.

Join me in John 13 and let's try to enter the drama of this moment. **Jesus is about to die.** It is Thursday evening. The cross is looming before him like a deadly spectre. Jesus leads his disciples to an upper room so they can celebrate **the Passover** together one more time - breaking bread, remembering the lamb that was slain so the angel of death would pass over the homes of the Israelites, and drinking cups of wine to commemorate God's mighty deliverance of His people.

Before they can celebrate this ancient Jewish memorial, before they can really appreciate all God has done for them to save them from slavery, to protect them from His wrath; before they can enjoy a meal together, **something has to be done about their feet.** In those days it was customary for the host of a meal to arrange for his guests to be cleaned up before they ate together. Usually the lowest servant in the house would manage this task. But if there was no servant in the house, it was the duty of the host himself to wash the feet of his guests.

On another occasion Jesus went to a dinner at the home of **a Pharisee named Simon** - a prominent and respected religious leader. Jesus was reclining with the other guests when a “woman of the city” came in - that’s code for a woman of questionable reputation. This outcast from respectable society had heard about Jesus - about his love and mercy - and wanted to see him for herself. Imagine her boldness to come into this house filled with “holy people,” the religious and social elite who would never associate with her personally and probably tried on numerous occasions to have her thrown out of town.

This sinful woman came into the party and went straight to Jesus. Around her neck she carried a precious flask of perfumed ointment - no doubt her most valuable possession and one she needed to carry out her occupation. But she fell at Jesus’ feet and started to weep. He did not shoo her away. He did not look down on her in judgment. He saw her act for what it was - a profession of faith and allegiance. She was bowing before Jesus asking Him to forgive her, to save her, to accept her as one of his. The Pharisees would never have accepted her. But in a stunning turn of events, Jesus did!

Overwhelmed by gratitude, this woman bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. This may look glamorous in your mind but it wasn’t. It was an ironic moment - on one level quite disgusting as the dirt and dung from the streets moved from Jesus’ filthy feet onto the woman’s hair; but on another level it was profoundly beautiful. Here was a sinner being forgiven; an outcast being welcomed in; the one washing dirty feet being washed clean herself; a broken person being made whole; the unloved, for the first time, being loved.

Jesus pulled the Pharisee aside and said:

“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but ***she has wet my feet with her tears*** and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in ***she has not ceased to kiss my feet***. You did not anoint my head with oil, but ***she has anointed my feet with ointment***.” Luke 7:44-46

The wealthy, well respected host did nothing for Jesus, his guest. The sinful outcast washed his feet with her tears and hair, poured out her most valuable possession onto his feet and never stopped kissing his feet in grateful joy. What a striking contrast!

We have ***an even more shocking scene here in John 13***. Jesus is the host of this dinner, so the care of the guests is his responsibility. But everyone would expect a famous Rabbi like Jesus to delegate this responsibility - probably to the least important disciple, or more likely, to the women who travelled with his group. Foot washing was the work of a slave - the lowest one. Everyone in those days was used to this - most of them came from common homes so they had all “done their time” as the lowest in their family, washing Dad’s dirty feet when he came in.

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands... rose from supper. **He laid aside his outer garments**, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin **and began to wash the disciples' feet.**” John 13:3-5

Think of it like this. **You don't have a dishwasher**, so for several years it is your task to wash all of the dishes by hand. Then one day you have a dishwasher installed! Ah, the joy! Now there is a machine to help with this task! A couple more years go by and your younger brother grows up so now it's his job to rinse the dishes and put them away, you have graduated up to the more prestigious duty of taking out the trash. (This reminds me of the joke, “What do you do when the dishwasher stops working? You tell him to get back to work!”)

The point is that we all have things like this.

- You used to wash your car, now you pay to have it detailed.
- You used to mow your own lawn, now you pay a service to have that done.
- You used to scrub your own bathrooms, now you have a cleaning lady who comes once a week.

It's not that you *can't* do these tasks anymore, it's just that you *don't* do them anymore. You used to, but you've graduated. **You've “done your time,”** like it was a prison sentence and now you're free.

That's exactly how all twelve disciples felt when they arrived in that upper room. They were looking around at each other thinking, “**Andrew**, you're the youngest - get to it!” or “**Thaddaeus**, no one remembers your name, come on!” or “**Judas**, everyone knows you're sketchy, do something to prove us wrong!” Peter, James and John, the big three, should have taken the lead. Jesus had already taught them numerous times that the greatest in the kingdom was the one who served - not to lord it over the others, but to be considerate of them. But they all missed the point - they missed the opportunity.

Now, before we rush to judgment on the disciples who were so dumb and slow to catch on - let the arrow of God's Word hit the target of your own heart - because we are ALL guilty of this.

Every one of us has had this thought, “**I did my time.**”

- I used to work in the nursery but that's on to someone else now.
- I used to clean and plunge the toilets here, but thankfully I'm not a deacon at the moment.
- I used to slave away on those work days, but the younger folks can start pulling their weight.
- I used to help with this or that but not anymore - “I did my time.”

Can we agree together as a church family that we will banish that phrase from our usage?

Come into the upper room with Jesus. Look around at the other 11 guys. Realize that everyone else in the room is thinking the same thing you are - “It's not my job. It's someone else's turn. I've done my time.”

When that thought rises in your mind, answer it with the words of Jesus in verse. 12 –

Let's banish the phrase: "I've done my time."

"Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, ***your Lord and Teacher***, have washed your feet, ***you also ought to wash one another's feet.***" John 13:12-14

Jesus did the unthinkable. He got on his knees and started washing the disciples' feet. ***Consider how embarrassing this must have been*** on how many levels. First, because they knew Jesus was the Son of God - not just the most important human in the room, but the most important being in the universe! Second, because they knew his whole message was to love and serve sacrificially. He'd been modeling and teaching them that for three full years. This was their final exam and they all failed it miserably. As special as this moment was to be served by their Lord and teacher, it must have been tarnished as one by one they all felt their ***Master doing the work they should have been doing.***

Of course, **this is an illustration of the gospel**, and that's what Jesus tells Peter, who voices the objection the other disciples were feeling. "You'll never wash my feet!" Sure, I'll let you wash the feet of these other filthy wretches; I'm not inclined to help with that. But I'm way too righteous and impressive to let you wash my feet! And Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Let's banish the phrase "I've done my time"

- Because of all Jesus has done ***For Us***.

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And **you are clean.**" John 13:8-10

None of us could cleanse ourselves from sin. So that is precisely why Jesus came - to wash away the filth of our sin, not with his tears, but with his blood. That was the only way we could have a share with him - how we could be with him - was for him to wash us - ***to do the work we could not do ourselves.*** But because of His work, Jesus looks at his followers and says, "**You are clean.**" Hear that wonderful word today - if you have put your faith in Jesus then he says clearly and firmly to you, "You are clean. You have been washed in my blood. Your sins are no longer on you, for I have washed them away once and for all."

That is our fuel for service - remembering how Jesus served us moves us to serve others. with that gospel motivation, filled up with gratitude like the woman Jesus forgave and accepted, let's look at **three ways Jesus embraced his role as a servant** and embrace these practices and

attitudes ourselves. ***Let's take on this mindset***, which is already ours in Christ Jesus, who descended to the lowest place for us so he could raise us up to eternal life with Him.

Three keys to servanthood. First: trust The Director.. Verse 1

How to be a Servant

1. Trust *The Director*

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when ***Jesus knew that his hour had come*** to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” John 13:1

Jesus knew there was a plan. In the mystery of the incarnation, as a fully human man, there were details of the timing that it seems Jesus did not know. In the garden, soon after this meal together, Jesus prayed that the cup be taken from him - essentially asking if the plan could be changed. But Jesus overcame that temptation, saying, ***“Not my will, but yours be done.”*** Even now Jesus does not know when history will end. The Father alone knows the day and the hour. Jesus, like all of us, is trusting in the Father’s plan and awaiting His final signal.

This was the pattern for Jesus’ whole earthly ministry. In John 5 Jesus says, ***“I can do nothing on my own, but only what I see my Father doing.”*** Because of his fully human body and mind, Jesus had to learn things just like we do. He had to deal with uncertainty and lack of perfect understanding. But here in John 13:1, it says “Jesus KNEW that his hour had come.” Then in verse 3

How to be a Servant

1. Trust *The Director*

2. Commit to your *Part*

“Jesus, ***knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands***, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper...” John 13:3-4

Jesus trusted the Father’s plan. ***He was confident in the Father’s timing.*** And Jesus knew his part in the plan - ***he was committed to his role.***

Our boys have gotten into theater in the last couple of years, performing in four different musicals. Many of you came to the recent performance of ***the Music Man*** - what a fun show, opening with salesmen on a train doing a complicated syncopation, and closing with 76 trombones and the whole town of River City singing and dancing together. For a show like this to work, each person must know their role and commit to it.



This is true for the lead characters but it is just as true for the stage hands, audio technicians and ushers. ***Everyone involved has a part to play and has to know their role and commit to playing it as well as they can.*** Jesus knew his role. He knew that he had come from the Father to give his life to wash away the sins of mankind. That was his part to play. Since he had a clear understanding of his role, he did not hesitate or turn away from this specific scene - washing his disciples' feet.

Brother, sister, do you know your role? Do you trust the Father's plan? Do you trust in His timing? Are you committed to your part? The key to a good show is everyone going all in - not just doing their part to a minimum standard, but giving all they have to the performance. One of the challenges of this in theater is when you have multiple performances. For each one you have to commit again and give yourself to it!

Now, I want to be positive this morning - because there is so much to be thankful for here at Oakwood. We have an amazing church family filled with hard working servants. That was tremendously apparent during **VBS a couple of weeks ago**. We had an amazing teaching team featuring ***Gordon Raames Cress, Emeril Bustagassi, Chef Boy R D-Money Osborne, Guy Frank Fiere***, plus these two remarkable hostesses whose hair somehow changed every night... We had resilient small group leaders who managed groups that kept growing all week. We had station leaders handling registration, snacks and crafts and games. And then, of course, we had Mr. Dave running around with his air horn.

What a picture of the body of Christ wonderfully at work, with each member knowing their role and committing to their part - even when it involved challenging assignments like registering 19 new kids the day VBS started, managing 14 4-6 year olds or tying up 57 paracord bracelets. I know there were bandaids and ice packs applied. I know there were hundreds of hotdogs and burgers cooked and after everything was over, a lot of cleanup to get the building ready for our normal Sunday events.

That is a dramatic example, but I know there are dozens and **dozens of faithful volunteers** who serve in many ways every Sunday and every week so that our church functions smoothly to accomplish our mission of transforming ordinary people into fully devoted followers of Christ. All of us trust our Director and week after week we commit to our part, joyfully doing the tasks assigned to us as part of the big show we're involved in.

Let me just give one example. A couple of months ago we had a toilet acting up in the office building. **Our deacons swung into action**, getting the guts of the toilet back into working order and then very wisely replacing the old plungers on campus - one of which literally fell apart in someone's hands (Brian, I think). So when you see a new fangled plunger in a restroom, give thanks for the servant-hearted workers who have used it and had the good sense to buy a new one!

So the first key to servanthood is to trust the Director. And the second is to commit to your part.

How to be a Servant

1. Trust **The Director**
2. Commit to your **Part**

"He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and *began to wash the disciples' feet.*" John 13:4-5

When it comes to serving in the church, we should **expect things to get messy**. Jesus could have chosen any other way to teach this lesson - brush down the donkey, cook the meal, wash the dishes - but the way he chose to drive home this essential point was by washing feet.

Sometimes our thinking about service gets all turned around. We start thinking more about our own sense of fulfillment and usefulness than we do about the needs we are going to meet. **We make "ministry" into ME-nistry**. It's all about me. I'll do it if it fits *my* schedule, *my* interests and *my* expectations. And as soon as any of those things don't fit - I'm out.

The whole point of this foot-washing lesson was to jar the self-focused disciples out of their self-focused thinking. Stop trying to get people to serve you and start living like your Master. Hear these words from the Lord Jesus:

Expect to get Messy

"Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, *you also ought to wash one another's feet.* For I have given you an example, *that you also should do just as I have done to you.*" John 13:13-15

Does this sound to you like a suggestion? Does it sound optional? In case they might have missed the point, in verse 34 Jesus summed it up:

Start with your Local Church

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, *you also are to love one another*. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Notice he does not say, “A new suggestion I give to you” or “a new idea to think about.” Here is a new commandment that replaces the other commandments by fulfilling their intention. If we love one another we will not lie or steal or kill or covet or commit adultery. In fact, we’ll go beyond these “thou shall nots” to actively and joyfully serve one another as Jesus served us - making sacrifices as we put others before ourselves.

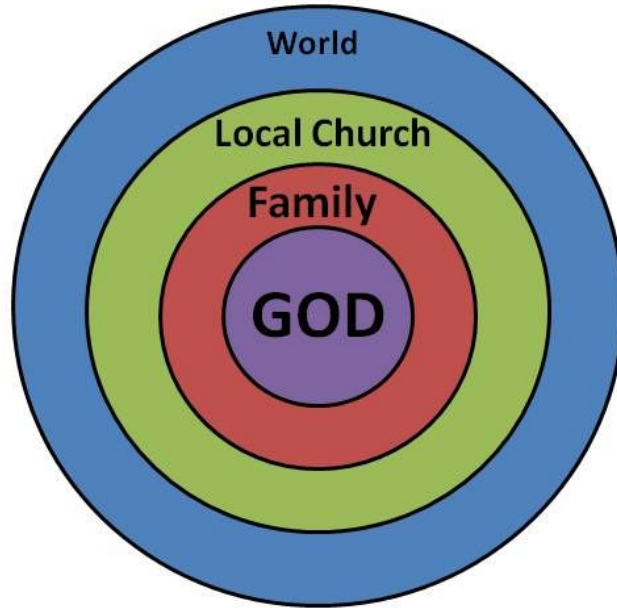
So here is the rub - do you know YOUR Role? Have you committed to YOUR Part? What does it look like for you to love your brothers and sisters in the church family here? Elsewhere Jesus teaches his followers to “love your neighbor.” We’ll get to that in the next series, Reach the World. But the defining characteristic of a Christian is how we love one another. That is how the world will know we belong to Jesus - that we love each other as he has loved us. And that is a sacrificial, serving kind of love.

Think of your ***love priorities*** in terms of concentric circles. Your top and central priority is to love God. Your next ring is to love your husband or wife - to sacrificially serve the man or woman with whom God has made you one. The third ring is to love your family, taking care of your children and then your extended family. The next ring is to love your church family. And the final ring is to love your neighbor - the people God has placed around you. Here is how Paul says it in Galatians 6:

Love Priorities

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith.*”

Galatians 6:9-10



The emphasis in the New Testament is to love and serve ONE ANOTHER in the church. We are called to love everyone but to prioritize how we love our brothers and sisters in the family of God. So let's be clear about the call to servanthood - this command relates specifically to serving IN YOUR LOCAL CHURCH. If Oakwood is your church home, then it is part of your obedience to Jesus, part of your growth in Him, to find a way to serve.

Now, lest you think that I have a conflict of interest in preaching this - listen to Jesus:

2. Commit to *Your Part*

- Expect service to be **messy**
- Start with your **Local Church**
- Anticipate Blessings after **Obedience**

“Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, ***blessed are you if you do them.***” John 13:16-17

There is a blessing for obedience here. If you know your role and you sense the Lord calling you to act, you will be blessed if you DO SOMETHING! We have all experienced this in different ways. Many of you helped pull together the 35th Anniversary Celebration. Wasn't that a blast? So many people moving chairs, setting up, amazing decorations, an encouraging program... And all who helped out were blessed, weren't you? It was a special thing to be a part of!

That is true in every area of service. We are blessed when we sacrifice something. And we are especially blessed when we make a sacrifice that no one knows about but God. In the Bible the pattern is consistent – blessing follows obedience.

2. Commit to *Your Part*

- Anticipate Blessing after **Obedience**

“Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, ***blessed are you if you do them.***” John 13:16-17

The blessings will often be spiritual, not physical, but there are ALWAYS blessings in store for the one who takes a step of obedience to the Lord.

- We all know the phrase “It is ***more blessed to give*** than receive.” You can know that from past experience, but every time you give – especially when you do it anonymously, you feel the joy of secret, generous giving.
- **Menial service** never looks like fun, but don’t you have some special memories of gruesomely hard labor? In high school and college I worked at a Bible camp in Wisconsin. One of the most fun afternoons of my teen years was when the maintenance director handed machetes to me and a friend and sent us to a back pasture that had gotten overgrown. Our hands were blistered to pieces and we got devoured by mosquitoes but hacking away at brush for 3 hours in the summer heat was an absolute blast. (But no, I don’t want to come over to your back yard this weekend. I have four boys for that now.)

“If you know these things, you are blessed if you DO THEM.” Know your part. Commit to your Role.

The people who embody this for me are my parents, especially my dad. They started attending the Evangelical Free Church in my home town just before I was born, and they are still there today, 42 years later. The two of them – like many of the longtimers here – have done just about every job at the church. Children’s ministry, youth ministry, finance, deacons, deaconesses, small groups, technology, work projects – you name it.

My dad has the spiritual gift of service. He loves to work and he is skilled to fix things. Our 60 year old house in Chicago gave him plenty of projects to work on (and still does, since we still own it he is the one going over every week to mow the grass). He’s the one the elderly woman called when her husband with advanced alzheimers needed a diaper change. He’s the one the pastor called when the gym floor needed to be resurfaced. He’s the one the missionary family with five kids called when they needed a place to stay for a one year home assignment. He’s the one – 32 years ago – that the pastor called when a 9 year old girl was dropped off at our church without a note or word of explanation.

The pastor asked my parents, “Can you take care of this girl for a few days while we figure this out?” That’s literally how we got my little sister, Sandy. There was never a shred of legal paperwork. Her mom was so desperate that she just dropped Sandy off and drove away. Sandy was legally adopted right before I officiated her wedding – so that my dad could walk her down the aisle as an Anderson. That’s my dad.

Really it’s both of my parents. Dad would be nothing without mom – as is true of all of us. Mom was the one who managed the house when there were four Andersons and five Slayton missionary kids running around it. Mom was the one who raised five kids, including three foster kids, while also helping with various committees at church.

My parents were amazing servants to their church. And they still are to this day. Do you see how they knew their part – adjusting to different roles in different seasons of life – but committing to the roles they were in? They trusted God’s timing, bringing additional kids into our family and constantly hosting missionaries and other young single people, with their exceptional gifts of hospitality and generosity. I experienced the blessings from their obedience – and truthfully, all of you have already experienced the spill over blessings from their obedience (assuming you’re glad that I’m here...). And the wonderful thing is that in their early 70s they continue to serve. It looks different than it used to. They’ve adjusted their pace. But they love to serve. And they are blessed by it, as the church is also blessed.

One final principle for servant leadership. Know your role; commit to your part and third: highlight the main storyline:

How to be a Servant

1. Know your **Role**
2. Commit to your **Part**
3. Highlight the **Main Character**

“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and **God is glorified in him.**” John 13:31

And so we come full circle. Knowing your role involves trusting the Director – his timing, goals and vision. In the end, service must never be about us – it must always be about the Main Character. The purpose of our lives is not to make much of ourselves but to make much of the Lord! This life is not about you. And the more you live thinking that it is about you, the more frustrated, disillusioned and empty you will eventually feel.

How did Jesus manage the betrayal of Judas? One of his closest friends and followers – one of the twelve – sold him out. But Jesus predicted this and knew that it had a purpose. It was necessary in the grand drama the Father was directing.

How to be a Servant

3. Highlight the **Main Character**

- It's All About **Jesus**

“The Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place *you may believe that I am he.*”
John 13:18-19

Our lives are ultimately about Jesus – about pointing other people to Him so that they may believe He is the Son of God – the Savior. That is the Big Picture, the big story. Your suffering is to showcase the sufficiency of God. Jesus is enough for you even when everything else is taken away. That is “the death by which you will glorify God.”

Your service is to showcase the glory of Jesus. It's not about you. It's not about me, or anyone else. It's all about Him. And the more we orient our lives around this big picture, this grand purpose, the more things will make sense and we will be both joyful and fruitful in the work God has given us to do.

This winter our youngest son was on a basketball team with two of Tony Dungy's kids. The Tuesday after the Super Bowl I saw Coach Dungy sitting by himself at practice so I went over to chat with him, asking him what the highlights were for him at the Super Bowl. He said his favorite moment was before the game - praying in the locker room with Nick Foles and four other believers on the Philadelphia Eagles.

Nick and the other guys were praying that God would be glorified whatever the outcome - win or lose, they prayed, Lord Jesus we want to honor you. That was a holy moment, Coach said. And those are guys who understand that Jesus is the main character of this story. We are all supporting actors and our job is to keep the spotlight on Jesus.

That is the summary for today. It's all about Jesus.

3. Highlight the **Main Character**

- It's all about **Jesus**

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

So let's learn from our Lord and Teacher. Let's embrace His mindset of humble, sacrificial service. Let's remember all He gave up to save us. Let's believe His promise that we will be blessed if we obey His teachings. And let's become a foot-washing church. Whom can you serve today? Whom can you serve this week? Start in your own house. We are servants. None of us are kings or queens. We are all slaves of Jesus.

Embrace that identity and the work that comes with it. Trust the Director. Commit to your role. Rejoice to fellowship in the sacrificial suffering of the Lord, remembering the big picture – that its all about Him anyway.