

# re:novate VI: serve

Reconnect – April 17, 2011



**Text:** I Peter 2:18-21; I Corinthians 7:21-23

**Key Thought:** If you want to grow in God, serve others well even when it hurts.

You who are domestic servants must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (I Peter 2:18-21, NLT)

**Pre-Intro: “Have A Nice Day” (Bon Jovi)**

**Intro: Have a nice day 😊**



- If you’ve ever said this not once or twice, but fifty times in a day, you’ve worked in retail
- The last census pegged 75% of Canadians as working in the service sector of the economy, with the largest group within that being – yep, you guessed it – retail, at more than 12% of all Canadians
- Just about everyone has a retail job at one point or another in their lives – whether it’s a first job at the mall, or a college job waiting tables, or a stopgap job in a career transition
- But there are many people who wind up spending their whole lives in retail – more and more of them are in it and stay in it – and they are the ones who make sure our lives run smoothly – they serve us from morning till night, and all through the night if we need it
- Think about how that works: you get out of bed in the morning and you retrieve your newspaper, which has already been put at your doorstep by your deliveryperson

- Then you head out and grab a coffee on the way to work from Tim's, served by someone who has started hours before you even woke up
- You get gas on the way to work, and even if you do pay at the pump, there is someone in the booth making sure everything is right
- You get to work and you receive deliveries, you greet your staff, you go shopping at lunch to pick up a few things – your day is shot through with retail even if that's not what you work in
- And every time you encounter someone in retail, they smile, ask you how you're doing, and they tell you to have a nice day – and if they DON'T, you are outraged at the poor service you have received
- At the end of your day, you fall into bed and sleep soundly, while taxi drivers prowl the city streets and WalMart employees stock shelves

### **The double life curse of retail and Steven Slater, the JetBlue guy**

- Retail demands a way of perceiving and interacting the world that is not natural for us as people
- We have to put all of our own feelings and situations and pressures to the side, and smile at everyone we meet, and act like they are the most important person we will meet today, even if they clearly are not or are even a jerk and there are five urgent situations demanding our attention and we just got chewed out by our boss
- Think about the JetBlue guy – after decades of life in retail, he just lost it – he was done (regardless of what actually went down there, or why) and he became a huge sensation as a folk hero, inspiring the masses who turn up “We're Not Gonna Take It” on their way home from work every day

### **Retail faith?**

- Then we come to our faith, which has a lot to say not only about how we treat people, but about how we're supposed to view them as we do – our actions and our words and our hearts, too
- Peter spoke to a particular group of Christians who had to live out this “retail faith” in circumstances that were outside their control, where sometimes it was easier and sometimes it was harder

### **Read text: I Peter 2:18-21, NLT**

**You who are domestic servants must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (I Peter 2:18-21, NLT)**

### **First question: service versus servitude?**

- But really, before we go any further, we have to address the elephant in the room on this
- A lot of times, the word that I've translated “domestic servants” is translated as “slaves”
- Isn't there a far cry between service and servitude? I mean, the application on McDonalds doesn't give them the ability to run EVERY aspect of your life – and Wal-Mart doesn't have living quarters underneath it – does it?

- We live in a “classless society” – at least we would like to believe we do – where freedom of the individual is an inalienable right and everyone is a person
- But our society has evolved to that, and most other societies through history have not been as advanced or as enlightened
- I know when I think slavery, I think of human trafficking in Africa, and I think of the Old South in the United States, civil war times
- But from everything I’ve read and learned about this passage and about the first century Roman Empire, things were somewhat different
- Peter is speaking to household slaves here – people who are tutors, butlers, cleaners, cooks, gardeners, domestic workers – but they are NOT free – so “servant” is not the right word, but “slave” might not be the right word either
- So why doesn’t Peter just tell them to “throw off their chains”? Why is he concerned that they obey harsh masters – why not just tell them that Jesus is their only master, and that they should run away?
- Some thoughts on first century slavery in the Roman Empire:
  - In the Roman Empire, slavery was pervasive, and there were different degrees of slavery – estimates run that perhaps more than a third of the population were in some degree of servitude
  - Slavery in Roman times wasn’t like the slavery of the Old South – at times, yes, it was hideous, and it did always involve a lack of freedom for the slave – but slaves were very often educated, performing roles ranging from doctor to teacher, well-treated, working alongside the free, and people would choose to sell themselves into slavery for a time, to pay off debt or to try to get ahead in the end – it wasn’t race-based, and many freed slaves became very successful in society, including positions of leadership, because they could become full Roman citizens
  - Remember, there is no social net – no unemployment, no disability, no welfare, no cheques from the government for you – if you are down on your luck, and your family doesn’t have money, then you need to find some money, and that was how you did it
  - Christianity starts out as a very tiny movement in a backwater section of the empire – remember, it comes primarily from a group of under 120 people – in a people group that derived their national identity from being freed slaves – remember the Exodus? This was their national memory...
  - And yet, the NT is shot through with the language of slavery – redemption is a slavery word – buying someone back – **Gal. 3:26-28 – For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus**
  - These first Christians, instead of trying to overthrow slavery from the get-go and being wiped out as a threat to society, decide to undermine it, instead – first, by declaring that in Jesus everyone is equal – whether you’re a slave or a master, when it comes to your faith, you are equal in standing before God, worshiping side by side – and that’s revolutionary

- Christians call themselves “slaves of Jesus” again and again, whatever their class in society is – they bring a whole new dignity to the word and identify with Jesus through radical obedience and humility
- Then, they start encouraging those of them who are slaves to be the best slaves they can be – in sections of the Bible like this – and again, suddenly your domestics are motivated? Who better to see this change in a life than the other people of a household? And a slave working harder would mean that they could earn more, and ultimately be set free or purchase their freedom sooner
- And finally, Christians also start selling themselves into slavery, to buy back slaves who are being mistreated – they start quietly subverting the empire, working the system
- It would take WAY too long for Christians to finally end slavery – long centuries after they had the influence in society to do so, they shamefully forgot their roots and they forgot the example of Christ
- But ultimately, it was Christians like William Wilberforce in the 1800’s that led to slavery being outlawed in the west – and one day, God willing, it will be that way all over the world
- But let’s face it – even if that was the big picture, life was still extremely difficult for someone who didn’t have their freedom:

“How an enslaved person, especially a household slave, was treated day to day depended almost entirely on the character and disposition of the owner. Greco-Roman laws and customs gave slave owners much leeway to act cruelly or compassionately in response to slaves, who were conventionally expected to act with fawning deception. Slaves were vulnerable to corporal punishment, including whippings that reinforced both the owners’ domination and the slaves’ lack of honour and dignity.”

– S.S. Bartchy, “Slave, Slavery” in Dictionary of the Later New Testament

### **Who do you REALLY work for? (Rights vs. responsibilities)**

- So when we bring this advice to the modern day – well, the equivalent has to be as employees – people who depend on our jobs, who don’t have the luxury of being able to walk away, who have to put up with difficulties and people in our faces
- There are those we serve because we have to (like our clients), those we serve because we want to (family members, people we like or look up to), those we serve when we feel like it (family members?), those we serve but don’t want to (like our supervisors or bosses, at least some of the time), and those we don’t serve – maybe we treat them as equals, maybe we treat them as though they are below us, but we certainly don’t serve them
- And yet, we’re confronted, both by this passage and others, and by the example of the Christians who started this way of life for us, that our calling is to serve others – even when they don’t deserve it, and especially when they don’t deserve it – just like Jesus did with all of the people he came into contact with, over and over again
- But no-one wants to serve

- we value freedom so highly in our society, in our day and age – we fight wars over it – we are trying to bring freedom, bring democracy to those who don't have it (like Afghanistan, even like Libya)
- And we value personal freedom too – so much so that we have gone from being a responsibility-based culture to being a rights-based one – instead of asking “what we can do for our country” we ask what our country can do for us – a 180 degree change
- We are very, very concerned to get what's coming to us – every advantage
- And every slight we experience is a horrible thing – that should NEVER happen – and if we are treated unfairly, we call the papers or a lawyer or make a complaint to customer service or we tell everyone far and near about what's happened
- We all want to be first among equals – no-one really wants to serve
- And anyways, that word “serve” is a dirty word, isn't it? The “service industry” – isn't that what you work in if you didn't get to go to university? And you don't make much money... the joke is “do you want fries with that”, right?
- Never mind that it's really hard work – when I see Tim Horton's on a resume, for any length of time spent there, I respect that – because they work and work and work and get treated badly for it
- I've had the chance to have all kinds of “service jobs” – and it's not easy to continually put a smile on your face and ask people how you can help them, when you might be tempted to stab someone in the eye
- But we can serve others because we know that our lives are in God's hands – He's the one who pays people back, He's the one who knows people's hearts – we are in good with the ultimate boss of everyone, and He knows what we're going through
- We don't need to agitate, or whine, or self-promote, or make sure that people are seeing us, because our God sees all of it and He is working on our behalf

### **On serving (tips): (discussion)**



- “Humility is a servant's true dignity” – Edwardian England servant motto
- “you don't know how much of a servant you are until you're treated like one”
- Keep smiling

## Key Thought:

# TAKE IT HOME:

**If you want to grow in God,  
serve others well even when it hurts.**

Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you – but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don't become slaves of people.



**1 Corinthians 7:21-23, NLT**

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## Conclusion:

- Where I've come from (Grandpa Harris and Great-Aunt Rose) and their outlook on their servitude, what I want my kids to inherit – freedom with limits, choosing to serve
- Grandpa Harris working as a domestic servant – no freedom as one of the Home Children – my Great-Aunt Rose working as a maid in the Domestic Service in Britain – dropped off at an orphanage by my Great-Grandmother after my Great-Grandfather's death
- That life seems a million miles away to me – because no matter how many service jobs I've had, no matter how many different bosses I've had (some very good, some mean and some ridiculous), no matter what I've been through, at the end of the day I was still master of my own destiny – to think of anything else is jarring – more from a nightmare than anything else
- Serving like Jesus did – a slave has no rights at all, nothing – and Christ became that for us, His will was set aside to do what God the Father wanted
- Including going to the cross

**Response: the Lord's supper – "In Christ Alone" (band)**