

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Service and Helps

by Dan Trygg

“According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: ... <sup>7</sup> if service, in the service”

Romans 12:6,7

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> 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.”

1 Peter 4:10-11

“And God has placed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues.”

1 Corinthians 12:28

Sometimes there is no replacement for doing the “leg work” in order to gain an appreciation for a biblical word, so I thought I would go through all the times that “service” occurs in the Bible, both in the Hebrew and the Greek, and see when the Greek word for “service” used in the NT came up in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. This would give me a historical background for this term. **I should have just looked up “*diakonia*” or “*diakonos*”, ...I could have saved myself a lot of time.** I spent a couple of hours looking up each Hebrew word, and checking out the Greek equivalent, only to find out that **those Greek words only occur four times in the entire Septuagint translation of the OT. They occur only in the book of Esther for personal attendants to the king** (1:10; 2:2; 6:3,5). **Of the other 103 instances where the Hebrew word for “service” occurs, the predominant word used to translate it was a stem meaning “work”.** On 32 occasions, the simple stem for “work” was used (*ergon*), ...and an additional 51 times a compound form, meaning “public work” or “work of or for the people”, was used (*leit + ergon = leitourgon*, from which we derive “liturgy”). **Almost all of it was about physical work of some kind.**

This was true for the word “*diakonia*” as well. It was a non-religious Greek term, and it simply meant “service”. **It usually was used to describe someone who attended to the needs or commands of another person.** As my “leg work” study of the OT confirmed, it was *virtually unused* as a translation for any Hebrew terms. The few times it was used in Esther, it was used to describe an attendant to the king. These attendants carried out his commands and were ready to meet his needs. Interestingly, this word is only used in the context of this Gentile king, and his servants. It was *not* used to refer to any activities or responsibilities within the religious establishment of Israel. **To the Jews, it would have been a totally non-religious term. In the Greek culture, it referred to someone who was at the ready and attentive to meet the needs of whomever they were responsible to serve. This is a key distinctive of this kind of servant, ...they were attentive to anticipate and recognize needs, and took action to meet those needs,** often even *before* being asked. This particular word for “servant” (*diakonos*) was used in the NT 29 times (Matt. 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mk. 9:35; 10:43; Jn. 2:5, 9; 12:26; Rom. 13:4; 15:8; 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:15,23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7, 23,25; 4:7; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12; 4:6), and the word for “service” (*diakonia*) was used an additional 34 times (Lk. 10:40; Acts 1:17,25; 6:1, 4; 11:29; 12:25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 12:7; 15:31; 1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; 2 Cor. 3:7-9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1,12,13; 11:8; Eph. 4:12; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:5,11; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 2:19). In addition, the verbal form (*diakoneō*) occurs another 37 times (Matt. 4:11; 8:15; 20:28; 25:44; 27:55; Mk. 1:13,31; 10:45; 15:41; Lk. 4:39; 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26,27; Jn. 12:2,26; Acts 6:2; 19:22; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 3:3; 8:19,20; 1 Tim. 3:10, 13; 2 Tim. 1:18; Phlm. 1:13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:12; 4:10,11). So, what was a *virtually unused* word in the OT, became a *very significant word* in the NT scriptures (over 100 times).

**A weird thing happened in the history of the English language that has obscured and confused our understanding of this word.** In 1611, at the time of the translation of the King James Version, **the word “ministry” and the word “service” were almost synonymous. “Ministry” was a functional word, not a religious word.** We can still see this original meaning in the titles of certain government offices, like the Prime Minister, or the Minister of Finance, or the Minister of Defense. The term “minister” in these public offices harks back to original meaning, which meant “servant” or “one who carried out the command of another”. We still use the terminology of “a public servant” for people in political office, because they are supposed to be serving us, the public. **So, when the Bible was originally translated into English, the choice of the word “ministry” was a legitimate and good word to use. Over time, however, for many of us, the word, “ministry” has come to have a more religious connotation that would have been foreign to the original Greek word.** What that means is that we tend to “read-in” notions of Bible study, prayer, church activities, and pastoral responsibilities into passages that were not meant to narrowly describe such things. The “work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12) has become a rather poor and narrow translation of what the original meant to say, “the work of service”. **Any place where you read “ministry” in the NT, you should substitute the word “service”** to avoid thinking in terms that were not intended by the original writer. We should be starting from a *literal* understanding of

“service”, ...and then possibly extend that metaphorically to include serving other people’s spiritual needs. Instead, by using “ministry”, we tend to exclude all the other ways we could or should be serving others.

**Well, what about the spiritual gift of service?** The word, “service”, here is that same word, *diakonia*. **The spiritual gift of service could be defined as a uniquely enabled and prompted ability to watch for and anticipate the needs of others and be ready, willing, able and activated to meet those needs.** If you think of a good table waiter at a restaurant, they will anticipate your needs, and will be on hand to provide whatever you may desire or need. An exceptional servant would be able to do that even before you asked. **This is the fundamental defining aspect of a person with a gift of service, ...the anticipation and initiative to meet needs, oftentimes before a person would ask for help.** A person with a spiritual gift of service will be willing and eager to serve others in practical ways, and will often offer that service *before* the recipient would even *expect* anyone to do such a thing. **The readiness to serve will stand out in a very clear, amazing way. The grace of God will flow through that person in concrete actions.**

Now we need to move a bit from the literal meaning of that word “service” to include some broader, metaphorical expressions. **Anticipating or recognizing someone’s emotional or spiritual needs, and being ready and willing to support and serve in specific, pragmatic ways, ...like meeting other types of needs in order to offer support, or give relief, or help relieve emotional pressure..., can also be expressions of this gift. A person with the gift of service will think to do concrete, practical things that will help to lighten the load of the brother or sister in need, to ease their burden or help them through a difficult time.**

**People with the gift of service will often team up with a person who has the spiritual gift of helps.** The word for “helps” is *antilempsis*. **It refers to someone who takes hold of something “over against” or “on the other side of”, or “in partnership with” someone else.** It is the epitome of partnership in a momentary project. **This person is very willing to get involved and participate in response to someone else’s initiative or need.** The word does not necessarily describe a joint and equal partnership, it describes a person willing to assist someone else. **He offers help, aid, assistance, or does beneficial acts in order to help, support or assist someone.** This word is used in the Septuagint Greek translation in Psalm 22:1,19; 83:9; 84:5; 89:18, and Psa. 108:8. In some of these texts, it is used to describe help as in deliverance, strength, protection (as in a shield or even a helmet). **It is used to translate the Hebrew word ‘ezrah, or ‘ezer, which means help or assistance, and implies someone who can do things you cannot do on your own.** So, oftentimes a person with the gift of helps has developed particular skills or abilities that other people do not commonly have, and this person freely volunteers their assistance. It is not a “less than” role, necessarily, ...because God Himself is referred to by this word. **The person with the gift of helps often can bring skills or abilities that you do not have, in order to solve a problem, meet a need, or offer support. Sometimes it is as simple as an unusual and consistent willingness to offer assistance, no matter what is needed.** The person with the gift of helps will be led by the Spirit to “show up to help” over and over again. This person becomes known for that.

**The distinction between these two gifts seems to entail the anticipatory watchfulness and creative initiative that seems to belong to the gift of service.** A person with this gift will see a present or potential need, and maybe even develop a larger plan to serve or address this issue. **The person with this gift will often serve in ways that are not asked for, or required. They just like to serve.** They think of the comfort of the person, or how they might be a blessing to them by their actions, and *they will often go beyond expectations and surprise the person they are serving with their creativity, concern, or the extent of their care.* **They often can develop and oversee long-term commitments to care for others, ...as in distributing food, or serving the homeless or needy. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit to take action to get involved, and they find ways to accomplish the goal. They often will recruit people with the gift of helps to join them in their schemes or projects to do good things for others.** They can often coordinate the collection and distribution of goods and services to others who need them. **Those with the gift of helps are willing to assist and support, but they do not seem to have the same anticipatory vision. Their gift seems to be inspired in response to a specific need that becomes known to them, or they are willing to volunteer to help with others who make the plan or set up the organizational structure. They are willing to “plug in” to help, but they tend not to be the planners, schemers, or administrators that envision and initiate action to serve.**

**Each of us has received a special spiritual gift. We are stewards of the gift we have been given, and are to be actively involved in serving God by serving others, according to our gifting. Every gift matters.** Every ministry is important. **The Spirit-enabled ability to see the needs of people, or to envision creative ways to practically support and encourage others through thoughtful, kind and practical acts of service is powerful.** **The willingness to get involved and volunteer your help, ...your presence, your strength, your hands-on involvement to benefit others..., not only meets particular needs in the Body, it demonstrates love in practical and visible ways.** Jesus said, “Let your light shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). **The Spirit-prompted initiatives to serve and help establish a backdrop of good will that opens people up to God.**