

“In this world of swagger, Jesus calls us not to be served but to serve—him, one another, and the whole world. That happens beautifully as we come together in churches with our Lord’s servant heart. Thank you, Steve, for writing this book and inspiring all of us to give our hearts away!”

RAY ORTLUND, Renewal Ministries, Nashville, TN;
Author, *You’re Not Crazy*

“Drawing on 20 years of church leadership experience, Steve teaches us how and why we should serve in the church, motivates us to follow the example of Jesus from a heart of love for him, and encourages us to persevere in service. Study questions make this short book ideal to read and discuss in small groups. Every church will be strengthened if they read this stirring challenge.”

JOHN STEVENS, National Director, FIEC, UK

“One of the wonderful privileges of belonging to God’s family is that we get to serve him by serving one another. But it doesn’t always feel like a privilege. It’s easy to lose our sense of purpose and motivation, and become weary and discouraged. In this delightful book, Steve reminds us of the ‘who’ and ‘why’ of our serving. This book left me humbled by my Saviour’s example, grateful for opportunities to reflect his servant heart and determined to joyfully follow his example.”

CAROLYN LACEY, Author, *Say the Right Thing*
and *(Extra)Ordinary Hospitality*

“In this warm, pastoral book, Steve Robinson provides us with a resource that is biblically rich and deeply relatable for why serving one another is vital to being a healthy church. Read it to remember how Jesus has meaningfully included us in his work. But even more than that, read it to remember the glory and beauty and example of the God whom we are serving.”

ADAM RAMSEY, Lead Pastor, Liberti Church, Gold Coast,
Australia; Director, Acts29 Asia Pacific; Author, *Truth on Fire*

“This little book is simple, clear, warm and practical. It’s definitely worth a few pounds of anybody’s money.”

MEZ McCONNELL, Director, 20Schemes,
Author, *The Least, the Last and the Lost*

“*Serve* is a gift to Christ’s church. It calls us into joyful and costly labours driven by a hope-filled and realistic vision of the church. If you are wondering whether you can serve your church family, what this might look like or how to go about it, you will find much wisdom and warmth here. There is a great joy in serving alongside Jesus, in the hard times as well as the easy. Steve knows this personally and his book invites us to this sort of Christlike ministry.”

JOHN HINDLEY, Pastor, BroadGrace Church, Norfolk, UK;
Author, *Serving without Sinking* and *Refreshed*

“Steve points us to a critical and often underdeveloped element of life in the body of Christ: service to one another. Serving, as he points out, is an essential and inescapable part of the Christian life. Where has God placed you? How has he made you? What opportunities are in front of you? Live in light of your King, and lovingly serve him by serving those around you.”

TONY MERIDA, Pastor, Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, NC; Author,
Love Your Church and *Gather*

“I was so strengthened by this book. Steve Robinson gets right to the heart of many barriers church members face when we don’t know where or how to serve, or when our passion to serve runs dry. This book is chock-full of Scripture, wisdom, and helpful stories. It’s motivating rather than guilt-inducing, uplifting rather than overwhelming. Read it with your friends from church and be encouraged and equipped to start serving—or keep serving—together!”

JEN OSHMAN, Author, *Cultural Counterfeits* and *Welcome*

“This little gem reflects the cheerful and humble servant-heartedness of its author... and his Servant-Saviour! Here is encouraging, wholesome, down-to-earth biblical wisdom for serving God and his church with a smile as the people God has created us to be, with the gifts God has entrusted to us, in the circumstances God has placed us in.”

RICHARD COEKIN, Senior Pastor, Dundonald Church, London;
CEO, CoMission

“Oftentimes, the idea of serving in our local churches comes from a posture of obligation rather than a response to the gospel. This book makes a compelling argument for a gospel-driven heart of serving others with compassion in Jesus’ name. Inspiring, impassioned and thoughtful, *Serve* will provoke discussions and prompt change, bringing about gospel-centered results for many years.”

DOUG LOGAN, JR., President, Grimké Seminary and College;
Author, *On the Block*

“Wise, clear and fortifying, here is a book that proves we can serve Christ and his church with love and joy even through the tough times. Steve Robinson shows how the gospel enables us to serve wholeheartedly, whatever our situation, even in our weaknesses and failures. Read and be encouraged!”

MICHAEL REEVES, President, Union School of Theology;
Author, *Rejoice and Tremble*

“Consumerism used to be one vice among many—yet today it’s one of the most widely-agreed-upon foundations for the good life. We desperately need a more compelling vision. With pastoral warmth and biblical wisdom, Steve Robinson calls us back to the beauty of being conformed into the image of the one who came not to be served but to serve. I’m confident this book will help equip many to give their lives away for the glory of God and the good of others.”

JOSH KOURI, Lead Pastor, Frontline Church, Oklahoma City, OK

“I can’t think of anyone better suited to write a book on this subject! I have had the privilege of watching this brother lovingly serve his family and his church through some of the toughest seasons imaginable and he has done so humbly, faithfully and in ways that modelled dependence on and devotion to Jesus. I pray that what’s written in these pages will encourage and inspire you to serve the Son of Man who didn’t come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for you.”

DAI HANKEY, Church planter; Founder, Red Community;
Author, *Hopeward*



serve

STEVE ROBINSON

the goodbook
COMPANY



Serve

Loving Your Church with Your Heart, Time and Gifts

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To my wife, Siân –

*I am so thankful that the Lord gave me you to serve
alongside. You are a blessing to many. Love you.*

To my children, Ella, Lilly, Elijah and Joshua –

*I pray you will know the joy of serving Jesus and his church.
Love you.*

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FOREWORD

BY BRIAN HOWARD

Throughout the centuries, countless Christians have heeded the call to serve, driven by their faith and the teachings of Christ. Their stories of devotion and sacrifice are woven into the tapestry of our history, reminding us of the transformative power of service and inspiring us to follow in their footsteps. Christians have manifested service by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick and providing shelter to the homeless. They have fought for justice, advocated for the marginalized, and stood as voices of compassion in the face of adversity. They have served God, their families, communities, and local churches. Many Christians who have long since gone to be with Jesus are known by us today because of their lives of service.

One record of this servant-hearted approach to life is found on a tombstone in North Hampton, Massachusetts, that reads:

Sacred to the memory of the Rev. David Brainerd. A faithful and laborious Missionary to the Stockbridge,

Delaware, and Susquehanna Tribes of Indians, who died in this town. Oct. 10, 1747.

David Brainerd was often sick, struggled with depression, and only lived to be 29 years old. But because he was willing to use what he had to serve God, there are several hundred Native Americans who owe their everlasting life to his ministry.

In today's world, where self-interest often dominates, the concept of service is not on the societal intuitive front-burner in any way. But serving does remain the essence of the Christian life. Through living a life of Christ-like service, we have the opportunity to be used by God to transform those around us as they encounter a countercultural way of living. Christians who view life through the lens of service have the opportunity to reshape our communities and impact the lives of those around us in profound ways.

Over my 35 years of adulthood and 33 years of ministry, I have endeavored to serve as a way of life. This commitment for me seems to be essential for living in a gospel-centered way. I was motivated first by understanding that Jesus had come not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). I read of the apostle Paul describing himself as a servant (Romans 1:1). I found Epaphroditus in Philippians 2 and noticed that Paul said he deserved to be honored simply for his mundane acts of service. And then I learned about serving from watching my dad put our family first and being mentored by older leaders who served well.

As a college student, I began to look for opportunities to serve. I joined a church-planting team. I served in a local church by leading worship and teaching the Bible to a few teenagers. After college, I married and began a 30-year-long journey of serving my wife. Over these years, we raised four (now adult) children. Throughout my time in vocational ministry, I have looked to serve God, the local church and my neighbors. My aim has always been to see myself as a servant. I do not have a perfect record of doing so, but I have sought to remain true to this commitment.

So it is with great pleasure that I introduce this excellent book by Steve Robinson, which explores the depth and beauty of Christians serving as a way of life. I have known Steve for many years, and he has devoted his life to gospel-centered service to God, his family, his community and his church. Within the pages of this profoundly helpful work, you will embark on a journey that delves into the beauty and depth of serving as a way of life. Steve examines the biblical teaching that underpins the dedication to serving as a way of life. And he explores the deep-rooted connection between Christian faith and service, illuminating the theological foundations that have propelled individuals and communities to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Christians are called to bring hope, love and compassion to those around us. At its core, service is an expression of love—of God and of those around us. It is a selfless

act that transcends personal gain and embraces the example of Jesus himself. Ultimately, this book serves as a rallying call to all Christians, inviting us all to embrace serving as a way of life. It challenges us to examine our priorities, question our motivations and live our lives as an embodiment of Christ's teachings. As you read this excellent book, may you be inspired, encouraged and empowered to live a life of service, infused with the love and compassion that lies at the heart of Christianity.

Brian Howard
President, Acts29

1. WHO DO WE SERVE?

My wife and I are two of the tens of millions of people who became hooked on the TV series *Downton Abbey*. We were fascinated by the lives of the aristocratic Crawley family and their domestic servants on their fictional country estate in early 20th-century Britain. We enjoyed it so much that we even became members of the National Trust.

For a working-class lad born into a two-up-two-down house in a deprived area of Liverpool in the 1970s, my experience (like most people's) is a million miles away from the aristocratic families who used to reside in these grand mansions. But I confess that I have said to my wife, Siân, on several—ok, on many—occasions that I think I could *just about* have handled that life. I especially think this on day trips to country houses as we pass through grand studies, enormous living rooms and vast grounds.

The other area of these households that fascinates me is what was known as the “downstairs”. The life of these

old aristocratic homes was kept going by the service of those who lived and worked downstairs—the butlers, footmen, lady's maids, cooks and kitchen hands. These roles were taken up by local people who lived within the house and served the families that employed them. It wasn't viewed as casual employment but as a dedication of their lives to service and, hopefully, if the family were kind, a dedication to that particular family. To do the best job, these staff had to know exactly who they were serving—by learning the ins and outs of the master's and mistress's habits, likes, dislikes and temperaments. They also needed to serve each other through their different roles downstairs—the cook still needed to prepare staff meals and the maids still needed to lay the fires for the staff. And outside of the household, they were fully aware that they represented that family to the surrounding towns and villages that relied on the success of the House. They were serving their master, each other and the local community.

Like the servants in these grand houses, as Christians we are called to serve. One way of describing what happens when someone becomes a Christian is to say that they have “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). The word “servant” doesn't *fully* describe who we are as Christians, but it is *part* of who we are as Christians. And, just as in those country houses, when it comes to our service, who we are serving matters more than what we are doing in our serving. In

other words, we need to know first and foremost exactly who it is we are serving. Really understanding this will be the foundation that determines why and how we serve, and will give purpose and meaning to our lives.

WE SERVE GOD

Genesis 1 declares that we have been made in the image of God. God's plan and desire in his design was for humanity to display his image here on earth. As people walked, worked, played, interacted, engaged in relationships, had children (multiplying more image-bearers) and created culture, his glory would increase. God gave humans everything we needed to represent and serve him fully. We were to live a life of joyful service with our Master walking beside us. Not with him living upstairs and us living downstairs but with God's presence right in our midst, with him being glorified in our service.

But the desire to be served and the desire for self-glory captured the affections of the first humans. As a result of their disobedience to God's word, sin entered the world, and the human image of God was distorted. Our intentions became selfish, and we lost sight of the God whom the first humans had joyfully served, and we became afraid of him. Humanity was cast out of his life-giving presence, with death becoming our ultimate destiny—this is the tragedy recounted in Genesis 3. In the book of Romans, Paul sums it up like this: