

DR. MIGUEL NÚÑEZ

SERVANTS FOR HIS GLORY

*Cultivating
Christlikeness
in a World of
Performance*



To be a spiritual leader requires a biblical understanding of being a servant. This excellent book by Miguel Núñez shows us the way. I wish I could place it in the hands of every pastor. They would serve Christ and their church more faithfully.

Daniel L. Akin, president,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The world measures success by metrics and outcomes. Sadly, worldly success has influenced the church and even how Christians approach serving the Lord. In *Servants for His Glory*, Dr. Miguel Núñez argues that God calls us to a different standard. Our doing should flow out of our being. And if we are to serve the Lord in a manner that seeks to make him, not us, famous, we must do so in a manner that reflects his character. If you long to be a useful servant that lives for God's glory, I encourage you to pick up this book.

Juan R. Sanchez, senior pastor, High Pointe
Baptist Church, Austin, Texas and author of *The Leadership
Formula: Develop the Next Generation of Leaders in the Church*

So much of the literature on Christian leadership puts the proverbial cart before the horse, focusing on the "how" of leadership but skipping over some fundamental questions of identity. That's why *Servants for His Glory* is so important. Miguel Núñez has given Christian leaders a clear and urgent call, reminding us that godly and effective leadership is most profoundly anchored in what it means to know and follow the risen Christ.

Matthew J. Hall, provost and senior vice president of
Academic Administration, The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

This book of wisdom, distilled from the pages of Scripture and decades of faithful service in the church, offers help to those in the pulpit and in the pew to learn how to be a servant. May this

book help all God's people learn how to serve from wellsprings of humility, courage, conviction, and grace. Ultimately, may it encourage us all to be sanctified servants, growing in holiness for the glory of God.

Stephen J. Nichols, president of Reformation Bible College and chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries

In an age that has so much pontificating but so little learning, this text is full to bursting with wisdom. Written by a godly man who is an experienced pastor-theologian, it is surgically discerning and continually convicting. This is, quite simply, one of the best books on the Christian life I've ever read.

Owen Strachan, author of *Reenchanting Humanity* and *Always in God's Hands* and professor, Midwestern Seminary

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INTRODUCTION

All literary works have both a motivation and an intention. Motivation is what moves the author to dedicate time and effort to write down the thoughts and ideas which have filled his mind so that they can be shared with others. Quite often, the author of a book spends years researching and reflecting on the subject about which he seeks to write, so much so that he is finally able to organize his ideas so they fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. At this point, many of us move forward in an effort to write for the benefit of others. Intention, on the other hand, deals more with what the author wishes to see accomplished in the life of his readers. It is possible that in some cases, his only intention is to entertain his readers, but in other cases, his goal is to contribute to the transformation of their lives. Such is the intention of the book you are reading.

As soon as you read the title of this book, you begin to have an idea of the subject matter discussed within it. I do not know how many people have noticed the interest that human beings have in doing something productive or significant. I believe that many of us are striving to do something which will convince us that our life counts, even as many place importance on knowing that they are leaving a legacy for their posterity. These feelings and emotions propel human beings into the world with the goal of accomplishing objectives, which requires them to participate in “doing things.”

In general, we all come into this world with a certain void in our hearts, which produces a search for meaning. Each of us carries this out in different ways. Men, by nature, are doers and find their identity in what they accomplish. We see how little boys enjoy building sandcastles or forts or setting up toy soldiers on an imaginary battlefield. It would appear that men have been born both ready for battle and ready “to do” what is necessary.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, women are naturally inclined to develop and find their identity in personal relationships. Even as little girls, we see how some tend to play with their dolls at an early age and assume the role of mother without necessarily being taught how to live out or express motherhood. Nevertheless, as society has been steadily downplaying the value of motherhood, we have observed that many women have embraced life as professionals because they find more satisfaction in what they can do outside of the home as opposed to what they could do inside of the home in service to their families. “Doing” has become the addiction of the citizens of our generation.

It is both sad and concerning that while human beings are highly concerned with the things they accomplish, they do not place a high value on cultivating their inner being, which certainly would allow them to better manage the world around them. This explains the great failures we continuously see in everyday life, such as when an unprepared individual jumps at the opportunity to do something meaningful even though he is neither mature enough nor strong enough to stay the course in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the task.

Human beings, in general, and men in particular, do not want to invest the time necessary for their formation. Rather, our first inclination is to want to be given responsibilities so that we can start accomplishing tasks immediately. It is as if we consider it a poor use of our time if we don’t see work being accomplished. In other words, any time dedicated to the formation of the inner man is seen as a waste of time and effort. Accomplishing these tasks produces a sense of satisfaction in us and causes us to feel

some form of significance. Something similar occurs when we finish our university career in our particular field of study; we develop a certain impatience because we experience the need to see ourselves active in our field of study. And certainly, part of our learning occurs when it is time to put into practice that which we have learned in theory.

In the Christian life, things are not that different at all. Someone is born again on the day of his conversion and frequently, almost immediately, he starts asking: "What can I do?" and when he hears that the best thing that he can do is to wait until he has grown in wisdom at the feet of Christ, he feels as if a bucket of cold water has been dumped on his head, and he might even be offended. This desire increases when we see others who are already doing something for God that we also desire to do. It is as if we have been programmed to "do" things, something that is particularly true for men. We must not forget that we are human "beings" and not human "doings." There is no doubt that having the motivation to serve is a good thing, but the question is if we are ready to carry out such service. When an individual's character has not been formed before he begins to serve, he can cause a lot of damage. The problem becomes even worse when the motivation to serve is neither good nor holy. No one begins serving with pure motivations. In fact, because no one is perfect and will not be perfect until we are called home to glory, we will often be serving with a certain level of corruption in our motivations. Occasionally, we are honest enough to admit it.

Much of what we will discuss in the coming chapters is based on my own personal growth and ongoing observation as a medical professional, pastor, and counselor. The topics that we will discuss most likely will not be foreign to us, as we have experienced some of them in our own lives while observing others in our relationships with friends, relatives, church members, patients, and acquaintances in general. We all walk down this same path.

CHAPTER I

You Must Be before You Do

The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty."

Acts 6:2–3

By nature, some of us are more observant than others. One activity that I enjoy is observing human behavior, which leads me to both reflect upon and view through the lens of God's revelation. I have always found it interesting how a child at a very early age struggles with his mother in an attempt to unsuccessfully tie his shoelaces all by himself without her help, repeating this cycle over and over again. He tries to complete this task even though he does not yet possess the fine motor skills to do so. Some of this has to do with rebelliousness, autonomy, and self-sufficiency, which are big stumbling blocks for us. Other times, however, it has to do with our wanting to do something that matters, as we said in the introduction to this book. Even children do not want to wait to grow up to do those things for which they are not yet

qualified to do. Impatience has always characterized human beings. And while God never seems to be in a hurry, we have no desire to slow down. From here on, we will begin to emphasize the idea behind everything we will discuss on the pages to follow: we must *be* before we *do*, or we will suffer the consequences.

The context of the passage above is the sudden growth of the church and its leadership who found it necessary to delegate tasks, as they no longer could continue to do so given their multiple obligations. The task before them was relatively simple: waiting on tables and distributing food among their brethren, which may have ultimately included celebrating the Lord's Supper (something the early church would frequently do). And yet, for simple tasks such as these, the apostles established certain criteria related to the character of the people who would serve. In simple actions such as waiting on tables, we can see exactly how important it is for us "to be before we do." This is one of many examples we find all throughout the biblical revelation, as we will see later in the coming chapters.

We tend to serve in a ministry capacity as soon as we possibly can because it makes us feel useful. Unfortunately, serving before we are ready not only can lead us to error, but it can also lead to the deformation of our character when we take pride in ourselves. The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us that "There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven" (Eccles. 3:1) while also stressing that God "has made everything appropriate in its time" (v. 11).

During the apostle Paul's first missionary journey, he was accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark. When they arrived at Pamphylia, John Mark decided to separate from the group and return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Later, Paul did not want to take Mark on his second missionary journey, precisely because Mark had deserted Paul in Pamphylia on the first journey. This caused a great conflict between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40). The text does not specify the reasons that caused Paul to think this way, but it is quite possible that after this experience, the

apostle felt very strongly that Mark was not ready for that kind of ministerial work. Perhaps he lacked the necessary strength of character that could be acquired over time. Eventually, this is the same Mark who would author the gospel that bears his name. Nevertheless, at an earlier stage in his life, the apostle Paul did not consider him ready for the ministry.

After his disagreement with Paul, Barnabas decided to take John Mark along with him, and they departed in the other direction. It is possible that Mark needed someone who would continue to invest in him until he could be completely mature and ready for the work to which God had called him. This fact demonstrates the wisdom of the author of Ecclesiastes in saying that there is a time for everything or event under the sun. It also serves as a good example to remind us that we are not always ready to serve in ministry even though we may think we are. This is the motivation of everything else you will read in this book.

Our Arrival into the Family of God

The Bible goes into great detail concerning how Adam's fall profoundly impacted the integrity of God's image in man. Our minds were darkened, our hearts were hardened, and our wills were enslaved. However, the Bible does not make a calculation of how every fallen family unit affects the development of each of the members within that family unit. Some members were abandoned by parents who did not assume their responsibilities as parents. Others were raped by relatives or acquaintances. Some were bullied, mocked, or rejected; others were physically abused. This has been true in the case of many wives and children. Knowing that the world is made up of millions of families, we could speak about millions of these kinds of situations throughout history and across continents.

This makes it clear that before we can serve the family of God, He must do a work of healing and growth within us. The

Bible calls this work *sanctification*. Our purpose is not, nor could it be, to present a therapeutic alternative to the problems we just mentioned. Rather, it is to raise awareness that, on the one hand, when it comes to serving, we need evidence that we have really matured enough to be able to carry out the job that we have been called to do. If someone is not ready to manage his own world, he will be much less ready to direct the world of others around him. Let us not fool ourselves. The apostle Peter and the other apostles thought they were ready to drink of the cup that the Lord Jesus would drink, and only a few short hours later, they abandoned Him. The Master's death and resurrection were two events that served to ultimately prepare them for the ministry ahead.

Let us look at some of the behaviors that demonstrate our spiritual and emotional immaturity:

For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, because you are still worldly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? (1 Cor. 3:1–3)

Let us imagine for a moment, as may have occurred, that certain people with these types of characteristics had been chosen to serve in the church at Corinth. This explains, at least in part, the chaos surrounding the use of the gifts of the Spirit, an issue that the apostle Paul addresses in chapters 12 and 14 of the same letter.

The best evidence of the need for growth in the Christian before beginning to do anything for God is found in both of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, as we can see in the text above. Let us begin our analysis of the text: "For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ" (1 Cor.

3:1). Here, Paul is confronting these brothers and sisters because, even though they were believers, he could not speak to them as mature believers but as immature children or individuals who were still of the world. Note how Paul equates these two things: people of the flesh and children. When he speaks of children, he is referring more to immaturity than to innocence. Their emotional and spiritual immaturity made them react in the flesh, as if they were still unbelievers. Paul continues:

I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, because you are still worldly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? (1 Cor. 3:2–3)

While Paul was with them, the Corinthians behaved like children. Therefore, Paul gave them milk to drink; that is, he spoke to them about simple things that they could understand. A little later, the apostle wrote and sent the letter we know today as his second epistle to this church, and even in that letter, we find evidence of immaturity within the church at Corinth. This was a church that was so immature or so carnal in its ways that it caused Paul to weep (2 Cor. 2:4).

In the same epistle, Paul leads them to understand that none of us has sufficient reason or status to be proud, because we are mere servants of Christ:

For whenever someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not acting like mere humans?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who

waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (1 Cor. 3:4–7)

Ultimately, neither Apollos, nor Paul, nor we are anything. This is a mature way of looking at life, so that tomorrow, when our brother or sister who possesses a gift and a talent is recognized and commended at church, let us not be jealous of him or condemn him. Let us not be envious of him or judge him. This is all part of God's plan for His church. Let us applaud our brother or sister to whom God has given something special.

In order to emphasize the importance of the growth that should occur in us as believers, let us take another look at a 1 Corinthians 3:2–3, but from the version of the Bible known as the New Living Translation (NLT):

I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, *for you are still controlled by your sinful nature*. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? *Aren't you living like people of the world?* (emphasis added)

This section is key. We still have a sinful nature (the flesh), but that sinful nature should not control us. Some individuals control it better than others, depending on the level of sanctification they have reached. When we are under the great influence and control of our sinful nature, we may often find that jealousy, envy, strife, division, condemnation, and criticism are present; and that is what this text is presenting. Imagine that, in the midst of fights like the ones mentioned, you start to lead a youth or couples' group, or some other ministry in your church. The magnitude of the damage could be great, as often has been the case in many congregations. "[The Corinthians] were so entrenched

in worldly ways of thinking that it was going to take a long time before they could tolerate ‘solid food.’”¹

Each of us is born insecure, and such insecurity makes us proud. But as Andrew Murray said, “Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.”² Pride is just one of the many manifestations of our lack of maturity or lack of sanctification.

How Do We Enter into the Family of God?

1. We enter the Christian life as born again but affected by our past.

The day we give our lives over to the Lord, we become new creations, yet we still have a past that has shaped us and continues to manifest itself in our outer world. We come into the Christian life having been emotionally affected by our upbringing, education, past experiences, painful experiences, sometimes situations of incest, physical mistreatment, verbal mistreatment, superiority or inferiority complexes, and many other types of experiences. The reality is that each of us has been affected. Even after years in the faith, there is no guarantee that these things have left us unless we have grown, something which does not happen naturally. The first thing we must do is to accept that we come to the feet of Christ as individuals affected by our past.

2. We need to accept that we have been affected by our past so that we can deal with our sinful dysfunctionality.

If we do not accept that we have been affected by our past experiences, we will have the tendency to blame others instead of understanding why we are the way we are or why we feel the way we feel, only then to seek after God and His Word so that we may find the way of redemption of the image of Christ in us. In reality, there are people who have influenced who we are now, but once we enter into the Christian life, God wants us to deal with who we are so that we can begin to change. “We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.”³

3. We enter the Christian life with a distorted and unbiblical worldview.

Even though it may sound redundant, our worldview when we become a Christian is “worldly.” Perhaps we could say that our worldview before coming to Christ is secular, but I do not believe that such a term sufficiently describes it. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, *secular* may refer to worldly things, but it may also describe things that are not overly religious. On the other hand, *Merriam-Webster* indicates that *worldly* deals with a relation or devotion to the pursuits of the world instead of religious or spiritual affairs. Therefore, we certainly enter into the Christian life with a worldview that is, without a doubt, of this world. We place value on our professions, our studies, how we dress, those with whom we have relationships, and we judge everyone else just like the rest of the world does. This is what we have known throughout the years. The problem is that unless we know and accept this reality, we will not be able see the difference between the biblical worldview and the “worldly” worldview in order to change it. This is the heart of the problem. It is common for us to listen to Sunday’s sermon with a biblical worldview, only to then live our lives the rest of the week with a “worldly” worldview.

Worldview is how we see the world, how we judge it, and how we react to it. This worldview must be changed. We enter into the Christian life with incorrect perceptions, and if there is anything from which we suffer, it is precisely the following: we live with incorrect perceptions even years after we begin our Christian life. The only One who has a completely correct perspective of all that is seen and all that occurs is God. The question that we must ask ourselves is: “How incorrect are our perceptions?” Those of us who are counselors could say that the norm for human beings is to have an incorrect perception of reality. We see an example of this when we listen to a husband speak about a situation he is experiencing in his marriage and later listen to his wife describe the situation with a completely different

perspective. At that moment, we could certainly wonder if these two individuals are really married or not. The husband describes the situation as being white, and the wife describes it as being black—two entirely different descriptions. In these cases, we see that between spouses distinct perceptions exist which frequently are each incorrect to some degree or another.

We have a self-centered worldview. We are the center of our universe, and this self-centered way of seeing things makes us ungrateful. After being given so much from God, family members, and friends, we do not respond with sufficient gratitude. The same thing also occurs within the church. Pastors, leaders, and other Christians all provide spiritual counsel and aid, only for us to respond with ungrateful hearts. Ingratitude is not part of the character of Christ; therefore, this all must change. If this form of thinking and acting does not change, we will begin to sinfully and erroneously teach others. We teach by both word and action.

4. We enter the Christian life with an overvaluation of ourselves.

We think we are worth more than we actually are. This is why we tend to judge and condemn others because, as we do so, we are able to tacitly affirm that we are superior to them. Perhaps we may have never preached a sermon, but we assume that we could do a much better job than the one who is preaching. God knows this about us, which is why He gave us the following instruction:

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. (Rom. 12:3)

This is our sinful tendency. Paul again insisted the same to the church at Corinth when he wrote:

For we don't dare classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding. (2 Cor. 10:12)

How Do We Evaluate Ourselves?

As we seek to be sincere, with the help of God and the Spirit of God, we are able to continue discovering the signs of immaturity in our character. Some of these signs are:

1. A profound need for approval

Due to our fallen condition, we all long for approval. Nevertheless, some of us have an extreme need for approval. At the slightest hint of someone's disapproval of us, we become offended and irritated, even when someone does not greet us, for example. Other times the need is a little more hidden. "Even public sharing of repentance and failure may be motivated by an unconscious hunger for approval."⁴ We are complex persons with multiple tactics and defense mechanisms that serve to conceal our dysfunctions. At the heart of it all, these external manifestations correspond to internal insecurities. We need a greater perspective of the God we worship and a smaller idea of man and the recognition or accolades of this life. One reason why we sin is that we crave the approval of people, or we fear their rejection. We need the acceptance of others, and so we're controlled by them. The Bible's term for this is "the fear of man."⁵

2. Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a sign of insecurity. As we experience a greater level of insecurity, we experience a greater need to feel secure. Perfectionism is nothing more than an external form of wanting control over our environment because controlling our

environment guarantees our security, which is something we will never really attain. As we mature in our relationship with God, perfectionism should diminish as we feel more and more secure in Christ. When we place our life on the scale to be weighed, we learn that we are not as good as we think we are, and we are worse than we could ever imagine.

3. Jealousy

Jealousy is another indication that our emotional world must mature. Some people experience jealousy for friendships when others are able to make friends. The jealous person desires to control the relationships of others. Frequently, children experience this feeling when their parents have a second child. Some regress in their behavior, and we even see children between the ages of eight to ten years old start wetting the bed at night again. Such is our fallen condition. Where there is jealousy, there will inevitably be strife (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; James 3:14, 16).

4. Frequent Condemnation of Others

This attitude is motivated by a sense of superiority over others. We could also call this self-righteousness or moral arrogance. These individuals tend to point out or criticize anyone who does not live up to their standards. Mature people are humble people, and humble people do not feel the need to condemn others around them.

5. Resentment and Lack of Forgiveness

Resentment and lack of forgiveness are evidence of built-up anger, which is a warning sign of profound areas of immaturity. Emotionally mature people forgive others relatively easily. Even non-Christians who are emotionally mature are able to arrive at the point where they can forgive relatively easily, because man has been created in the image of God. Maybe those non-believers

who manage to forgive others cannot forgive as deeply as a child of God or with the added blessings of being a child of God. Those who have difficulty forgiving see themselves as victims, and they forget that the greatest victim of all was the Lord Jesus, and we were His offenders.

6. Uncontrollable Outbursts of Anger

Outbursts of anger which we cannot control reveal a lack of self-control. This lack of control is more related to our fleshly nature than with the image of the new man. If we cannot control our anger, there is something in our sinful nature seizing control instead of the Holy Spirit who dwells within the believer. Let us remember that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). Anger in a father or mother produces profound damage within the family. We can say the same when anger forms part of the character of the leadership in the church. “In any event, our anger arises from our value system. It expresses our beliefs and motives.”⁶

7. Loving to Serve, but for the Wrong Reasons

When we love to serve, but for the wrong reasons, we reveal our self-centeredness. We often love to serve others because doing so makes us the center of attention and, in our immaturity, we like being at the center. When we are the center of attention, people see us, they applaud us, they approve of us, and so on. We should serve, but we should do so for the right reasons. “Many people change their behavior, but their motives and desires are still wrong; so their new behavior is no more pleasing to God than their old behavior.”⁷

When we do not serve and are on the periphery, we feel rejected, minimized, and worthless. The reality is that there is a time to be on the periphery and a time to be serving.

8. Difficulty Recognizing the Talent of Others

When we have difficulty recognizing talent in others, which is nothing more than a sign of envy, we justify ourselves with phrases such as, “I cannot applaud others because they could become proud.” But in the Bible the reality is that we frequently find God commending many of His children. It is said that Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3). Of Job, God says that he was a just and upright man (Job 1:8). Paul exhorts the brethren to imitate Timothy (1 Cor. 4:16–17). If we have learned anything, it is that we must not try to keep others humble because this is not our role. Our role is to encourage, edify, motivate, and help others. God will take care of the rest. This enables us to appreciate the talents of others.

9. Difficulty Controlling the Tongue

Difficulty controlling one’s tongue reveals a lack of being filled with the Spirit. This is a sinful weakness that James discusses in chapter 3 of the epistle which bears his name. Lack of dominion over the tongue is not only sinful, but it also indicates a spiritual immaturity that is at the root of such a lack of control of our speech. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) is the result of being filled with the same Spirit. James reminds us:

So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large a forest. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (James 3:5–6)

10. Difficulty Maintaining Close Relationships with Those Who Differ from Us

This is very significant. Others do not have to be in agreement with our values, our likes, and our preferences. Many people distance themselves from those who differ from them because they feel insecure when they are around them; while others only know one way to relate to others, which is through codependency. In order to feel comfortable, codependent individuals need to be in agreement in everything. Codependency is frequently a sign that we have an extreme need for approval from other people whom we need for our sense of identity. Control is a prominent characteristic of codependent relationships.⁸

11. A Suspicious Attitude toward Others

There are individuals all around us who are suspicious of others. They pass value judgments and evaluate the intentions of others as if they were living inside them. These are the ones who are always putting puzzles together or playing chess with other people in their mind. Such an attitude leads to manipulation. We must not live this way. We cannot live a peaceful and tranquil life constantly rearranging the jigsaw puzzle or the chessboard. If we are emotionally mature, we rest in knowing God is the one who moves the chess pieces. It may be that at a certain moment, people are playing games with us, but it is best to let God be in charge of those games. Let us enjoy the peace and tranquility that a close relationship with God provides.

We need to have an emotionally mature life in order to experience the abundant life that Christ purchased for us (John 10:10). Our desire is that people would lead lives free of all of the snares that these fears cause. There is nothing better than to live emotionally free, in Christ and by Christ and not in our own strength. Can you imagine the damage we can cause if we live shackled by some of the things we have just mentioned? Sadly, this is the reality of many divided churches today.

The Need for Time

The biblical account allows us to see different ways of “being before doing.” Moses spent forty years in the desert and, prior to that, he spent forty in the palace of the king of Egypt. God began using him as His prophet eighty years after he had been born. What did Moses do during all of that time in the desert? What did he learn? He certainly learned a lot because serving forty years in the sand and under the direction of his father-in-law (Jethro) has the tendency to produce humility in a person, something that, in effect, occurred—as the Word of God reveals that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth, as we mentioned earlier. In Pharaoh’s palace, Moses was treated as a prince, but in the desert, he was simply a shepherd of sheep. Thus, Moses learned humility; he learned to serve; and he learned to follow. If you have not learned to follow others, you are not ready to lead. Believe me. There has not been one leader who was not first a good follower.⁹ Joshua was formed in Moses’ shadow, Elisha under the leadership of Elijah, and Timothy was trained by Paul. The good follower learns submission, humility, and patience, while also learning to listen. The great leaders have always learned all of this prior to being used greatly by God.

The testimony of the Old Testament demonstrates that reaching maturity and becoming a servant takes time. Even so, the reality is that none of us will become a Moses; therefore, forty years in the desert is not necessary for us. Thank God! But we do, in fact, need time; and if we continue to examine the life of this great prophet of God, we will observe another way in which God demonstrates the fact that we need a time of preparation and a work in our character before beginning to serve. When Moses is overloaded with work, Jethro, an older and probably more emotionally mature man, appears and provides Moses the following counsel:

But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. (Exod. 18:21)

Note of Jethro's words: "able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit [bribes]." These men had already arrived at the point of "being before doing." Before serving, in their character, these men had to exhibit the characteristics cited in the text.

The New Testament is no different. In one of his epistles, Paul instructs Timothy, his youngest disciple, regarding when to place people into service and what type of people should serve. We know that there are diverse types of service, and some require more time than others or require more character than others; but at the end of the day, the idea is the same: in order to serve, there should be a time of formation and preparation of character. If our character has not been formed, the best thing we can do is wait for it to be prepared. In this sense, Paul tells Timothy in his second letter: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Here we see that the ability of these men to teach others (doing) is preceded by faithfulness and competence that is observed in them (being). What Paul is seeking to communicate to Timothy is: "Timothy, when you come to the point of selecting people who will teach, pay careful attention to their character, and as you do so, think about those who are faithful, competent, and ideally suited. Then you will be able to permit them 'to do' something . . . to teach." The order is: character first, then service. This is very important for us to note.

God's appointed leaders do not develop their integrity after being appointed. Their integrity precedes them. We can see this in the counsel that Jethro gave to his son-in-law, Moses; in Paul's words to Timothy; and we see it in the requirements of being

an elder. A pastor or an elder “must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). A person should wait a while after his conversion before aspiring to be an elder. The first condition of being an elder is that the candidate must be “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2). When someone begins to serve, he can be sure that there will be much responsibility, and with responsibility comes power, influence, privileges, and rights which the character of the immature will not be ready to handle.

Again, we can see that the testimony of the Scriptures is that character is required in order to handle service, rights, privileges, influence, and power. God’s grace is what makes possible all that we get to do; but once we move from God’s grace to something more earthly, we could say that everything is related to character, and the formation of character takes time. Our God is never in a hurry, as we have already said. The Bible is Christ-centered from beginning to end, and still, when Christ came, He had to wait some thirty years to preach His first sermon. The One who is the subject and object of the entire biblical revelation had to wait thirty years. Why? Because His time had not yet come. God has a time for everything under the sun, but man wants things to be done according to his own time line. Jesus lived His life in a different way:

After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee, since he did not want to travel in Judea because the Jews were trying to kill him. The Jewish Festival of Shelters was near. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see your works that you are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he’s seeking public recognition. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

Jesus told them, “My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand.” (John 7:1–6)

Paul waited some seven to ten years after his Damascus road experience to take his first missionary journey. In the Old Testament, God stipulated thirty years of age as the minimum age at which a priest could serve. We do not believe that God randomly chose that age, because our God is a God of purpose. Without a doubt, in the history of the church there have been people who began serving God as prophets and preachers even during their adolescence. Jeremiah was one of those prophets, and Charles Spurgeon was one of those preachers. But we have not had many Jeremiahs, nor have we had many Spurgeons. Moreover, the exception does not create the rule.

God has emphasized character development all throughout His revelation. When Paul writes to Timothy, he says, “Don’t let anyone despise your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12a). And he then immediately adds: “but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (v. 12b). Paul seems to say: Timothy, I urge you, even in your youth, to be an example . . .

in speech . . . when you speak

in conduct . . . in your lifestyle

in love . . . in what or how you feel

in faith . . . in what you believe

in purity . . . in what you see and do

In all of this, Timothy was to be an example, and today, we must do the same. Even in our youth, God places an emphasis on character above all for those who desire to serve Him. Character is what will sustain us in crisis. We must represent God well before men. Even this simple example allows us to see how important it is for us “to be before we do.”

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, when the early church began to grow, it was necessary to delegate some of the tasks that the apostles had been doing up to that point. Then we see that after the church had grown to several thousand people in number, it was necessary to include others who could help carry

out the ministry. On one hand, this delegation of functions was motivated by various complaints that had come from some of the Hellenistic widows. Let us look at the following passage:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:1–4 ESV)

For a task as simple as serving tables, it was necessary to choose individuals who had both a right walk with God, as well as a good testimony before men. Note how the text describes the people who should take on this task: "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." This also means that God was emphasizing the need to cultivate our character before we serve in the kingdom of heaven.

Final Reflection

The Bible uses just one word to describe the way in which we grow. That word is *sanctification*, which describes the progressive process through which God makes us empty ourselves of the ways of thinking and the life habits that characterized the old man so that He may incorporate the image of the new man in us. This is produced by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, as Paul so well describes in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Cor. 3:18)

As we examine the Scriptures, the Spirit of God reveals areas of sin in our lives and, by means of the same action of the Spirit, He helps us to rid ourselves of everything that does not look like Christ. This is a cooperative action of both the Word and the Spirit of God. This is why Christ prayed in the following manner:

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
(John 17:17)

Now, in practical terms, what we continue to observe during the process of sanctification could appear similar to what has been described as the four stages of learning any new skill:¹⁰

1. Unconsciously unskilled

We do not know how to act or live well, and we are not aware of it. In other words, “we do not know what we do not know.” Someone has to show us that we are bad. The Word of God and the Spirit of God are primary agents of revealing areas of sin in our lives, but God also uses people within His church to show us our sin and guide us to the Truth.

2. Consciously unskilled

In this stage, we are aware of our sin, but we still have not been able to overcome it because not enough time has passed since being illuminated by the Word and the Holy Spirit to implement in our lives the spiritual disciplines which are necessary to weaken the residual sin of the old man.

3. Consciously skilled

After a while, the Holy Spirit develops the character of Christ in us. He does so in such a way that the specific area of sin we have been dealing with continues to be left behind, but we will still have to consciously struggle against it. For example, if we are going to confront someone about his sin, we may need a lot of prayer and a reminder that we must be gracious if our natural tendency has been to be vengeful; but we are capable of achieving this, which is why we talk about being consciously skilled.

4. Unconsciously skilled

Finally, when God has cultivated the fruit of the Spirit in us, we may then become men and women who are controlled by the Holy Spirit, who now possess a transformed heart and mind, who behave as true sons and daughters of God because we have actually become something, by God's grace. We are not just doing things the right way ("doing without being"). Now, we think through His Word and act according to the Spirit. Now the fruit of the Spirit has been harvested:

. . . [L]ove, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
The law is not against such things. (Gal. 5:22b–23)

Carrying out what we are proposing means change, and therefore, growth. For the Christian, being born again without growing is not an option, which is why we need a community of believers. We cannot grow in isolation.¹¹

BEING *is* *greater than* DOING.

We all come into the world with a certain emptiness in our lives—an emptiness that leads to a search for meaning. And the world tells us that search for meaning can be solved by *doing*. Unfortunately, an over-emphasis on doing has led many people away from cultivating an interior life that allows them to sustain their exterior life.

This explains the many failures we continuously see in day-to-day life. When a person's inner life—who he or she *is*—is not prepared, that person's character does not have the maturity or the strength to sustain them in the long run.

In this book, Miguel Núñez points us to Scripture and experience to show us how being is more important than doing. He teaches us how to cultivate the foundations of our lives, so that we can be what we need to be, in order to do what we need to do.



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