

Service

Overview of the Module

Preamble - a confused child

This module is about the school value of “**service**”. But pity the child who is learning about what this means! They might begin the day with a class assembly. The teacher, who hasn’t yet read to the end of these worship notes, talks to them about **serving** the local community and people who do that. At least that should be easy to understand.

Later in the morning, to much excitement, the teacher has taken them outside, with racquets and balls, in order to play a game. It turns out that they are going to learn how to play tennis. During the lesson they are taught how to “**serve**”.

Later in the day the teacher announces that on Friday the whole school is going to visit their local church, for a church “**service**”. Being a well organised sort, their vicar has sent the staff an “**order of service**”. (Though some posh vicars like to refer to it as “the liturgy”.)

Soon the children are being taught one of the songs to be used in the service. It is called “The **Servant King**”. They find themselves singing “so let us learn how **to serve**”.

Fortunately, at this point the bell rings and it is time to go home, possibly with an aching head.

However, the child has picked up something from this day of learning. They tell whoever is picking them up from school that on Friday they need to take a racquet and ball to church, so that God can teach them how to serve.

Then pity the teacher, who probably has a sore head at the end of most days but is beginning to wonder if they should bite the bullet and read the worship notes for this module.

Lastly, pity the writer of worship notes who is going to attempt to explain how all these things are related, and give some theological background and some biblical foundations. Yet, all that without delving too deeply into things like translations and original languages. They will also be hoping that readers don’t get sidetracked by curious questions such as ‘when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, and He and Satan both quoted scripture, what language did they speak in?’.

Keep reading, the Biblical foundation follows. For those who are interested in digging deeper, then also read the Appendix.

Biblical Foundation

A biblical foundation for the theological significance of the word “serve” is best begun with the second of the ten commandments. But English translations can be inconsistent. In these “Inspired by Christ” worship notes, wherever possible the English Standard Version (ESV) translation is used. Exodus 20 verses 4-6 (repeated in Deuteronomy 5) says:

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or **serve** them,*

Some children will be familiar with what lies behind these words, perhaps from their family religion today. In the ancient world a temple, street shrine, or a private home would have an idol (mostly statues but sometime totem poles). People would bow in front of the idol and bring gifts, in particular food, to offer. To the outsider the idolater is serving the idol when they do this. But the worshipper would usually

think of themselves as serving the god whom their idol represents. Such subtleties are irrelevant to this command, God knows our hearts and the command forbids both the act and whatever lies behind it.

The implication of the commandment, and clear teaching throughout the Bible, is that whilst we may not have ‘graven’ (carved) images of the LORD, we are to bow down to Him in our hearts and minds, and also **to serve Him** in our lives.

We see how in the New Testament when the gospel was preached and idolaters came to believe and trust in Jesus, their lives were transformed. As a result they

turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thessalonians 1:19)

The words **serve**, **service** and **servant** are common in the Bible and have everyday uses. But in some places they have a particular focus on God.

For examples in Isaiah chapters 41 to 53 there are prophecies of **the Servant**. These prophecies seemed to point to a future figure who would suffer and die. The promises remained a mystery in the Old Testament and the time between the Testaments. But Jesus fulfilled those prophecies and, referring to himself as “the Son of Man” said

*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but **to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)*

Those words of Jesus follow on from Him telling His followers:

*whoever would be great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:43-44)*

Therefore, in looking at our school value of service we will want to think about how we should serve those around us and how we can serve our local community in particular. In this we will reflect on Jesus’ teaching about being the servant of others.

- ◆ We will also think about what it means to serve God, how do we do that, and why?
- ◆ We want to learn why it was that Jesus came to serve, that He is “The Servant”, and how that was shown particularly by Him giving His life as a ransom for many.

Ideas for delivering worship

On the reverse of each unit are areas for some notes on delivering worship, resources, and follow up. Most units in this module contain suggestions based on using two particular **props**.

The concept of the The Servant King is often represented by two items - a **crown** and a **towel**. If the two items are visible at the front then one or both can be used for those delivering some units, as well as to be a reminder of the overall theme.

Other props might also be useful for many of the units. For example, a **beard** can be used in almost any unit - Moses in Unit 1, a Prophet in Unit 3, Jesus in most units, and the first disciples (up to 12 beards) in many others.



Additional Notes about words and languages:

The following notes are purely for those who are interested and to explain some or the comments above.

You will see in what follow that finding Bible verses to speak about this theme is not straight forward. There are several related ideas and words, and different English translations choose different words. In general the ESV translation is fairly consistent, more so than some others, but not entirely.

When God first gave the 10 Commandments He wrote them on stone tablets. We have no idea what language God wrote in because those tablets were destroyed, by God. The Lord then dictated the commandments again and Moses wrote them down on new stone tablets. We can only assume that Moses wrote in Hebrew. Jesus affirms the tradition that Moses wrote most of the first five books of the

Bible and seemingly in Hebrew. (The second lot of tablets were last heard of residing in the Ark of the Covenant, whereabouts unknown, and irrelevant for these notes.)

Three of the gospels record how Satan tempted Jesus, though Mark does not give the details. But in response to one of the temptations Jesus quoted the second commandment. We don't know what language Jesus was speaking at the time, probably Aramaic the every day language of the Jews but he may have quoted Bible verses in the original Hebrew language. There is an early tradition that Matthew wrote his gospel in "the Hebrew tongue" which probably means Aramaic, but if so he or someone else later translated in to Greek which was then circulated and became part of the Bible. Luke and Matthew both record the words of Jesus in identical Greek words – as is often the case even if the others details of an incident may vary.

The ideas behind the commandment are usually passed on with particular words in the New Testament. "bow down" in English, translates the Hebrew *khawah* which is translated in Greek *proskuneo* "serve" in English translates the Hebrew word 'abad, which is translated in Greek *latreuo*.

Both these words could be translated in English as "worship" reflecting the fact that there are two different aspects of worship. But our concern for this module is with the idea of serving God, and others. When it comes to serving God that is therefore part of worshipping Him in our lives.

It is also worth mentioning at this point that another, similar, Greek word is *leitourgikos*, often translated "minister", in the sense of "to serve". It is where the word "liturgy" comes from, which, as pointed out in the preamble, is used of "a service".

So, the Biblical roots of the idea of service has to do with serving God, by living for Him in our daily lives. Verses about service and servants in both the Old and New Testament are often related to this.

Jesus could speak of being a servant in the sense of coming to serve. He calls his followers to be servants, and to serve as He did. Both he and his followers also use the stronger word "slave".

Another similar word "to minister" has the same basic idea, and ministers, whether ministers of religion, or ministers of the crown, or "prime ministers" are supposed to be those who serve.

We may also draw on the idea of "military service", and the fact that Americans often say to service men and women "thank you for your service". Whilst our own war memorials often refer to those who gave their lives in the "service of their country".

Yet greater than all these is the death of the Suffering Servant who came to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. You will see that there are a lot of different avenues that could be taken in thinking about the idea of service today, and also the significance of the concepts of service in the Bible.

Finally, in the Biblical background there is the last mention of the idea, which is in the very last chapter of the Bible. About 70 years earlier John, his brother James, and the others had been arguing on a journey about who was the greatest. Jesus had rebuked them and told them that he who would be greatest must be the servant of all. Jesus had gone on to say that He, the Son of Man, had come to be the servant and to give His life as a ransom for many.

James was the first of those disciples to die for being a servant of Jesus. He was beheaded about 10 years later, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostle. John, his brother, was the last of them. Those who knew him personally passed on various details of his life. But John himself records one particular incident in his book, which is often known by its opening words in Greek – "The Apocalypse" meaning "revelation. He dutifully recorded all that was revealed to him, including how puzzling some of it was.

In the final chapter, 22, he records what he saw of some of the detail of the new creation in the presence of God. But John was certain that when all was fulfilled he himself would be there.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and,

His servants will worship Him.