

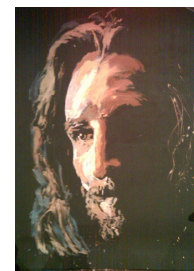


## THE FACES OF GOD

Service

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**Intro:** I remember when I was about 10 years old; there was a bully who lived in our neighborhood. His name was Vic Burgess and he was really BIG for a 10 year old. In fact he stood 6 foot 4 and weighed like 300 lbs. OK he wasn't quiet that big, but it sure seemed like it to me when I was 10.

How many of you have had to face a bully at some time during your life? I read where one study suggested that 3 out of 4 people have had a bully at some point in their lives.

So what is a bully? Bullies are people who are stronger than us --maybe physically or mentally; maybe emotionally or economically, the point is they take great pleasure in pushing us around. I read where one expert summed it up by saying: ***“Bullying is all about power”***.

Now if bullying is all about power and the Bible says that God is all-powerful, and if the old saying is true, ***“that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”*** and again if that statement is true, then it would be understandable if God were like the quintessential bully. And that certainly is the mental picture that a lot of people have of God. They see the face of God as a mean stern face that looks like He is waiting to squash us mere mortals like grapes beneath His feet. There are way too many people who see God as the biggest bully in the universe. BUT that's not what God is like...that is not the face of God!

Look at what happened as Jesus ate with His followers one day. Here's the first part of the verse, **John 13:3-5, “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so...”**

The verse said, **“Jesus knew”**. In other words, Jesus was fully aware that He was God and that He could do whatever He wanted; Jesus was fully aware of the fact that He was all powerful!

And then there’s the little word **“so”**. So, knowing all that heady, ego-inflating stuff, what does Jesus do? Does He arrogantly demand that everyone cater to His every wish? Does He throw His heavenly weight around and bully His disciples?

Well, look at the rest of that sentence: **“So...He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples feet...”** Jesus chose to perform a task that was so demeaning and humiliating that none of the disciples were willing to stoop down to do it. **And the obvious question it seems to me is why?** Why would someone who has been given all power and authority stoop down to wash feet?

Here’s why: Because even though power and servant-hood don’t seem to go together, both qualities reside in God...they reside in God because God is love. **So when you look into the face of God what you see is a loving servant.** You see, God is a servant because God is love, and love by its very nature involves the giving of oneself. After all love is a verb not a noun. Love is an action word that is all about doing and giving and serving.

And that’s the very essence of Christ’s life, as the Bible spells it out in **Philippians 2**. I love the way Eugene Peterson renders this passage in The Message: **“Jesus had equal status with God, but didn’t think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave -- became human! It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death -- and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.”**

Jesus, who, by all rights, could have been a bully, instead becomes a suffering servant...for us. God descended to greatness. In our world of upward mobility, in our world of climbing up the ladder of success, God descends from the top to the

bottom. God steps into the world and defines real success as descending to greatest...real success is the ability to let go of all our worldly privileges and our American rights...it is stooping down to serve on the lowest level.

But that's still not the end of the story. After Jesus defined real success and stooped down to teach us how to serve then He challenged us with these words...He said: **verse 14, "Now, I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you."** In other words, if we follow Jesus and we allow Him to change us from the inside out, then inevitably we too, will stoop down and pick up a towel and become servants. And then and only then will we recognize what it means to become great in the kingdom of God.

### **Martin Luther King Video**

And here's the thing: **When people see the love of a servant in our eyes they will get a glimpse into the face of God.** That's why being a greeter or an usher or a volunteer in the youth or children's ministry or being a worship leader or a staff person here at SpringWell is such a big deal to me...we get a chance, through our service, to show people the very heart of God! **We give them a chance to see the face of love!**

There's a story about a little orphan in London after World War II. He was poor and dirty, and one day he was peering through the window of a bakery where the baker was finishing up a batch of fresh donuts. You know how wonderful donuts smell, right? Well, this little war orphan was just drooling, he wanted him a donut, but he had no money.

Then a passing American soldier saw the boy. He said, **"You want some of those donuts?"** The boy nodded. So the American went inside, bought a dozen donuts, came out, handed the bag to the boy and turned to leave.

The little boy looked at the bag, and then said, **"Sir!"** The soldier turned around, and the boy asked, **"Are you God"**.

You very well be the only Jesus that some people will ever see. When we enter into the world of greatest as defined by Jesus we represent Jesus to those we serve. The Bible says in **Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

You see one of the greatest thrills for a servant is when their love for Jesus shines through so much that someone opens up to God. Or when their servant-hood enables someone to hear the message of Christ and they respond to it. Then the servant gets to watch the amazing spectacle of God revolutionizing another human life. We get to watch as God transforms people lives and their relationships are renewed and their priorities are changed and their definition of success gets reworked.

We ought to thank God for inviting us into the servant lifestyle because that’s where we find the soul-satisfaction that will escape us if we merely live to serve ourselves.

Jesus said it like this in **Matthew 16:25, “If you try to keep your life for yourself, you’re going to lose it, but if you give up your life for my sake, and for the sake of the good news, you will find true life.”** You’re going to give your life away for something. Some people give their life away for a career and you get a gold watch at the end -- big deal! Some people give their life away to get a big bank account. Some people give their whole life to get some kind of thrill or some kind of pleasure out of life or to attain some level of status or to get their name or picture in some magazine or to accomplish some kind of human achievement.

You’re going to give your life for something. The question is: Are you going to give your life for the right thing? How much is it going to matter in eternity? When you die is it going to matter at all?

Everybody is trying to figure out how to live longer. That’s not the real issue. It’s not how long you live that matters, it’s how you live that matters. It’s not the duration of your life; it’s the donation of your life. **If you’re not going to use**

**your life in service, why should God even let you live next week?** God does not owe you another single minute of life.

But if you're going to use everything that God gives you in serving Him and others, if you're going to use it to fulfill His plan, if you are going to live your life in such a way that gives people the opportunity to see the face of God, then He's not through with you.

And here's a little benefit to this whole serving thing: When people live for themselves, they eventually get bored and they feel unfulfilled. On the other hand, when you start serving God through serving others, it brings fulfillment, satisfaction and significance to your life!

**“Keep busy in your work for the Lord since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever without value.”** Can you say that about everything else you're doing right now? I'm afraid that way too much of what you and I do is of no value in the long term. So we start to feel insignificant and worthless. But nothing you do in the Lord's work is ever without value therefore serving God fills your life with meaning and purpose!

**Romans 7:4, “You are part of the body of Christ and you belong to Him in order that we might be useful in the service of God.”** In the New Testament church, when they would welcome new members into the body of Christ, the family of God, they would say, *“Welcome, Jesus Christ now has a new pair of eyes to see with...Jesus Christ now has a new pair of ears to listen to the hurts of others...Jesus Christ has a new pair of hands to help others...Jesus Christ now has a new heart to love others with.”*

So is your life full and meaning and purpose? Do others see Jesus in you? When other people who are outside the faith see you do they see a reflection of who Jesus really is? Do they see the face of God? Do they see the face of love?

**SONG—“Face of Love”**