

BFF412 Serve with Gladness

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well, Scott. How are you?

Scott: I'm good, I've been listening to audiobooks as I drive for work. I've read about half of "The Chronicles of Narnia." I finally finished "The Silver Chair," and I have decided that Puddleglum is one of the greatest characters in all of literature. And one of my heroes.

Steve: OK. I have to ask this question then, have you read, "Winnie-the-Pooh"?

Scott: Yeah, man, Puddleglum to me is sort of like Eeyore, but with a heroic side. Eeyore accidentally does stuff. Once in a while he stumbles into it. But Puddleglum, (spoiler alert) I'll give you a second to tune out or close your ears ...

One of the climactic moments is when they're all being deceived by this witch and he stomps on a fire with his bare foot to cause himself pain and help himself to break the spell. I'm like, dude, what a hero. And that's the moment they managed to all come out of the deception. What a great guy.

And when the other people were saying, you're so down, Puddleglum. What's your problem? We're not going to die. Everything's going to be all right. Then Puddleglum says, "That's the spirit, son. Keep going." Oh, gosh, I love this guy. He's fun.

Steve: Yes, Puddleglum is a breath of stale air.

Scott: That's fun. It makes me appreciate C.S. Lewis even more.

Steve: Those books are genius. I love the fact that you love Puddleglum.

Scott: Yes, that does fit. Doesn't it?

Steve: It does, especially when you have allergies in that deep bass morning voice.

Scott: Yep.

Steve: I'm sure Puddleglum didn't sing tenor in the choir.

Scott: There you go. How's that for a lead-in to whatever you're talking about?

Steve: This is an interesting introduction to what we're going to study today.

Scott: All right.

Steve: You are aware how God has opened up Psalm 100 to my heart and I continue to mine through these principles whenever I come near to God. I sing, I give thanks, I praise His name, I make a joyful noise. But there's another phrase that I have not given much attention to until recently. Someone pointed it out, and I felt that the Holy Spirit direct me to dig a little deeper.

Psalm 100:2, "Serve Yahweh with gladness." Yeah, I don't know how Puddleglum is going to apply this, but that's exactly what it says. There are two concepts here. The first one is serve, and the second one is gladness. Let's pray.

Father, help us to unpack this passage today and give us ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying and how we can apply it to our lives, but help us to first understand it. Do our homework, so to speak, and then we can bring it before You and then help us to apply it to our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: The word for serve is abad, which is used 289 times, It can mean any kind of work, and is rendered: cultivate, serve, or labor. It may also be translated: bondmen, bond-service, compel, do, and ear.

The gist of this word is work. Of the 289 times, some form of the word is translated to serve, 200 times out of 289. When you see this word, it has some flexibility as most Hebrew words do, but it also has that connotation of serving.

The first time it's used in the Bible is in the second chapter of Genesis when Adam is commanded to **cultivate** the ground. In Genesis 15, God prophesies through Abraham that they're going to **serve** the Egyptians. In the 29th chapter of Genesis, Jacob **served** Laban. And then in Exodus 13, speaking about the children of Israel in Egypt, they **labored rigorously**. Same word.

Numbers 3:7-8, talking about the Levites. "They shall keep his charge and the charge of the whole congregation before the tent of meeting to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the furniture of the tent of meeting and the charge of the children of Israel to do the service of the tabernacle."

I chose that one because of the 289 options, because the idea of serving in the tabernacle, was part of the Levites' charge. In Deuteronomy addressing the whole nation of Israel, he says, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you. Therefore, I command you this day. But if he says to you, I will not go out from you."

Now, remember, this was a servant who had been working in somebody's home, and now he has an option. His time is up. God first starts off by saying, don't forget, you were a slave in the land of Egypt. But then when he's talking to this servant, he says, you have an option today. Your time of service in our home is up.

I'm sorry. I should have given that context before. But I'm back to reading it. "If he says to you, I will not go out from you because he loves you and your household, since he is well off with you, then you shall take an awl and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant or slave forever."

There's a bunch going on there. Don't forget you were a slave. Now treat this brother, this person who's become like a part of your home well, give him the option. But if he chooses to stay with you forever, then you shall put an awl through his ear into the door.

I remember many, many years ago, I was at a conference and a young lady stood up and she felt like God had talked to her and she had responded to Him, I want you to put this awl through my ear because I want to be your bondservant. I want to be your slave forever.

Whenever I read this passage, I think of that young lady and to follow through, she has continued to serve God. Many, many years later, she's been faithful to her promise, but she and God had come to this one night, and she surrendered, and she said, no, I want to be your bondservant forever.

John 6:27–29, which I think is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set His seal. Then they said to Him, ‘What must we do to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent.’”

You and I know that sometimes believing is work, and takes effort, but this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. As you know, for at least the last year and a half, maybe going on two years, I'll have to check my journal, I've been spending time, usually twice a day, waiting on God, believing God's promises, praying, doing the work of God.

Some days I do it with alacrity, and some days I have to gird my loins, because it feels like work. But I'm always glad to be doing God's work. I'm believing in Him Whom He has sent. So we've established the first one. Serve.

Then it says to serve with gladness. The Hebrew word is simcha. Hard to describe it in English. Simcha. It's translated 93 times, 38 of those times, it's translated joy, gladness, mirth. The root word is samach, which is used 105 times, and most of the time it's rejoice or be glad.

I'm going to give you some verses to sample what it means to rejoice. Psalm 68:4, Psalm 92:1 are very similar to Psalm 100:2, where we started, serve the Lord with gladness. Psalm 68:4, “Sing to God. Sing praises to His name. Lift up a song to Him who rides through the desert. His name is Yahweh. Exalt before Him.”

Psalm 92, “It is good to give thanks to Yahweh, to sing praises to His name, O Most High.” We're going to have a joyful compilation of Scriptures, yet I want to stick this one in to make sure that we have a solid balance. Deuteronomy 28:47–48, “Because

you did not serve Yahweh your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies.”

Serving with gladness is not optional. This is a command. We need to serve, and we need to do it with a song in our hearts and a smile on our face because God has given us so much that we are to serve Him with joyfulness and gladness of heart, or else we're going to serve our enemies. It's right in there in Deuteronomy 28.

In the New Testament, I think of this as a priestly verse, Paul is exhorting the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” This is similar to what God told Levites and the priests in 1 Chronicles 16, rejoice, pray, give thanks.

Another one from Deuteronomy 12, “When you go over the Jordan and live in the land that Yahweh your God is giving to you to inherit, and when He gives you rest from all your enemies around so that you live in safety, you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns.”

This is a command. You need to rejoice. And give thanks. God has given you some wonderful things in the land of Israel. He's delivered you from Egypt. And the only posture that is legitimate is one of gratefulness and joy.

I'm going to close with Psalm 149:1–2. Praise Yahweh. Sing to Yahweh a new song and His praise in the congregation of the godly ones. Let Israel be glad in His maker. Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their king. This Psalm ends with, “this honor have all His saints.” So this is something for all of us to do, to rejoice, serve God happily.

That should be the mark of a Christian. We should be able to give thanks in all things because we know that God is God. We should be able to rejoice in all things because we know that everything is working together for our good. We should be able to give thanks more than anybody, not because everything is going our way, but because we're on God's team. He's our dad. We're His kids. These are verities. Eternal truths.

OK, now I'm going to ask Puddleglum how this resonates with him.

Scott: I find that, once again, God is very kind. To give us something to do and something that will ground us and keep us focused when there's so much else pulling in our attention. Like the world tells you that you ought to be served by everybody and you should demand to be served, well, especially if you're paying for it.

Steve: [laughs]

Scott: But God says to serve with gladness. He knew we were going to need something to do with our time. He gives us this life and He builds it into us that it's actually fulfilling to be of service to others and to Him. I don't know, I find that

comforting. It centers me when I'm tempted to just be fussy about myself and wanting my own way, which I do a lot of that in my Puddlelum ways.

And if you want to plumb the depths of other great literature, there's a character in "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." Have you read that one?

Steve: Nope.

Scott: It's a bit odd. It's a very minor character, but there are people that are described in that series as beings that occasionally become immortal. And most of them go crazy because they don't know how to handle immortality and just living forever, but the ones who don't go crazy have to find something to do before eternity. Well, one of them is this character that just travels throughout time and space, insulting everything. So he just shows up periodically and insults someone.

Steve: That's his purpose?

Scott: That's his purpose, basically. It's not a great one, but it's something, And I thought God has given us a much better purpose than that, even if it's serving.

Steve: Thank you for bringing this up. I haven't given a lot of thought to purpose, but I now see that purpose is essential for life. Bear Bryant, the famous football coach from Alabama, I believe he died within a few weeks after he stepped down from coaching.

And I've heard of other coaches that did the same thing, because that was their life purpose. They were good at it and they did it for generations. When it was taken away, they died.

There's something special about having this purpose to serve by believing, we're going to serve by laying our lives down for our family, we're going to serve by being light, being salt, all these things. I like about this priestly Levitical thing that God made us to stand by God and believe Him. That was their purpose.

I'm finding purpose in this myself. I like speaking, I like traveling, I like teaching, I like doing podcasts, but I feel that right down deep in my core, my purpose is to believe God. My purpose is to serve Him and serve Him gladly.

I want to be faithful in believing and trusting and then mixing faith with His promises, but now I want to do it with a smile. I'm making myself smile while I'm saying it. I want to be serving faithfully, and I want to be serving gladly.

And that's part of the purpose that all believers have and we can be serving gladly when we are washing dishes, when we are cleaning out the car, when we're driving our kids to events, because we have a smile on your face, and we're being faithful to the job that He's given you to do. Amen.

Scott: I have a ways to go. I may have graduated from like Eeyore status to Puddleglum status where I'm at least resigned to well, I'm going to do it and hey, that's the spirit, we'll try and be happy, but I'm working on it.

Steve: Have you ever heard the song "Brighten the Corner Where You Are"?

Scott: I believe so. It sounds familiar.

Steve: This song has this message right wrapped up in it. So let me read a little bit of the history of this song because I think this is a great illustration of what it means to be faithful in the situation that God places you. Not to be kicking against the goad, so to speak, and wishing we were somewhere else and doing something else.

Here are the words. And I might sing one verse just so you get the tune. You ready?

Scott: Yep.

Steve: [singing] Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do. Do not wait to shed your light afar. To the many duties ever near you now be true. Brighten the corner where you are.

That's the message. Brighten the corner where you are. Don't wait until you can do some great thing. The woman who wrote it was Ina Ogdon. She was the daughter of a farmer who fought in the Civil War.

She wrote her first hymn when she was just a young person. She married a guy and then gave up her job as a school teacher so that she could write more hymns. She then began a 25-year career as a Sunday school teacher.

She also wrote poems. Ina longed to be doing work in the inner city or in foreign missions. She was even was invited to be a speaker at a big conference, but her father was paralyzed by a stroke, and as a result she stayed home to care for him instead. There she was with all these big ambitions and talents, and she ended up taking care of her father.

One day, a neighbor remarked that the brightest spots in her life came from time at home. Ina began wondering whether the people in her own life could stay the same. Shut up in the upstairs corner bedroom, she wrote the words to brighten the corner where you are because she wanted to be cheerful and have a wholesome attitude and to plant seeds of God's love rather than spreading anxiety through the home.

So she wrote that song and that song began to be sung all over the world. How do you like that?

Scott: Nice.

Steve: She was faithful to what God gave her to do. And then God gave her that song which has encouraged thousands, perhaps millions of people. Pretty cool.

Scott: I can't top that, man. That's good.

Steve: Yeah, that's a great example. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for showing us this. This was not in my notes. Thank you for Scott's input about finding purpose and doing what You've called us to do. And thank you for Ina and her faithfulness to her paralyzed father and how God You used that and her experience and her song to reach thousands. So today, renew our sense of purpose to serve gladly in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scott: Amen. And that's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.