

AVAILABILITY vs. SELF-CENTEREDNESS

AVAILABILITY IS SIMPLIFYING OUR DAILY NEEDS SO WE ARE READY AND ABLE TO SERVE THOSE WHOM GOD BRINGS TO US

***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me”
(Matthew 16:24).***

DEFINITION OF AVAILABILITY

When Jesus called his disciples, He used the verb *akoloutheo*, which means “to accompany (specifically as a disciple).” He taught them not to be hindered by personal cares and distractions and explained the sacrifices they would make to serve Him: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). The Greek word for deny is *aparneomai*, meaning “to forget one’s self, lose sight of...one’s own interests.”

AVAILABILITY BEGINS BY CHOOSING ONE LEADER

Availability is impossible to achieve if we try to serve more than one leader. “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). Based on this passage, we must choose to serve the Lord. Otherwise, we will serve ourselves by seeking money, popularity, possessions, or other things. Joshua stated, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

Availability means giving our hearts—not just our hands—to God and to any task He asks us to do. J. Hudson Taylor stated, “I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.”

AVAILABILITY IS MOTIVATED BY BEING A “GIVER” RATHER THAN A “TAKER”

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that they must have the motivation of being givers rather than takers. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Jesus then explained this paradox: if someone tries to keep his life for his own goals, he will lose it. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). A taker often focuses on getting money. Yet in the next verse, Jesus asked, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

AVAILABILITY IS BASED ON THE JOY OF MAKING OTHERS SUCCESSFUL

True happiness is not in receiving things, but in giving that which will truly benefit the lives of others. Paul praised Timothy for having the quality of availability. “I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel,” (Philippians 2:20-22, New International Version). Timothy learned this self-sacrificing attitude toward others from Paul himself, who told the Corinthian believers, “And I

will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls..." (II Corinthians 12:15, New American Standard Version).

Jesus is the ultimate example of availability. He lived among people who had needs and served them from early morning until night. He laid down His life that we might have life, and now He makes continual intercession for us. (See Romans 8:34.)

HOW CAN WE DEVELOP AVAILABILITY?

1. By not seeking our own pleasure

The pleasures of the world dissipate time, energy, and assets. Proverbs says, "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings" (Proverbs 31:3). The futility of seeking our own pleasure is accurately described by the word amusement, derived from the root words *a*, meaning "not," and *muser*, meaning "to think."

2. By not seeking great achievements for ourselves

"Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). By seeking our own achievements, we will be distracted from achieving the goals of those whom we serve, and we will tend to use others to serve us and our goals. We are motivated to be available if we recognize how our tasks accomplish part of a greater objective. When three bricklayers were asked what they were doing, the first answered, "I am making a living." The second said, "I am building a wall." But the third responded with a smile, "I am building a great cathedral!" We are here on earth to accomplish the greater objective of advancing God's kingdom, so must seek it first. (See Matthew 6:33).

3. By developing efficiency in meeting personal needs

The more organized our personal lives and the less we need for ourselves, the more time, energy, and resources we will have for the tasks of those we serve. Paul stated, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8). When I remember that all the things I have come from God and belong to Him, I cheerfully make them available for Him to use. Peter's boat was empty and available, so when the Master came and asked for it, it was used to teach multitudes how to find life. (See Matthew 13:2, Luke 5:3).

4. By discovering the priorities of those we serve

When we serve God-given authorities as if we are serving the Lord, it is hard to distinguish which voice is calling us. This was the experience of young Samuel. (See I Samuel 3). "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1). Availability means knowing when needs occur and which needs should be taken care of first. If we try to decide this for ourselves, rather than discovering the priorities of our authorities, we risk making unnecessary sacrifices. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22).

HOW AVAILABLE ARE YOU FOR SERVICE?

- Do you choose to serve God rather than money?
- Do you purpose to be a giver rather than a taker?
- Do you work to make others successful?
- Do you keep your personal responsibilities to a minimum?
- Do you deny yourself distracting pleasures?
- Do you set aside personal ambitions in order to advance the kingdom of God and His righteousness?