

“An utterly liberating and joy-giving book—and a really fun read. *Serving without Sinking* opens us up, exposing the problems that cripple our Christian lives, and then applies the healing balm of God’s grace. It’s a book that every Christian should read.”

Michael Reeves, Head of Theology at UCCF, UK; author of “Delighting in the Trinity” (US) / “The Good God” (UK)

“If, like me, you don’t read books much and get bogged down with Christian service, this book will help you smile. Not just because it is enjoyable, contemporary and biblical, but because it reminds us that we are served by Jesus, who—as our Master, Friend, Husband and Brother—gives us every reason not to sink, but to smile.”

David Burrowes, Member of Parliament for Enfield Southgate; Parliamentary Chairman of the Conservative Christian Fellowship

“I am so glad someone wrote this book. It is easy for church service to degenerate into a burdensome exercise in works righteousness—here is good news for anyone who wants to avoid bitterness or burn-out. I plan to commend this to every elder, deacon and ministry elder in our congregation.”

Mike McKinley, Pastor of Guilford Baptist Church, Virginia; author of “Passion” and “Church Planting is for Wimps”

“If it’s true that as Christians we don’t need more *than* the gospel but more *of* the gospel, then this book is a book to read. It applies the gospel to our hearts and circumstances and reminds us again and again of what God has done for us in Christ. It is accessible, biblical and keeps taking us to the Saviour. Read and be refreshed.”

Steve Timmis, Director of Acts 29 Europe; a pastor in The Crowded House, Sheffield; co-author of Total Church

“This book is short and easy to read, yet it’s packed with liberating gospel truth to turn service from duty to delight.”
Tim Chester, Pastor of The Crowded House, Sheffield and faculty member of WEST Porterbrook; author of “You Can Change”

“This will transform the way you think about service. I wish I’d read it twenty years ago—buy it, read it, give it!”
Carrie Sandom, Associate Minister for Women and Pastoral Care at St John’s Tunbridge Wells, Kent; author of “Different by Design”

“This fresh, warm, honest book did me good. It is richly filled with grace, informed by a gritty realism, and shot through with pastoral perceptiveness. There is something in it for every Christian.”
Christopher Ash, Director of the Cornhill Training Course, London; author of “Pure Joy” and “Married for God”

“If you long to serve Jesus joyfully, but don’t know how; if serving God feels exhausting rather than restful; this book will help you rediscover His love and excite you about serving Him.”
Marcus Honeysett, Director of Living Leadership; author of “Finding Joy”

“This book delivers what it promises; a desire to serve the Lord who came to serve us. It will change your life and help you change the lives of others. Highly recommended.”
David Jones, Minister of Mount Stuart Presbyterian Church, Hobart, Australia

Serving without sinking

How to serve Christ *and* keep your joy

John Hindley

*To my wife, Flick.
Your love, fun, wisdom and kindness make our
marriage a delightful gift from Christ to me.*

Serving without sinking: *How to serve Christ and keep your joy*
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Contents

1	Introduction	7
2	Serving can be joyful	11
3	A wrong view of God	17
4	A wrong view of people	31
5	Served by Christ	45
6	Friends with the Boss	55
7	Bride of the King	65
8	Sons of the Father	75
9	Still being served	81
10	The gift of serving	89
11	Serving is love	99
12	Slaves with a Master	107
13	The joy of serving Jesus	117
	Thank you...	125

1 . Introduction

Martin began to relax as he walked home from church. His work was finished. He'd opened up, sorted out the chairs, done the children's talk, and cleared away afterwards. He felt free—he'd done his duty and now the rest of the day was his. He could relax and enjoy himself. What a wonderful feeling!

Sophie had been running the children's holiday club at church. It had been exhausting, and the clear-up had finished her off. Just as she collapsed onto the sofa, the phone rang. It was a guy from church. Could she get the bread for communion the next morning? It would only be a ten-minute walk. She said yes, of course—but inside she was seething. Furious with... well, with Jesus. She'd been serving Him all week; she'd been the only one who stayed behind to clear up; everyone else was relaxing at home; *she* had to go and get the bread. Couldn't He give her a break?

David really loved his new church. The harvest supper had been great—he was starting to make friends. Afterwards, the pastor asked him to help put some stage blocks back in the storage loft. He joined a group of guys lifting them in. It was great fun and a good laugh—and afterwards the pastor thanked him for being an example of joyful service. David went home praising God. He liked serving Christ. He was going to enjoy being part of this church.

Brad had been a student for three years when it all clicked. The minister was preaching on God's love, and particularly God's love in dying for those who were so flawed. Something happened that night in his heart—and he knew that all he wanted to do was serve Him. He fixed up a meeting the next day with the minister, and told him he wanted to spend his life serving Jesus—and that he wanted help to get started.

I have been all those people (I gave myself different names, and in one case a different gender!). And I have gone through those feelings in reverse order, from *Brad* through *David* to *Sophie* and *Martin*. This book comes out of what had happened in my soul, that turned serving Jesus from the thing I enjoyed most into a chore that I resented and a duty I had to fulfil.

Maybe you feel the same. Maybe you remember a time when serving Jesus was exciting, something you wanted to do—but now it's something you just have to do. The busy-ness has sucked out the joy—it's a constant battle to keep your head above water. *A servant is who you have to be.*

Maybe for you it's not like that. Perhaps for you, serving is nothing like a duty; it's your glory. You see yourself as, and you love that everyone else sees you as, a dependable volunteer; or an admired children's-group teacher; or a well-respected preacher. *A servant is who you are.*

Or perhaps you work hard behind the scenes at your church—and no one ever notices. You can feel yourself growing bitter about serving because it's never met with a thank-you. *A servant is who you'd like people to notice you are.*

Maybe you serve as much as you can, because you want to be as good a Christian as you can. Otherwise, God's not going

to bless you, is He? Sometimes you go to work without reading your Bible and praying, and you know the day will go badly—God won't be pleased with someone as useless as you. *A servant is who God demands you be.*

Or perhaps you are none of those people. You don't need to run around serving Jesus—the whole point of Christianity is that you're saved by grace! He's done it all so that you don't have to. He's given you your ticket to heaven. *A servant is not who you need to be.*

Maybe you're not a Christian and you have some questions. Christians talk about freedom and forgiveness. They talk about a God who loves and asks nothing in return. Then they live as though working for the most demanding, picky, small-minded of gods.

The thing is that Christians serve for many kinds of reasons—and almost all of them are flawed. I know my motives are mixed at best, wrong at worst.

Christian service shouldn't leave us feeling irritated, exhausted, guilty, proud, bitter or lazy—but all too often I chat to Christians who feel one (or all!) of those things. I see them in myself, too.

So this book looks at our service. When we think of serving as Christians, we often think of what we do for and with church; and so the majority of the examples and applications in each chapter are about serving as part of our churches. Our service of Jesus is much wider than this, though, and maybe when you think of serving Him, you most naturally focus on another area of service—in your home, bringing up children, or in someone else's home, looking after an elderly relative or friend, or somewhere else. Christian service is not less than what we do on Sundays at church, but it's much more than that. So wherever and however you are serving, the truths in this book apply.

But this book isn't primarily about *our* service. It's mainly about Jesus Christ, and about *His* service. He said that He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10 v 45). He meant it. He was taken, beaten, tried, mocked, nailed, hung, cursed, judged, killed. He served. He loved.

So Jesus does not want you to measure your life by your service of Him. He does not want your service to get in the way of your love for Him. He did not come to be served by you—He came to serve you.

If we grasp this, then we will be set free to enjoy His love. And then, oddly, we will also be set free to serve Him longer, harder, braver, truer than we ever could otherwise. This is joy, and we'll only find it in Christ.

I was all four of those people (including Sophie). I still am, at times. I pray that this book helps you in your love for Jesus, your joy in Jesus, and then—and only then—with your service of Jesus. And at this point in writing, I'm praying it does that for me, too!