

ONE ANOTHER

Cultivating Christ-Centered Community

LESSON THREE



THE FRUIT OF SERVING ONE ANOTHER

- Giving yourself to others in the service of Jesus; offering his welcoming heart to others
- Seeing your neighbors as real and important; loving them as you love yourself
- Sharing your home, food, resources, and all that you call your own so that another might experience the reality of God's welcoming heart
- Seriously caring for those who are marginalized and oppressed
- Receiving interruptions as opportunities to do good
- Turning your attention to others and their needs rather than only thinking of yourself
- Using your influence to better the lives of others
- Using your gifts to build the kingdom of God

SERVE ONE ANOTHER

“WHO IS GREATER, THE ONE WHO IS AT THE TABLE OR THE ONE WHO SERVES? IS IT NOT THE ONE AT THE TABLE? BUT I AM AMONG YOU AS ONE WHO SERVES.” LUKE 22:7

In the kingdom of this world, greatness is defined by power. The one who is served is greater than the one who serves. Jesus reversed the notion of greatness. Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Jesus was a servant. As Jesus is, so are his followers. His example becomes our example. Being a servant of others is the highest way to live. Wanting and needing to be served by others is not life-producing but soul-destroying. Jesus showed us that by example. Jesus, the Creator of the universe, the King of kings, comes to serve. He washes the feet of the disciples. He lives to serve.

This is because he was moved by one thing: love. He told his disciples that the greatest expression of love is to give of yourself for the good of others. In fact, the greatest act of love would be to offer your life in exchange for the well-being of another. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13).

Jesus taught us how to serve one another — in love. Jesus not only taught it, he lived it. He gave his life for the good of others, including you and me. We who follow him as teacher and Lord are called to do the same, to shift our focus away from ourselves and onto others. Simply put: We are to love and serve one another because we have been first loved and served by Christ himself.

— James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community*

We learn about service best by watching it in action over an extended period of time. When we see someone intently listening to another human being, we are witnessing service in action. When we see a person holding the sorrows of another in tender, loving care, we are witnessing service in action. When we see someone actively guarding the reputation of others, we are witnessing service in action. When we see simple, everyday acts of kindness, we are witnessing service in action.

It is in these actions and many more like them that we begin to get a picture of service. The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of serving one another. Such a ministry, flowing out of the inner recesses of the heart, is life and joy and peace.

— Richard J. Foster

SERVE ONE ANOTHER

“Serve one another humbly in love” Galatians 5:13

Serving one another begins with *seeing one another*. As Adele Calhoun observes, “We will never really serve others unless we see that the needs of our neighbors are as real and important as our own. When we are preoccupied with our own concerns, much of the world is simply invisible to us. **Service is rooted in *seeing* — in seeing others as God sees them.**”

God cares about everybody. The Spirit of Jesus is a compassionate, serving Spirit that always works for the good of others. When we serve one another, we reflect the helping, caring, and sharing love of God in the world. Ultimately, serving one another — whether by offering our resources, time, treasure, influence, or expertise for the care of others — gives hands to the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Read Galatians 5:13-15

Free. Serve. Others. Love. With those four words in verse 13, Paul shows us that we are free precisely for the purpose of service to others through love. Many consider the notion of freedom in our culture as license to do “whatever I want” or to gratify every desire. Paul offers a radically different understanding of freedom. Paul tells the Galatians not to use their freedom as an “opportunity for self-indulgence.” The freedom Christ gives is not freedom for self-indulgence but freedom *from self for service* to others. It is the freedom in which life in community flourishes.

This is Paul’s point: We are free, but not to use our freedom to serve ourselves (“indulge the flesh”). “Flesh” (*sarx*) for Paul is not merely the physical body, but the whole self under the power of sin, with its self-serving desires and motives. This self is never satisfied; it never has enough esteem, status, wealth, pleasure, or whatever else it is seeking. Self-indulgence easily becomes a new form of slavery. Christ frees us not only from the law, but from the sinful self. Freed from self, we are free to serve one another in love. Our freedom is expressed when we use our freedom in Christ to serve others in love. When we serve one another, we embody what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We participate in Christ’s display of his love toward his church.

Paul says that “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (5:14). It is the self-giving love God has shown us in Christ, “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This kind of love goes far beyond what the law demands. It is an all-encompassing way of life, constantly seeking to serve the neighbor. The alternative to loving service to one another is described in 5:15: “If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.” Self-centeredness inevitably leads to seeing others as rivals rather than beloved children of God. The resulting behavior is the opposite of loving service and destroys life in community.

Ultimately, the true meaning of love is found in the freedom to give ourselves away. True freedom is what we get when we live our lives in loving service to others. Paul does not see our serving one another as a burdensome duty driven by guilt, fear, or manipulation. Rather, it is the beautiful reality of the freedom offered to us by Christ in the gospel that drives our serving one another.

SERVE ONE ANOTHER

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve one another” 1 Peter 4:10

[Read 1 Peter 4:8-11](#)

1 Peter 4:8-11 gives a picture of the mutuality of church life the author envisions for the churches in Asia Minor. Passages like this one reminds us that faith requires community — a community in which all members share the particular gifts that God has given them.

In 4:10 Peter says that we all have gifts and that God expects us to use those gifts to serve one another. We are uniquely wired and gifted to serve God in specific and significant ways. All we need is intentionality and opportunity. Using our gifts for others won't happen by accident. It may not even happen on a Sunday morning. If we are really going to use our gifts for others, chances are it will happen during the 99% of the week that is not in the assembly.

In 4:11 Peter tells us that it is God who supplies us with everything we need to do this. True service comes from a relationship with God deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings. God's power and God's strength are manifested in the church through serving one another. On one hand, that means there are no excuses to keep our gifts to ourselves. On the other hand, it reminds us that the whole point of this is that when we love, serve, and show hospitality to one another that the end result is, “that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”

[Read Acts 2:42-47](#)

Each time we read this passage, we're reminded of how the community witnesses to Jesus and the power of the Spirit through its ministry of shared practices and goods, fellowship and meals, gratitude to God, and the goodwill experienced by them among the rest of the people. This witness manifests itself in houses and in the Jerusalem temple. It benefits its members and earns the admiration of outsiders. **The community exists not for its own sake, but to serve one another and care for one another, especially its most vulnerable members, and to be a means by which God extends salvation to others.**

[Final Thoughts](#)

In his chapter on service in *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster writes: “**True service is free of the need to calculate results.** It delights only in the service. It can serve enemies as freely as friends. **True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.** It knows that the “feeling to serve” can often be a hindrance to true service. **True service is a life-style.** It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It moves spontaneously to meet human need. **True service builds community.** It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others. It draws, binds, heals, builds.”

Still today, the risen Christ calls us to the ministry of service. We are commanded to serve, whatever that might look like. **Along with serving those to whom you are closest (e.g. family, friends, and small group), chances are, you have one neighbor to whom you could demonstrate care right now.** What are the needs? How can you care? What are some small ways that you can serve them? Remember, part of being knowledgeable of your neighbors' needs involves *knowing* your neighbor. If you are regularly having conversations, and they express a need (even if they're not asking *you* to intervene), you can show you care by finding a way to meet that need based on your conversation.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” Small acts of compassion and kindness are enough to make a great difference in someone's life.

DISCUSSION

1. Briefly describe a time that someone has surprised you by going the extra mile to serve you. What did that mean to you?
2. It has been said that the happiest people are those who have learned how to serve others. Who has modeled this for you and what have you learned from them?
3. “Serving one another begins with seeing one another.” In what ways have you learned the truth of this statement throughout your life? What are some obstacles that keep us from seeing others – particularly in the way that God sees them?
4. Serving and caring for others is rarely convenient. It will almost always involve a deviation from our normal plans. What makes it hard to make others a priority? How have you learned to receive interruptions as opportunities to do good?
5. When we think of service, often times it’s the “big” or “glamorous” examples that come to mind. But in reality, the most common opportunities to serve one another come through simple, everyday acts of kindness and humility. Name some examples of these small acts of service and discuss the suggestions below. Commit to serving others in some of these small ways in the coming week.
 - At the beginning of the day, ask your spouse, children, or roommate, “What can I do for you today?” Then do it.
 - Take time to ask a family member or friend how the other person is doing and really listen. Even if you have other things to do, practice putting his or her needs ahead of yours.
 - Take time to visit a coworker and ask, “What are you working on that I might be able to help with?”
 - Be intentional about having regular conversations with your neighbors. Chances are, you have one neighbor to whom you could demonstrate care right now. What are their needs? How can you care?