



SERVING OTHERS

Introduction

As our journey of following Jesus unfolds, it can be easy for it to become all about us. Indeed, it's amazing what Jesus has done for us, and thank God we have communion to remind us. But if we want to continue in our spiritual growth process, we have to also be reminded that this life is not all about us. By serving others we become Christ-like (Matthew 23:11, 25:34-40; John 13; Galatians 5:13). Jesus himself said in Matthew 20:28, "I have not come to be served, but to serve others..."

Let's read Matthew 25:34-40:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'



When was a time that you served other people? Did you treat it as you were serving Jesus Himself?

Are there any ways that you've been wanting to serve others but haven't done it yet? If so, what's holding you back?

Servant Leadership

The word "servant leadership" comes to mind here as we begin thinking practically about how to serve others. The night that Jesus was betrayed, the King of Kings got on his knees and began washing the feet of the disciples. If God himself can get down and wash those nasty, disgusting feet, then so can you. Not every Christ-follower has the "gift" of serving and yet we are all still called to serve. Serving others transforms our heart, soul, mind, and strength to focus on the needs of others. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." Just as Jesus had your best interests in mind in coming to this earth to redeem you, so we are to have the mind of Christ in looking out for the needs of others. We exemplify the leadership of Jesus by serving others and treating others with respect, dignity, and gratitude.



What does servant leadership look like to you? This could be at your job, your church, in your home, etc.



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The Science of Serving Others

When Jesus taught us practices and theology, they weren't just nice-sounding anecdotes about how to live your life. Most of these 7 Practices for Spiritual Growth are scientifically proved to help our biological bodies. As Christians, it's imperative that we look at health and growth through a holistic lens. God didn't just give us a spiritual body, He gave us a physical body as well, which is why spiritual growth takes place in both the spiritual and physical worlds.

There is research to show the scientific effects of helping others. Here are a few of them:

1. It can promote physiological changes in the brain linked with happiness. It also improves our support network and in turn can improve our self-esteem.
2. It provides us with a sense of belonging and these "face-to-face activities" of serving others helps to reduce loneliness and isolation.
3. "There is some evidence that being aware of your own acts of kindness, as well as the things you are grateful for, can increase feelings of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction. Doing good may help you to have a more positive outlook about your own circumstances."
4. Serving others can actually lower depression. What they found was that the "heightened levels of self-focused attention that's common in depression" was lowered because they were focused on others rather than themselves.
5. There is neural evidence that suggests a link between generosity and happiness in the brain.
6. When we help others "navigate their stressful situations, we are enhancing our own emotion regulation skills, and thus, benefiting our own emotional wellbeing."

What we're seeing here is that God created us, as humans, to be in community together and to help each other. I think God set this world up intentionally so that if all we thought about was ourselves, we would fall into things like anxiety, depression, and other forms of mental health problems. Please don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that anxiety, depression, unhappiness, etc. are *only* the result of self-absorbed behaviors. I'm saying that self-absorbed behaviors often carry the byproduct of those symptoms.

If we're being honest with the state of America right now, it's not hard to see that truth. The U.S. is ranked one of the top countries in the world for depression. Yet, the U.S. has the best medicine, the best technology, and everything one could want. How is it that we are one of the top countries with depression? According to Evelyn Bromet, PhD, "We have shown that depression is a significant public health concern across all regions of the world and is strongly linked to social conditions."



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The Science of Serving Others (cont.)

While studying for a sermon I preached recently, I came across an article that said, “There is solid research showing that a higher proportion of people in our society today display characteristics of narcissistic behavior compared to people in the past.” They believe this is tied, at least in part, to pervasive screen use. They note, “the objects themselves do not make us self-centered but the way we use them does.” Are we seeing a trend here? Higher rates of narcissism. Higher rates of depression and anxiety. Whether we want to admit it or not, we have become infatuated with ourselves. Now, this doesn’t mean that we all think we are the best. This means that a good portion of our time focuses on how we look, how we dress, how we shop, what material things we have or don’t have, etc. And when we don’t line up with “the Joneses” on Facebook, it causes us to be so inward focused that we lose sight of how to help and serve others.

Let’s read Galatians 5:13-14:

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”



What are some narcissistic behaviors that you’ve seen in yourself? Does your “screen use” contribute to them?

Do you think that serving others will help you in your self-esteem and/or morale? Why or why not?

History

If we go back to the Last Supper and the Seder for a moment, we find Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. During the Seder, there are two hand washings. In the first hand washing (Ur’chatz), a tradition exists that only the leader will perform their hand washing, and in some traditions, all Seder participants wash their hands. Regardless, we find Jesus doing something he often did: take things to the next level. While they all most likely washed their hands, Jesus took this ritual one step further and washed the feet of the disciples. In the NIV Cultural Study Bible, they note, “Washing others feet was normally a servile task. Dirt roads made feed dusty; urban streets sometimes included refuse from chamber pots dumped from windows.”

Luke’s Gospel does not record this act, however, when we look at Luke 22:24 we see that there was a dispute among the disciples about who was considered the greatest (Talk about narcissistic!). It’s here that Jesus says, “For who is greater, the one at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” Jesus was constantly teaching them that being a part of the kingdom has nothing to do with who has the greatest honor. The greatest among you, Jesus says, will be your servant. Followers of Jesus are humble servants who are meant to lead this world by serving others.



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Practicing Serving Others

Tonight we'll be serving one another by washing each others' feet. This of course reminds us of two things. First, there is no one on this earth that has a perfect life. We all need our feet washed because all of us are dirty in the spiritual sense. Second, it reminds us that we need to be people who model servant leadership and in turn become Christ-like.

According to the verses above, serving others seems to be requisite for living out one's faith in Jesus. We may be saved by faith and no amount of works helps us to earn our salvation, but Jesus is clear that serving the "least of these" is a fruit of the Holy Spirit residing in you when you come to faith in Him. Investing in the lives of others is not only important for spiritual transformation and growth, but for the Christian life as a whole. Galatians 5:13 says that even though we have been made free in Christ, we shouldn't use that freedom to indulge in flesh-like behaviors. Instead, we should use our freedom to serve one another humbly in love.

As we prostrate ourselves toward the feet of others, we recognize that we are all called to be servants to one another. It's a sign of humility and forces us to remember not to lord anything over other people. Remember as you go through this next week who you are called to be: Humble, serving, loving, gracious, and kind. As Jesus says, "The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Ways To Serve Others

I asked people online ways that they serve others and wanted to give you a few different ways that you can step out of your comfort zone to serve others in impactful ways.

- Taking someone out: coffee, salon, nails, etc.
- Invite people over for a meal when they need time alone.
- Fixing cars, appliances, and other household items.
- Feeding a busy family a hot meal each week.
- Helping people fill out important documents.
- Grabbing a drink or snack and dropping it at someones house, but don't go in unless asked.
- Passing out bottles of water to random people.
- Share soup and baked goods with friends in need.
- Handwritten cards.
- Organizing a food or supply drive for local shelters and food banks.
- Teaching classes to groups in need of support.
- Investing time in listening to what someone has to say and learning what their actual needs are and how to meet those needs.



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