

How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

Week 8 - Service

May 5, 2024

I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of study this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: On the night he was betrayed, in the Upper Room with his disciples, Jesus “got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. He then poured water into a basin and began washing his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” After this act of service for them, Jesus shared, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” That story is in John 13 and is foundational to this week’s spiritual discipline, Service.

Service is at the very heart of our calling as the people of God because service is at the very heart of our God himself. A few months ago, during Jason’s sermon series *Knowing Jesus*, he led us in a study of Philippians 2:5–11, a central teaching in the early church. In this passage, Paul invites us to model our lives after the life that Jesus led, who despite being God chose to empty himself by becoming a servant, made in our likeness. And then as a man, he lived a life of humility—a life that ultimately led to his death on a cross. In that sermon, Jason urged us to make Jesus the Lord of our whole life—our whole self. The life we are called into is a life that is not our own—a life of humility.

But this life of humility and service is in direct conflict to the ways of the world and the temptations of the enemy. The enemy wants your life to be all about you, and our culture normalizes and accentuates that desire. The enemy wants our lives to revolve around our needs, our desires, and our happiness, but Jesus models the opposite. He invites us to empty ourselves, to prioritize the needs of others, and to live a life of sacrifice.

This life of service starts with our eyes. Are we able to see the needs of our family members, our friends, and our neighborhood? Are we able to see others as God sees

them? Adele Calhoun writes, “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 does.”¹ By looking beyond our own needs and desires, we are able to see people as our compassionate God sees them and love people as our good God loves us. The spiritual discipline of service can help us transform our hearts and our eyes for the sake of the world and can help us model our lives after the life of Jesus.

- B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: Who is someone in your life who has modeled a life of service and humility to you? Share about them.

III. Discussion Time

- A. When you hear the word "discipline," what comes to mind? Is "discipline" an off-putting term to you? Instead of thinking about the spiritual disciplines as areas where we have to "try harder," Jason suggested thinking of them as "training" God uses to grow our souls. In your mind, is this a helpful distinction?
- B. Look at 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. In this passage, what does Paul have to say about this idea of "training" at a spiritual level?
- C. Can you recall a time when you personally witnessed Christian service in action? What stood out to you the most about this example?
- D. Read Galatians 5:13. What does it mean when it says that we have been "called to freedom?" How would you re-phrase the command "do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" in your own words? According to the final line of this passage, what is the key ingredient of Christian service?
- E. What are some of the barriers that keep us from serving others more fully? What are some practical ways we can overcome these barriers?
- F. Read 1 Peter 4:10. Do you know some of your spiritual gifts? If so, how are you trying to steward this gift from God? If not, how can you find out your spiritual gift?
- G. Jason emphasized that the idea of "ministry" is not limited to those who are employed by the church. The biblical idea is a broad one that covers all who follow Jesus. What is your ministry? What is your ministry to your family? To Mayfair? To your community?
- H. Read Colossians 3:23-24. What does this passage teach us about service?
- I. Read the following quote from John Henry Newman: "God has created me to do Him some definitive service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another . . . I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall love as Christ

¹Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 168.

loved, I shall do His work." What stands out to you about this quote? Is there a line that particularly resonates with you?

J. Close with some prayer time together.

IV. Invitation for the Week (***Invitation Video provided***): This week, we want to encourage you to take some time to practice the discipline of service. Here are three ways that you could practice this discipline:

A. Every morning this week ask your spouse, a roommate, colleague, or friend, "What can I do for you today?" Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you learn about yourself and the needs of others?²

B. In the context of your community (with your spouse, family, roommates, small group, or group of friends), pray together about a way that you could serve the city of Huntsville this week, and spend some time serving together. Our God is already at work in our city! How can you join Him? ***Here are some examples of some service opportunities in our city:***

1. University Christian Student Center
2. 2820 Community Ministry
3. Lakewood Church of Christ
4. West Lawn Iglesia de Cristo
5. Bags of Blessings
6. Childhaven
7. Shanon's House of Compassion
8. Agape of North Alabama
9. Boys and Girls Club - James A. Lane
10. Manna House
11. Kids to Love
12. 205 8th Street
13. Friends, Inc.
14. Huntsville Learning Center
15. CASA Gardens
16. Downtown Rescue Mission
17. Care for Hospitals and nursing home facilities

C. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us about the motivations behind our service: "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand

² Adapted from Calhoun, 169.

know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” This week, choose to do something for or give something to someone anonymously. Allow the Spirit to help you discover who you should choose. As you talk to people, pay attention to any need they might mention. Plan a way of following through on your desire without letting them know where the help or gift came from. Process your experience with the Lord.⁵

⁵Adapted from Calhoun, 120.