

LIFE with Jesus on Mission

Serve

INTRODUCTION

The night before He died, Jesus did a shocking thing. You would think He would have been withdrawn and preoccupied that night. Instead, He poured Himself out for His friends in the humblest possible expression of His love.

John relates how the disciples gathered in the upper room for the Passover meal. To satisfy customs of their time, they should have washed their feet before they sat at the table. This task would normally have been performed by a servant, but there were no servants, so they sat around the table with dirty feet. It probably didn't occur to any of them to take up this humiliating task.

Then Jesus takes their breath away: He takes off His outer garments and goes around the table washing each of His disciples' dust-caked feet—performing for them the humblest task of the lowest servant.

When He sits back down, He says to them, “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”¹

In Matthew, Jesus teaches the same thing: “The greatest among you shall be your servant,”² He says.

Jesus practiced what He preached. He was the greatest, and He was the greatest servant—giving even His life to serve His friends. Jesus, Highest King of Heaven, lived a lifestyle of love in action—service—by teaching, healing, feeding, dying, and even washing feet.

And He tells us to do the same: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another . . . Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”^{3 4}

To follow Jesus, then, we also must make service our practice.

This practice will focus on service within the community of the church. Other practices will emphasize service outside the church.

¹ John 13:13-15

² Matthew 23:11

³ John 13:35

⁴ John 15:12-13

THE PRACTICE

Offer Your Gifts

One of the beautiful things about church life is that there is a place in the church for the expression through service of almost every aptitude and gift. For the church to thrive, it needs the gifts of communicators, administrators, networkers, musicians, and visual artists; it needs those gifted in décor, in entrepreneurship, and financial management; it needs up-front leaders and funny public speakers as well as behind-the-scenes folks to organize, knit, and pray; it needs intercessors and evangelists, readers, card-writers, and chefs. You get the idea; the list endless!

Whatever you like doing, whatever comes naturally to you, you can find a way to bless and serve your church family with your interests and gifts.

- Take a step, reach out, and plug in!

Love One Another

Even more importantly, we can serve by loving one another well: listening, praying, and bearing one another's burdens.

Listen

We all need friends with warm hearts who will listen well to us. We don't necessarily need answers, but to know we are heard and understood. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them."

Attentive, love-filled listening, dotted here and there with questions designed to increase your understanding of your friend's heart and experience, is a ministry of service.

- Ask the Lord if there is someone who needs your listening ear. Then try to listen to your friend simply to understand and empathize; resist the urge to give answers or to fix anything.

Pray

Praying for one another is another expression of this kind of service. Jesus prayed for His disciples, and Paul says of the church, "we have not ceased to pray for you."⁵

- Ask the Lord if there is someone around you who needs the Lord's help and blessing. Commit to praying for them, asking the Lord to direct your prayers.

⁵ Colossians 1:9

Lift a Burden

Burden bearing is another way we express this kind of loving service. Paul says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."⁶ Does anyone around you have a heavy burden that you could help lift? This could be loneliness, sickness, loss, a difficult marriage, a suffering child, or a move across town.

- Ask the Lord, is there anything you can do to make their burden less heavy for them?

HELPFUL VERSES

"Serve one another humbly in love," Galatians 5:13

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve," Mark 10:45

"The greatest among you shall be your servant," Matthew 23:11.

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet," John 13:14.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," John 13:35.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends," John 15:12-13.

INTERESTING QUOTES

"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," Martin Luther King Jr

"Love in action is service." Mother Teresa

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them," Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

⁶ Galatians 6:2

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. What are your experiences with service to your church?
2. How well do you feel you listen to others?
3. Who do you know who is good listener? How do you feel when you are with them?
4. What do you anticipate will be rewarding about this practice?
5. How do you anticipate you might struggle with this practice?
6. Do you have any inklings about how the Lord might be inviting you to engage in this practice?
7. If your group knows one another well enough, can you encourage one another about gifts or talents you see in one another?
8. Someone pray for your group as you head out give this a try.

After you have tried this practice:

1. What were your experiences with this practice?
2. What did you enjoy?
3. What was challenging?
4. Did you find yourself out of your comfort zone?
5. How can you encourage one another to keep trying?