## **Developed through Service**

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

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| **Homework summary:** Please read pages 129 to 147. The exercise on service is on pages 134 to 135. (Approximately 2 hours.) |

**Matthew 25:37-40**

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

***Why do Christians need to serve?***

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our shorthand goal is to become more and more like Jesus himself. That means we should be focusing on deepening our relationship with God through worship, prayer and scripture as we seek to build the spiritual side of ourselves. But there is so much more to becoming a healthy Christian. We also need to exercise our spirituality by doing something with our Christ-centred selves. So again we ask ourselves, “what was Jesus like?” “How did he express his relationship with God?” The answer is, he served.

**Mark 10:45**

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

What both the Matthew and the Mark readings above indicate is that if we wish to serve Jesus and become more like him, we must adopt his “inside-out” approach to life. Jesus’ entire ministry was focused on taking the vision of the kingdom of God to others, and on healing people as a way of demonstrating God’s love for all people.

In many of the Mainline churches, one of our core values is inclusivity, which is probably best expressed as “We value every person as a beloved child of God.” We assert that every person has unlimited value in the eyes of God. As such, every person, no matter how unlike us they are, no matter how much they scare us, no matter how much they remind us that the world is not okay, is to be seen through the eyes of Christ. Every person deserves, and has the full love and devotion of God, and therefore they should have the full love and devotion of every disciple.

***Why is service so important?***

Ranging from the theological to the personal, there are many reasons why a disciple of Jesus Christ needs to turn their life toward the service of others.

*Service deepens your relationship with God*

In many ways, serving is practicing what you’ve learned about God. Jesus taught us what the world should look like (the Kingdom of God) and he wants us to live as though it is already present. This means that we are to love and seek the best for others, advocate for respect and justice for the weakest and marginalized, and work for peace in the world.

In essence, service is a way that God’s love flows through us – in both directions. For it seems that when we meet God others come along. That is why people so often report that when they are involved in meaningful service, they experience it as a holy time.

*Service makes God’s love real*

Scholars believe that the Letter of James was written as a corrector to the Gospels which could have inadvertently given the impression that Christianity is a “spiritual” religion. That is, the Jesus movement is all about our “internal” relationship with God; that all of the disciplines like prayer, worship, scripture, and the like are enough to build mature disciples. James reminds us that our growth as disciples is not the end we are seeking, but rather the Kingdom of God, and that faith alone is not enough to get us there.

**James 2:14-18**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

*Service is essential to the gospel’s credibility*

We all know the truth of the statement, “You need to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk.” Someone who claims to be a follower of Christ, but then acts without regard for others, or with a sense of entitlement or selfishness, has no credibility. In fact, Christians are primarily judged by the outside world as to whether or not they are fundamentally oriented inward on themselves and their church, or oriented outward to others and their neighbourhood.

Periodically, we hear people say, “Isn’t the church supposed to take care of its own people first?” If that were true, then we wouldn’t be the Body of Christ, since Jesus spent his whole ministry living so that others could have abundant life. Rather, as a church we exist so that others might hear of the gospel and come to experience the limitless love of God. Of course we do look after those in our own church, as our community is an expression of the kingdom of God. But that does not diminish our call to serve any in need, nor our purpose to take God’s love to the world.

*Service makes you feel better*

The world is full of consumer items and programs that are designed to make you feel better about yourself. The truth is, what folks are searching for is the certainty that their lives have purpose and meaning. Christians know from experience that the best way to discover those life affirming things is to serve others. Because God has equipped and called every person differently, we can’t say that all you have to do is to go and work with the homeless, or fight for environmental justice, and you will feel fulfilled. Every person needs to discover how they are made for service, and then decide to answer God’s call to use those gifts to build up the kingdom. Although trial and error, others' feedback, and prayer have been the traditional ways of discerning where you are called to serve, there are now instruments like *LifeKeys[[1]](#footnote-1)* which can assist you.

***Where and how do we serve?***

Knowing where you are meant to serve is not a simple thing to discern. Some folks just seem to fall into their ideal service situations. Others seem to struggle with finding opportunities which feed them and therefore don’t burn them out.

The amazing thing is that when you are serving in line with your gifts, you get the feeling that you have linked arms with the Holy Spirit and are able to access a joy and strength which will sustain you in that ministry for much longer than you ever thought possible.

*LifeKeys* consists of a process which allows someone to discern the following:

* Life Gifts – things you do naturally well
* Spiritual Gifts – gifts that God has given you to build up the kingdom
* Personality – using Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory to discover your preferences for the types of atmospheres where you would like to work
* Values – what is really important to you
* Passions – those God-given strong devotions to a cause or ideal or project
* Life Choices – the difficult choices that one needs to make in life in order to create time to do God’s work

Where those six factors line up with a need you discern, that is what you are called to serve.

*The issue of burnout*

Burnout is a serious issue in the church. When we ask people to work in areas which are outside of their gifts, then they will not be able to sustain that ministry for the long run. Nor should they. When you are not serving in line with your gifts, typically you will find that you come away feeling depleted (as opposed to tired). When you are serving in a ministry which lines up with your life gifts, spiritual gifts, personality, values, passions, and life choices then you should finish your time with a deep feeling of satisfaction and joy, even if you are “dead on your feet.” If you’re not feeling that way, then you should get out of that ministry because not only are you going to burn out, and possibly leave the church, you are likely to take others with you.

*Serving in your congregation*

There are always places for folk in the church to serve. There are always opportunities to try out your gifts. The possibilities range from behind-the-scenes helping ministries to up-front worship leadership, as well as administration and Small Group leadership. Simply talk with your Minister/Pastor or with an Elder to find out what is available. It doesn’t matter whether you are a long time member of the congregation or a brand-new, they’ll find a ministry for you.

*Serving beyond the church*

God’s work to bring justice, peace and healing to the world is not limited to the church. Many organizations and coalitions do God’s work, even if they don’t recognize it as such. In many cases it just makes good sense to join with non-Christian organizations who are doing great work, rather than trying to set up our own costly infrastructure to do the same thing. The only trick to serving in such organizations is to be intentional about naming for yourself why you are serving there. It is good to remind yourself that you are involved in any ministry/service because you are committed to being a disciple of the One who loves this world without limits.

*Serving through relationships*

When talking about service, folks get hung up on the notion that service is best if it is large and noticeable. The truth is that some of the most life-changing ministry frequently isn’t recognized as service at all. This world is besieged by a pandemic of loneliness. Everywhere you go you will encounter people who are desperately lonely – even in the church. The need to be in relationship with someone is one of the most basic of human needs. So never underestimate the healing ministry of relationships. Simple things like learning someone’s name, asking about their life, inviting them for coffee or dinner, can literally have life-changing and life-saving effects.

*Serving with our resources*

These days, any discussion of money and faith raises eyebrows. Whenever the topic comes up so do the suspicions about motive. Church and non-church people alike are apt to think, “Here we go again; more lipstick on a pig. The church may say that it’s interested in me and my well-being, but it always seems they are more interested in my money.”

The truth is the church has not done a very good job talking about money. This is partly because it feels particularly self-serving, and because we are not always sure about how we feel and think about it. As we’ve already explored, money is an extremely effective means to help God to change the world. Money in that context represents one of the resources available to us to help create the kingdom of God. So whether we use our money to support Cancer research, send an underprivileged kid to camp, support a girl to go to school in Kenya, or help pay the costs associated with running a church, money can be a very positive and life-giving resource at our disposal. That is why we talk about money when we talk about being Developed through Service to others.

***The question of time***

There is little in our society that is more jealously guarded than our spare time. There is no doubt that people today feel overworked and under-recreated. The demands on our time seem to continually increase and we hear more and more talk about how to say “no” to those demands, and how to protect our time.

The dilemma is that in order to mature your discipleship, to deepen your relationship with God, and to discover and express your individual call to making a difference in the world, you are going to have to spend a significant amount of time. From where is that time going to come, especially in light of the reality that few of us find ourselves asking, “What can I do next?” Of course, the answer has to do with prioritizing our lives.

Interestingly, the current mood around leisure time would suggest that there is very little of it available. But as we mentioned earlier, the average Canadian spends more than 35 hours of their leisure time a week in front of a screen. Perhaps the perception that we have no time for anything else in our life is a tad bit inaccurate.

Whether you serve others with your time, talents, or your resources, it is always a matter of giving something up so that you can do that. Perhaps the most important question you need to ask yourself is, “Do I want my lifestyle to determine my discipleship? Or do I want my discipleship to determine my lifestyle?” How you respond to that question will greatly determine how fully you can invest in the creation of God’s world. If you can get past the fear of giving things up, we guarantee you will find a sense of purpose, joy and satisfaction that will astound you. You will also find that the rest of your life will fall into place. For service is a gift of God, for you, a child of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. Jane Kise, David Stark, Sandra Krebs Hirsh, *LifeKeys: Discover who you are*, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)