

Project Serve Introduction and What is a Servant? Large Group Talk 1

Kick-off Logistics:

This is the kick-off for all the lessons and the DNow weekend. Spend some time laying the ground rules and explaining the schedule for the event.

Here are some things to consider talking about:

1. Tell students why your church or ministry is doing this event. Cast the vision for students to know why it's important and why the church values them.
2. Let students know what they can expect from this weekend. For example: a chance to worship God, learn more about following Christ, have a lot of fun and eat really good food, get some quality time with friends, have ministry leaders invest in them, get answers to tough questions.
3. Let students know what is expected of them. For example: coming to all the sessions, being honest, treating the host homes with care.
4. Take a look at the **Optional Intro Activity: Food Bank Faceoff** in your *Large Group Downloads* as an option to build anticipation and community among students from the start. This activity will give students a chance to serve as they dive into what it means to be a servant.

Project Serve Introduction

Ask: Have you ever seen something in the world that just didn't seem right—a child suffering from hunger or thirst, a person fighting a terrible disease, or a group of people unjustly oppressed by the culture around them? How did that make you feel? Did you do anything in response?

Say Something Like:

We live in a world of cause and effect. You probably learned Newton's third law of motion in science class: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Isaac Newton was talking about the way matter behaves, but it also applies to the things we do in our daily lives. Think about this morning, for example. You woke up hungry (cause), so you ate breakfast (effect). You were cold, so you put on a coat. Your breath stank, so you brushed your teeth—hopefully.

For most of us, service is more of a cause than an effect. It's a means to an end. Just think about what we call an opportunity to serve others—a good "cause." If someone asked us why we serve, we might answer, "Because it feels good to know I've helped someone," or "Because it looks good on a college resume," or even "Because the girl or guy I like is doing it." In each of these cases, service is the cause, and the effect is feeling good, looking good, or spending time with a certain someone. During this DNow event, you'll discover that this is not how service is supposed to work.

Large Group Talk 1: What is a servant?

Let's flip the equation around. What would it look like to see service, not as a cause, but as an effect? It would stop looking like a tool we can use to get what we want, and it would start looking like a natural response to problems we see in the world. It would stop looking like a once-in-a-while, "only when it benefits me" kind of thing, and it would start looking like an all-the-time, "whenever it's needed" part of our identity. So if service is supposed to be an effect, what are the causes? We should jump in to serve when we see injustice, pain, and people in need (and we don't have to look very far to find those things).

But the most important cause that should lead us to serve is the life and person of Jesus Christ. He came to offer himself in service of humanity out of God's love for us. When we encounter Jesus, the Suffering Servant, we should respond by following him with every part of us. That means loving the people he loves, doing the things he told us to do, and living every day to become more like him. Over the next few lessons, you'll discover that, by seeing service as the effect of a life transformed by Christ, service will start to look completely different—who we serve, when we serve, and even how we serve.

Project Serve: What is a Servant?

Large Group Talk 1

Objective: This lesson will give students a new way of thinking about serving others modeled after the life and teachings of Jesus. There are many motivations for service, but not all follow Jesus' example. In this lesson, students will get a clearer picture of what it means to serve like Jesus, to place others' needs before their own, and to give of themselves through sacrificial action. Serving others is a significant aspect of following Jesus; we can't be Christ-followers without also being servants. He doesn't merely call us to perform acts of service; he transforms us into servants. The good things we do should flow out of our new identities in Christ.

Transition to *What is Service?* Large Group Talk

Ask: What images or people come to mind when you hear the word *servant*?

Say Something Like: *When you hear the word servant, you might think of a maid or a butler, like the servants on the TV show "Downton Abbey." They dedicate their lives to serving their wealthy patrons, making and serving them meals, cleaning up their extravagant house, and even dressing and bathing them. (How much would you have to get paid to wash a rich old man or woman? What if you had to do it every single morning?) On the other hand, the word servant might make you think of saintly people like Mother Theresa, who gave up her own comfort to move into the slums of India to serve the poor and dying. Or perhaps you think of slaves, people owned by other people, forced to do everything they're told.*

Large Group Talk 1: What is a servant?

Jesus calls us all to be servants. But what exactly does that mean according to the Bible? Before we can answer that, we have to understand the difference between performing acts of service and taking on the complete identity of a servant. Let's look at a story in the Bible where Jesus describes what it looks like to follow him.

Read Luke 22:24–27

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is 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.

Say Something Like: *Did you catch Jesus' final words here? “I am among you as one who serves.” He doesn't just tell his followers about how good it will feel to do a few good deeds. He tells them that if they want to become great, they should become like him, a lowly servant. Jesus turns everything upside down and invites us into a life of sacrifice for the sake of others. In other words, becoming a servant starts with Jesus.*

Jesus called us to do something radical: to give up trying to be first and to choose to be last. That's way more involved than taking the occasional opportunity to do something nice for someone else. It's a whole new way of living! For Jesus, serving others wasn't just a good idea or part of his moral code. It was a reflection of God's own character. He didn't just serve when he felt like it or when it was convenient. The whole point of Jesus' life was to serve us (Matt. 20:28). Let's explore what Jesus meant when he said, “I am among you as one who serves.”

Teaching: What is a Servant?

1. Servants are Humble.

Say Something Like: *The disciples were fighting about who was the greatest amongst them. If you have siblings or competitive friends, you've probably had that exact same argument! Each of these guys wanted to be the best, the top dogs in the kingdom of God. But that's not the way of Jesus. He explained that their priorities were backwards. In God's kingdom, the greatest of the great are servants, not rulers. By fighting to be the ones in charge, they were becoming less like Jesus, who willingly gave up his high place to become a suffering servant.*

Large Group Talk 1: What is a servant?

True service requires an attitude of humility. In Mark 10:45, Jesus says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The God who created the universe became a human being, growing up as a poor carpenter and choosing to place others’ needs and desires before his own. But it’s tough to grow in humility! By working hard to become humble, we’re still focusing on ourselves. Before long, we’re patting ourselves on the back for being the most humble—not exactly the type of humility Jesus wants us to have. True humility is a result of following Jesus, as we begin to see ourselves in light of who he is.

2. Servants Sacrifice.

Say Something Like: *A true servant is also willing to sacrifice for others. Whether by giving up time, money, social status, or comfort, serving like Jesus means offering our very selves to others. Jesus said he came to “give his life as a ransom for many.” While we may not be putting our lives at risk by following Jesus (although many in our world still do), we are told to take up our crosses daily to follow him. That means dedicating our lives to serving him and the people he cares about. Sometimes service means being led by Jesus into places and situations where we would never go on our own.*

Sacrificial service isn’t done for the applause of others. We should serve to please God, not people. That means you might have to give up popularity, credit, and comfort. Yet serving in the name of Jesus is worth it for the sake of knowing Christ, fulfilling the role God made especially for you, and being a part of God’s kingdom!

3. Servants Do Something.

Say Something Like: *It’s not enough to just talk about serving others or to have an attitude of service. We have to actually do it! It’s one thing to agree that serving people is a good idea, but it’s something else entirely to get on our hands and knees and actually serve. Jesus didn’t just tell people about the benefits of service; he served people in tangible ways. So if we’re going to follow him, we better start walking the walk. His words about service are more than nice suggestions or good ideas to think about—they’re an example for us to follow every single day.*

Knowing what the leader is doing isn’t the same as following him. Mimicking the leader only when we feel like it isn’t the same as following him. We truly follow him when our lives begin to imitate his, when we put our faith into practice and begin serving others around us like Jesus served. Jesus wasn’t just a great teacher who taught about service—he actually served, all the way to his death on the cross for you and me.

Large Group Talk 1: What is a servant?

Putting It All Together

Say Something Like: *Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves.” This service was modeled in his life through humble, sacrificial action. He gave his life to save us from sin and death. Now that we know the life of a servant starts by following Jesus, we have to make some decisions about how we’ll respond. Jesus invites us to imitate the way he served others: by becoming the least instead of the greatest. Following him is a better reward than praise, power, and even comfort. That means we may have to rethink how we spend our time, choosing to say yes to service opportunities instead of other things that might be more fun. More than anything, we need to pray to Jesus and ask him to direct and guide us in our service. Remember, it’s about more than being a good person—it’s about becoming more like Jesus and growing closer to him!*

Question 1: What does it take to be a true servant?

Question 2: What is one obstacle that prevents you from serving like Jesus?

Looking Forward: Let the students know that the next lesson will look at *who* Jesus calls us to serve. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.