

Project Serve: Who Do You Serve?

Large Group Talk 2

Objective: This lesson will give students a clearer picture of the type of people Jesus calls us to serve. The short answer is obvious: anyone! But when we start to realize just who “anyone” includes, we may not be so eager. We cannot limit ourselves to serving only those we like. Jesus invites us to serve people with desperate needs who most people in society look past—the least. We’re called to serve those who don’t know Jesus yet, but desperately need him—the lost. And we’re even called to lovingly care for the people who put us down and wish to do us harm—our enemies. Serving these people means more than just being nice. Service requires our sacrificial love. Students will begin thinking about who they need to serve and how to get started on that journey.

Recap of *What is Service?*

Say Something Like: *In the previous lesson, we learned that servants are those who follow Jesus through humble, sacrificial action. To serve like Jesus means to humble ourselves and to think less about us and more about others. It requires sacrifice and to give up our own time and resources for the sake of others. It also means going beyond words and good intentions to actually do something!*

Introduction

Ask: Use your imagination and create a person exactly the opposite of you in every way—their interests, their favorite things, their personality. What would that person be like?

Say Something Like: *Now that you’ve come up with your imaginary opposite, would you like spending time with that person? People say that “opposites attract,” but is that really true? If you met someone opposite of you in every way, you probably wouldn’t get along with them. Yet there are all sorts of people in our world who aren’t like us—who believe different things, who have different likes and interests, and who may not be very fun to hang around.*

This raises a question: When it comes to serving others, just who are these “others”? Who are the people Jesus calls us to serve? Are they only the people we know and get along with, or does Jesus mean something more? Let’s look at a passage in the Bible where the apostle Paul expands our vision of who we’re supposed to serve.

Read Romans 12:14–16

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

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Say Something Like: *At this point in his letter to the Romans, Paul explains how we're supposed to treat different kinds of people: the lowly and even those who persecute us. These are the "others" in our lives, the people all around us we tend to forget, ignore, or avoid.*

Paul's commands are simple and straightforward, but they're a lot easier said than done. Through the power of Jesus, we can begin to serve the other people in our lives, viewing them less as worthless "others" and more as valuable fellow human beings. We'll look at three specific types of people God calls us to serve: the least, the lost, and our enemies.

Teaching: Who Do You Serve?

1. The Least

Say Something Like: *When we serve others, we're also serving Jesus! It's actually a way we can worship God: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Why widows and orphans? Because they were so far down the social ladder. In Jesus' culture, the husband and father provided pretty much everything for his family. If he died, his wife and children would have no way to take care of themselves. Over and over, God calls his people to support the poor and oppressed, the weak and imprisoned, the immigrant and refugee, the widows and orphans. These people are forgotten and dismissed as if they're worthless. They go unnoticed, despite their pain and stress and fear. But they aren't worthless to God. They're unbelievably valuable. The Bible tells us to be their friends and companions, to reject our social status for their sake, and to serve them like the treasured people they are.*

Paul makes it clear: do not be conceited. We're not to look at others as somehow less valued than we are. The least in our society are worth more than we can imagine to God. Who are the people you encounter on a daily basis who are forgotten, unnoticed, ignored, and lonely? Maybe you feel like you're one of the least. Remember this: Jesus loves you, treasures you, and is with you. You are never alone or ignored by God.

2. The Lost

Say Something Like: *So often we only serve people we're comfortable around. For many Christ-followers, that means serving only people within the church. They're the people we see most often and know the best, so they're the easiest to help out on the fly. Whether it's setting up chairs for youth group, watching kids in the children's ministry, or playing bass on the worship team, there are all sorts of ways we can serve within our own faith community. That's a great place to*

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start! Yet that kind of service doesn't push quite as far as God wants us to go. He wants us to reach outside our communities of faith to serve the unbelieving world around us.

There's no question that this is a difficult thing to do. It's so much easier to lend a helping hand to people who share our foundation of belief. But if the most important part of becoming a servant is to follow Jesus, we can't avoid reaching out to those who reject him. Loving and serving the lost was Jesus' primary mission on earth. Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Never forget—if you're a Christ-follower, it wasn't long ago that you were lost, too. Even if you were raised in a Christian household, Jesus still had to find you and bring you back to the Father. Chances are, he did that through the humble service of someone important in your life: a friend, a youth pastor, or maybe your parents. Now Jesus wants to use you in the same way, to help others who are far from him. If we were only called to serve other Christ-followers, we would be missing out on awesome opportunities to share the love of Jesus with those who don't know him yet.

Ask: *Think of some people in your life who don't know Jesus (you don't have to share their names). How can you share Christ's love with them—by simply loving them without condition, by helping them with their needs, and by sharing the good news of Jesus with them?*

3. Our Enemies

Say Something Like: *You've probably been nodding your head up until now: "Yes, we should help those our society sees as least!" "Of course the lost need us to reach out to them!" "Amen!" But now we arrive at a group of people that may make us grimace: our enemies. Now, maybe you're thinking, I'm a nice person. I don't have any enemies! We don't tend to use the word enemy to describe people we know; the term is usually reserved for super villains in comic books or the opposing forces in war movies. Here, Paul tells us to "bless those who persecute you." Jesus says something similar in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:43–44: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Both Paul and Jesus tell us to love those who oppose us, especially for our faith. Whether they are students at school who make fun of our faith or an adult who ridicules us for believing in the Bible, we're called to love and serve them with compassion. It's unbelievably tough to avoid retaliating against those who put us down, but it's not impossible. Once again, the power to serve our enemies starts with Jesus. Just look at this example of someone who followed Jesus' example in responding to his enemies.*

Our first instinct as human beings is "fight or flight," to hit back or to run away. But Jesus calls us to a higher path—to stand firm in our convictions while

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expressing deep love and grace for those who hurt us. Jesus shows us how to replace our hatred for our enemies with love and service. At the lowest point in his life, Jesus prayed for his enemies. It's hard to stay bitter or angry with someone if you commit yourself to praying for them.

Leaders Note: *Based on the group dynamic and the appropriateness of the situation, it might be worthwhile to say something like the following if you feel it would be helpful: It's also important to remember that loving and serving your enemies isn't the same as letting them continue to hurt or attack you. If you love someone, the last thing you should want is for them to continue opposing God's will and abusing others. If you're being bullied or abused in any way, either by people at school or at home, you don't have to deal with it alone. Please come talk with an adult leader or me, and we'll help you find safety and healing.*

Putting It All Together:

Say Something Like: *When we ask the question, "Who should I serve, my family, the greatest, the least, other Christ-followers, the lost, my friends, or my enemies?" the answer from Jesus is "Yes!" We are called to serve others, period—no matter how "other" that person may be. And we should say yes back. From people who don't know Jesus, to those we forget and ignore, to the people who oppose and hurt us, Jesus leads us to say, "Yes, I'll serve you." Honestly, we don't have the strength to serve all of these others by our own efforts. We need to submit ourselves to Jesus, asking him to love and serve others through us. We need the grace of Christ to empower us and to guide us, giving us the courage to serve when our own impulses tell us "No." We also need the power of community to serve others together. Paul encourages us to "live in harmony," to work together to serve others and to be a source of strength and encouragement as we show others compassion.*

Question 1: What gets in the way of you serving the lost, the least, and your enemies?

Question 2: What is one way you could serve these three groups that would require the help of a group of other people?

Question 3: How can you show God's love as a team in a way you never could on your own?

Looking Forward: Let the students know that the next lesson will look at the question, When does Jesus call us to serve? Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.