

Project Serve: How Do You Serve?

Large Group Talk 4

Objective: This lesson's goal is to expand students' ideas about service from simple daily tasks or acts of kindness into a lifestyle of service. When we become followers of Christ, we begin to take on his characteristics. Jesus didn't enter the world as a conquering military leader. He came as a suffering servant. So, if we're becoming more and more like him, we should find ourselves becoming servants, as well. What does that look like? Service takes many forms, and this lesson talks about serving in these three areas: praying for others, caring for others' relational and emotional needs, and sharing the good news of Jesus.

Recap of When Do You Serve?

Say Something Like: *In the three previous sessions, we talked about how service starts long before we do something for someone else. Service actually starts when we become like Christ, the ultimate servant. People who occasionally serve with their actions can cherry-pick the service opportunities that are the least stretching or that make them look good in front of others. But true servants start by following Jesus, transforming their entire lives to become more like him. People with this new "servant" identity will serve others they'd rather not: the least, the lost, and even their enemies. They will also serve at inconvenient times, embracing interruptions as opportunities to show Jesus to others. Service changes from being a checklist that can be completed into being a lifestyle that never goes away.*

Introduction

Ask: What's one thing you enjoy doing or do well that others would be surprised to discover?

Say Something Like: *Most of us probably have something we do in our spare time that would surprise our friends. Maybe we don't tell others about it because we're embarrassed. Or perhaps it's just never come up in conversation. Either way, we all have some talents and interests that are obvious and some that aren't. Service is similar. When we're asked to "serve" someone else, most of us immediately think of the obvious ways, usually physical acts of kindness. But that can be limiting because we won't always be available to do something physical (mow a lawn, dig a well, or feed the homeless). And in many situations, we won't even know what to do to help someone. In those cases, there are other, less obvious ways we can serve people. Those being served may never even know you've done these things. But that doesn't make them any less important. If we're going to be true servants, not just people who serve when it's convenient, then we're going to have to serve beyond physical actions.*

Let's unpack this idea from the book of Colossians:

Read Colossian 3:23–24

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Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Say Something Like: *Earlier in this chapter of Colossians, the apostle Paul says something very similar: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). Both times, Paul uses the same phrase: “whatever you do.” For Paul, and for Jesus, serving goes way beyond random acts of kindness—it involves our whole lives and whatever we do! We have to find creative ways to serve and bless others, sometimes in unintuitive ways. That means using the unique gifts God has blessed us with to, in turn, bless others.*

Opportunities to serve others will come in surprising and unexpected places. Paul encourages us to work at whatever we’re doing with all our hearts because it’s Christ we are serving. This should expand our definition of service to include things like prayer, meeting people’s relational and emotional needs, and introducing them to the good news of Jesus.

Teaching: How Do You Serve?

1. Prayer

Say Something Like: *Prayer gets a bad rap in the world of service. Some people use it as an excuse to get out of doing real work. On social media, they’ll write things like “Praying for people who lost their homes in the tornado” and feel like they’ve done their part, while others actually go care for the victims. But just because some people misuse prayer doesn’t mean it isn’t a fantastic way to serve others. The Bible says that prayer is powerful and effective. Who better to help those in need than our almighty God? Prayer also keeps our thoughts focused on those who need service. It’s easy to forget about the needy people in our lives, but if we pray for them regularly, we’ll be more likely to remember them and reach out to help.*

Prayer isn’t an excuse to be lazy, but going out and serving people isn’t an excuse not to pray. James 5:16 says, “Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” In other words, God tells us to serve others by praying for them. Prayer is a way of recognizing that, even when we’re helping other people in physical ways, God is the one they really need. You may hear people call this type of prayer for other people “intercessory prayer.” That makes it sound complicated. Don’t worry too much about saying the right words or praying in a certain way. Just talk with God like he’s right there (because he is). Make a habit of praying for other people and not just yourself.

2. Serving Relational and Emotional Needs

Say Something Like: *Human beings are wired for relationship. Even if all of our physical needs are met, we're still missing something important if we're alone. In fact, studies have shown that orphan infants in the former Soviet Union who had all of their basic needs met but didn't have regular contact with nurses grew up with serious physical problems. God created us to be in community with others, and he gave us emotions in order to feel and experience life to the fullest. Sometimes the best thing we can do to serve another person is to simply hang out with them, treat them like they're valuable, or sit with them and listen. Allow them to share their hearts. Weep with them. Laugh with them. Be their friend.*

We cannot ignore the relational and emotional component of humanity. There are extreme cases, like the ones we just showed you, but the truth is, all people in our lives have relational and emotional needs. That includes our classmates, our friends, and members of our families. Lack of intimacy and friendship can sometimes be the greatest void in a person's life. Who do you know that just needs a friend, someone to sit with them and listen? Who do you know that needs an invitation to hang out? Jesus didn't always serve people through miracles. Sometimes, he just showed them that they mattered by eating with them and associating with them. (Check out the story of the hated tax collector Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10). We can do the exact same thing. In those moments we are serving others and Jesus!

3. Sharing the Good News of Jesus

Say Something Like: *Beyond our physical and emotional needs, we also have spiritual needs. Every person, whether they recognize it or not, needs a relationship with the God who created them and loves them. We are all searching for meaning and purpose and significance. If becoming a servant starts with following Jesus, then the greatest act of service we can do for another person is to introduce them to him. That's not easy. Sometimes it can feel like we're imposing on others or making them uncomfortable. But if we really believe that a relationship with God through Jesus is the best thing for them (and it is!), then it's worth it to share Jesus with them. One of the best ways to do that is by sharing our own story.*

The greatest act of service you can do to meet someone's spiritual needs is to humbly share the good news of Jesus with them—that he loves them, died on a cross for their sins, rose from the dead, and offers them life and meaning and joy and freedom. This good news—what we call the gospel—affects every part of our lives. Sharing about Jesus with others can be a significant act of service, even when it's risky. Sharing this gospel with others can be a life-changing moment for the person we're serving and for us.

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Putting It All Together

Say Something Like: When it comes to serving others as followers of Jesus, we have to remember to serve more than just their physical needs. We should serve in these unintuitive ways, too. It's not enough to feed someone but never listen to them or pray for them. We have to serve every part of them with every part of us. And we have to remember that whatever service we provide, it's God who they really need. Service should be a whole-life posture—you're always serving, because it's part of your identity as a servant of Jesus! The thing is, we cannot live this way without the power and strength Jesus offers. We must confess to him our inadequacy and inability to love and serve others the way he wants us to, asking him to serve through us. When we recognize our need for Jesus, it transforms everything about us. We serve *with* Jesus, *for* Jesus, and *through the power of* Jesus.

Question 1: Which of these ways of serving is the easiest for you—praying, serving relational emotional needs, or sharing the good news of Jesus? Why?

Question 2: Which of the above ways of serving is hardest for you? Why?

Looking Forward: As this DNow event comes to a close, please take the time to pray a special prayer for people who are far from God. Challenge your students to look for opportunities to present the gospel. Remind them that the next small group session will be the last. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.