



SERVES OTHERS

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① INTRODUCTION

The RISKS series of studies provides an exploration into what it means to be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ. Five characteristics that need to be true of every single disciple of Christ each start with a letter in the word RISKS. A disciple of Christ:

- R**elies on God
- I**nitiates Interest in the Gospel
- S**erves locally and globally
- K**ingdom Investor
- S**haped into Christ likeness

Looking to Jesus' example and teachings on compassion, justice and service are crucial for our transformation to serve like Christ in our neighborhoods, city and world.

A common way to view serving is to focus on the "doing" aspect of good deeds, which is absolutely vital as we do "...the works God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)." But the "being" side of service cannot be neglected, paying attention to the attitude and motivation of the mind and heart as service is planned and carried out. There is a hand in hand relationship between "doing" and "being" in Christ like service.

As you journey through these studies and related outreach experiences as a group, you will investigate and seek to live out some of Jesus' own words regarding serving through the following: a fresh look at the Good Samaritan, humility, how good deeds and good news must go hand in hand, your motivation for serving and the experience of the very presence of Jesus. The culmination of this series is to plan and carry out a mission/service project as a group. The sixth session provides space to reflect on that outreach in life-giving ways.

The chart below contrasts Self-righteous Service and True Service and will be referred back to for the spiritual exercises throughout the Serves study. Read over and consider it now. Ask God to work in you and in your group as you seek to rely on God to grow a heart more like Jesus' in true service.

SELF-RIGHTEOUS SERVICE	TRUE SERVICE
1. Comes thru human effort	1. Flows from a relationship with God
2. Is impressed with the "big deal"	2. Doesn't distinguish between small and large acts of service
3. Requires external rewards	3. Rests contented in hiddenness
4. Highly concerned about results	4. Free from the need to calculate results.
5. Picks and chooses whom to serve	5. Indiscriminate serving
6. Affected by moods and whims	6. Ministers because there is a need.
7. Temporary	7. A lifestyle
8. Insists on meeting a need.	8. Can withhold or freely perform service
9. Fractures community, glorifies the individual	9. Builds community, celebrates others contributions.

*adapted from Gary Moon's leader's guide for the DVD curriculum, Celebration of Discipline. c. 2005, LifeSprings Resources.

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The heartbreaking wide, empty eyes of a hungry child. Those who've experienced abortion. Neglected children in our city and the world. Poverty. Homelessness. Violence in our neighborhoods, city and world. Single parents. Inequitable misuse of power and wealth. Pain, betrayal and tears experienced by others. Victims in the sex slave trade industry. Victims of abuse. Youth in prison. Incurable diseases. Those suffering persecution. The disadvantaged who need help with education. Isolated elderly folks. The disabled. Orphans. Those escaping their pain through addictions. Those somewhere on the road to recovery. These are just a few examples of apparent injustices and wounds that humans encounter as their lives are lived out.

Underline or add to the paragraph above issues that really stir up your sense of compassion, mercy and/or injustice.

What responses (internal and outward actions) do you have to injustices that confront you in your local or global world?

INTRODUCTION

Historically the church has been on the cutting edge of issues regarding mercy and justice. Historian Rodney Stark provides a perspective of urban life in New Testament times and the ways Christianity met these chronic problems head on by bringing a new culture filled with hope.

"Any accurate portrait of Antioch in New Testament times must depict a city filled with misery, danger, fear, despair, and filthy and cramped quarters, where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred and fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms and exacerbated by a constant stream of strangers. A city so lacking in stable networks of attachments that petty incidents could prompt mob violence. A city where crime flourished and the streets were dangerous at night. And perhaps above all, a city repeatedly smashed by cataclysmic catastrophes: where a resident could expect literally to be homeless from time to time, providing that he or she was among the survivors.

"...People living in such circumstances must often have despaired. ...surely too they must often have longed for relief, for hope, indeed for salvation.

"...Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as



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hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity...and to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services." (*The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark, Harper Collins Paperback, 1997, pp. 161-162)

This description seems to be our challenge to the church today, begging the question, "Have we allowed Jesus to shape our hearts to be like His in mercy and compassion toward those in need and experiencing injustices in the neighborhood, the city and world?" How do you respond to this question in light of the above quote?

Read Luke 10: 25-37 which is rich with truth about human nature, and different choices available regarding the kingdom of God, and Jesus' heart of justice and mercy.

- 1a. Quiet yourself before the Lord and ask Him to speak to you as you look into the oft told story of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37. Ask God to sanctify your imagination, as you reread the passage slowly and put yourself in the place of the priest. What are your concerns? Why are you in a hurry? Why do you pass by?
- 1b. Now, read it again and imagine you are the Samaritan. What is your motivation to stop and help? How do you feel about taking on all the expense for another's care?
- 1c. Who of these characters do you tend more to be like? Why?
2. From what you know about the division between Jews and Samaritans. List the things that seem unusual about the plot of this parable.
3. Why do you think Jesus responds with a story instead of a direct answer to the Pharisee's question?

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Defining the Terms:

These terms are found many times through the Scripture. Often Mercy and Compassion seem interchangeable, and Justice/Righteousness are interchangeable truths in Scripture.

Mercy - COMPASSION
clemency; leniency and compassion shown toward offenders by a person or agency charged with administering justice; getting a second chance

Justice - TRUTH
the quality of being fair and reasonable

Righteous - PURITY
characterized by or proceeding from accepted standards of morality or justice

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4. Did you notice that, in this story, Jesus reversed the question that was asked of Him? What was asked was, "Who is my neighbor?" (like, "Just who am I responsible to reach out to?") Jesus reverses the question after the story, asking "Who was the neighbor?" In other words, "Are you being a good neighbor? What is the quality of your life? Are you serving in the same way that that Good Samaritan was?" Jesus is interested in the heart of a disciple. How does this challenge you?
- 5a. In what ways do mercy and justice differ?
- 5b. How have you experienced mercy in your life? Who has been a Good Samaritan toward you?
- 5c. Where have you seen justice demonstrated to others in our current culture today?

There is a modern day parable of a man who lived in the country and had a garden on the banks of a river. The man was content to cultivate the soil under the sun's warmth. One day, as he worked in his garden, something in the river below caught his eye. As he approached the river, he noticed a young man lying face down in the water. He ran down to the bank and carried the man back to his home, bandaged him, nursed him back to health and sent him on his way.

A month passed and he returned to his garden to find the weeds had grown very high. He began his work on the garden and glanced down the ravine toward the river. To his surprise, he noticed another body floating there. He quickly dropped his hoe and ran to the river to rescue the young man. Once again he nursed the man back to health and sent him on his way. The man returned to his garden and became reluctant to turn his head toward the river. Eventually, curiosity caused him to look down the ravine and he saw another body laying face down in the current.

In this story, mercy is taking time to take care of the victims' needs: bandaging their wounds and nurturing them back to health. Justice goes further and begs the question, "What is going on upstream to cause/allow this atrocity to have happened in the first place?"

Refer to the chart contrasting self-righteous service vs. true service in the introduction to the Serves studies to answer the next three questions.

6. What are some underlying motivations and character traits you can speculate or identify with the self-righteous service column?
7. Contrast what you identified in Q.6 with motivations you find behind the true service column?
8. What underlies and motivates a Christfollower toward mercy and justice? (See I Corinthians 13, especially verses 1-3, 13.) Does the motivation behind the acts matter?
9. Who in your life receives your care? To whom are you a Good Samaritan? Are you asking, "Who is my neighbor?" or "Am I *being* a good neighbor?" Spend some time as a group sharing and praying for one another, for Jesus' eyes of mercy and justice in your world and for the Holy Spirit to empower you as you care for others in your life.

EXERCISE*

On several occasions before your next group meeting, consciously try to slow down long enough to practice the service of seeing and listening to someone in a context in which you might normally rush past preoccupied with tasks, time constraints or your own needs and obligations. Write a few reactions you have from doing this exercise.

NEXT STEPS

Begin to explore and pray about where you might get involved in opportunities to bring compassion/mercy and justice to your neighborhood, city or world. There are many partnership organizations you may find on the CCC website (www.cccomaha.org) under Bridge Ministries, or contact a Bridge staff person. Pay attention to what stirs up your responses of compassion and justice and as you seek to identify where God might have you plug in to a ministry or service opportunity.

*Exercise adapted from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, IVP Books, 2005, p. 146

Further reading:

When Justice Rolls Down by
Dr. John Perkins
International Justice
Ministries by Gary Haugen

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SHARING REFLECTIONS
FROM LAST TIME:

As you practiced the final exercise from Serves lesson 1, what did you see? Did anything surprise you? Share briefly with your group.

This passage is known by theologians as the “Kenosis” passage. The ancient Greek word κένωσις kénōsis means an “emptying,” from κενός kenós “empty.” The word is mainly used, however, in a Christian theological context. “Jesus made himself nothing (ἐκένωσε ekénōse),” which comes from the Greek phrase “to empty.”

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CULTIVATING JESUS' HEART FOR SERVICE

When we walk into a hotel, business or restaurant, we expect good or excellent service. If that's not what we find, we are quick to decide and may take our business where they understand what good service means. It is the key to staying in business. But the tables turn when we are in charge of providing service. We are quickly disappointed by an impatient client or demanding boss. Thoughts like “Who do they think I am, their slave?” freely surface. Human nature is opposed to serving others. Most would rather be served than serve.

Christians, being human, can be the same. The apostle Paul knew this as he wrote to a group of Christ followers. Read Philippians 2:1-8 and then answer the following questions.

1. What are potential motivations to serve because of what we receive from being in relationship with Christ and His Spirit? Philippians 2:1-2?
2. What instructions for believers are there in Philippians 2:1-8?
3. What does it look like to humble yourself before God and others?

“...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:5-7, NIV

4. What are four motives for living in unity and harmony, and sacrificial service?

These verses from Philippians 2 are foundational for Christ followers because they describe Jesus' core. Jesus' motivation and heart were tied into His relationship with the Heavenly Father. His attitude toward serving flowed out of love for the Father and love for others. This attitude (motivation) is lived out in a variety of ways. It can be as simple as getting a cup of coffee for someone, more extensive like volunteering regularly at a local school or even more personally sacrificial acts. The emphasis

needs to be not upon the act or the reward as much as the attitude and motivation. It is a normal part of the Christian life to serve others with your eyes on the Father and out of a heart of love.

5. How does one pursue Christ likeness with regards to service, motivated by a humble heart of love for God?
6. What can be learned from Jesus' motivation in Hebrews 12:2-3 and Philippians 2:6-8?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

7. Recall the focus the on the Good Samaritan from lesson 1 and the final exercise. Try to slow down and really see someone you might ordinarily overlook. How can one cultivate and maintain Jesus' heart of humility to carry out service that is rooted in "seeing" - in seeing others as God does? What does it mean to be conscious of others, to really see others in our lives and not look through them in our own preoccupations and hurry?

The freedom that comes with service is that it abolishes our need (and desire) for a "pecking order," and, more than any other spiritual practice, service works the grace of humility into our lives [as we seek to cultivate a heart like Jesus']. Gary Moon

8. Think about a way you recently served another person. Was it at work, home, church or elsewhere? How did you feel about serving? What would you identify as your motives?



9. How does a person's response affect your ability and attitude to serve?

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Humble people let go of image management and self-promotion. They honor others by making the others' needs as real and important as their own." ~Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, IVP, 2005

EXERCISE

Take a few minutes to look over the chart which contrasts Self-righteous Service with True Service in the introduction to the Serves series, especially lines that seem to address pride vs. humility. Then respond to the following:

- a. What are some characteristics of a humble heart, either identified in the chart, or from what you know to be true?
- b. What do you think you can do to cultivate a heart of humility in yourself?

Try this out as one way: Before your next group gathering, do a secret act of kindness or service for someone that you can do without letting anyone know that you have done it or why. It may be for someone who cannot serve you back. What is it like for you that only God knows what you did?

NEXT STEP:

Continue looking for and praying about local and global arenas (with local opportunities) where your compassion, mercy and sense of injustice are stirred up and ways your group might plug into a ministry that might relate to your interests. See a Bridge Ministry staff member or browse different options at ccomaha.org. During your next group meeting, plan a group service project. Look head at lesson 3's next steps section to be more ready to contribute to the details of putting your project together.



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SHARING REFLECTIONS
FROM LAST TIME

The last lesson's final exercise included finding a way to do a secret act of kindness. Without revealing the act itself or the recipient, share with your group any way you are aware that God used it for good. (either in you or the recipient)

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GOOD NEWS AND GOOD DEEDS GO HAND IN HAND

"One of the great tragedies of the contemporary church is its one-sided Christianity, where so few congregations enthusiastically and wholeheartedly [combine--rather than divide--prayer and action, evangelism and social transformation]. There are some congregations focused primarily on evangelism. Others do primarily social action. Most do neither. They merely maintain the church social club." ~Ron Sider, *I Am Not A Social Activist: Making Jesus the Agenda*, Herald Press, 2008

The American church was polarized on two divergent paths initiated by ideas from Yale lectures in 1917 from Walter Rauschenbusch, who coined the term "Social Gospel." He criticized traditional churches for focusing too often only on sin and salvation and ignoring Jesus' ethical teachings and neglecting social injustices. Many protestant denominations began to focus increasingly on important issues of social justice, but neglected evangelism and church-planting. In response, those who called themselves fundamentalist (later evangelicals) focused one-sidedly on evangelism and doctrine, largely neglecting what the Bible says about justice of the poor and marginalized. Author Ron Sider continues by saying, "for decades, this tragic division weakened American church life."

Scripture makes it clear that the two distinct emphases of sharing Jesus' Gospel and doing good deeds for others go hand in hand. They do not exist on opposing sides of a disputed continuum. In I Thessalonians 1:3, Paul teaches that work, labor and endurance are the result of faith, love and hope. Throughout the Bible these two things are clear:

We come into God's family by grace through faith. There are no works that are necessary to make us acceptable to God except for the work of Jesus in what he did by dying for us on the cross.

Genuine faith, hope and love are expressed in good deeds. If faith is genuine, then action follows.

The word "gospel" means good news. The good news Jesus brought was about a lot more than the minimum entry requirements to get into heaven after you die. The good news of Jesus is all about the Kingdom of God, the availability of His presence and His reign and rule to ordinary people right now, right here in the world today.

When Jesus was in the beginning of His ministry He is primarily teaching, proclaiming the good News of the Kingdom of God. The people of Israel had been waiting, yearning, watching and hoping for the kingdom of God to come. Matthew 4:17 says "from that time on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." He was saying the kingdom is here. I am the king. Let me teach you about what life in the kingdom looks like.

Read through Matthew chapters 5-7 for a picture of Jesus' good news of the kingdom. A few glimpses follow:

1. From what you know of the Israelites' religion, how did the kingdom Jesus described contrast from what they were accustomed?
2. How does it contrast with the teachings and world you have known?
3. What impresses you most about Jesus' good news of the Kingdom of God?

Read Matthew chapters 8-9. Matthew 8 begins with Jesus coming down from the mountain with a large crowd following him. You can see example after example of Jesus doing good deeds of healing, with only a brief teaching moment or two (good words) interspersed. Notice Jesus' compassion for the sick and infirmed.

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching...preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:35-38

When He healed people, it was out of true compassion and concern for the individual. Jesus was not just performing a magic trick to prove His divinity. He genuinely cared about people's physical needs, as He does today, and as we are called to do today.

4. What purpose do humanitarian deeds serve?
5. If you share the Gospel with a starving person, will he or she want to or be able to listen? Is one more important than the other: feeding a starving man or sharing the Gospel with a starving man? Explain your answer.



The body of Christ is powerful evidence of God's physical presence in the world through His people when it comes together to serve the needs of others with Christ's heart.

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6. How do you maintain balance between proclaiming good news and providing good deeds?

Christ Community Church rallied together in 2006 with a vision to build a hospital in Mali, Africa. This vision was birthed out of a crisis: the death of a pastor's wife during childbirth in Mali. The typical conditions of healthcare in Mali now are parallel to conditions in the United States during the American Civil War.

The infant and mother mortality rates in Mali were sky high. God's people came together with a vision to respond to those physical needs to build a hospital providing care for women and children. Many people from CCC traveled to Mali to serve at the hospital by teaching, aiding construction work and working as nurses and doctors. Some have gone for a week, some months and others years. Every patient entering the hospital is given the opportunity to hear the Gospel. The hospital is an example of finding that balance between providing good deeds and proclaiming good news.

EXERCISE:

Look back at the chart in the introduction to this series once again, the contrast between self-righteous and true service. Many of these qualities of true service apply to both doing good deeds for and sharing good news with others.

1. What tends to motivate your good deeds or acts of service for others? What are your motivations for sharing the good news of the kingdom with others?
2. Do your motives tend to reflect Jesus' heart for His father and for people?

PRAY TO SEE THE WORLD WITH GOD'S EYES:

Author Glandion Carney often prays something like this as he starts his day, "Lord, give me your eyes to see the world today as you see it." Sincerely pray this prayer before your day starts on five or more different mornings before your next group meeting, adding "and lead me to someone to serve today." Remain watchful for what God shows you. Notice what goes on inside you, around you and your responses. What impact does praying this prayer have on what you see and your doing good deeds?

Come back to your group next time with at least one story of how this made a difference in what you saw, did or shared.

NEXT STEPS:

Take a portion of this group time to plan specifics for carrying out a service project together as a group, preferably including direct contact with those you are serving. Find a time when you can all participate together. Here are some of the details you will need to address:

- Brainstorm and choose where you will serve together. Take into consideration what your group members' have found to stir their individual senses of compassion, mercy and justice, individual spiritual gifts and natural abilities. Many opportunities are available through the Bridge Ministries staff or online at cccomaha.org.
- Create a timeline and set dates to carry out this project during the next few weeks that allows everyone to participate together.
- Pray for yourself, your group and the people who will receive from you as you prepare to serve. Pray for God to empower you as you come together and offer what you are able, that He will magnify your actions by His spiritual power.
- Allow God the freedom to direct your response to the needs of others.
- Use the questions and space provided in Lesson 6 to record any reactions, reflections and ways you see God working as you serve together.
- Plan now to repeat this service project at least once during this series or while you are still together as a journey group.



SHARING REFLECTIONS
FROM LAST TIME

The last lesson's exercise encouraged you to start some mornings with the prayer, "Lord, give me your eyes to see the world today as you see it and lead me to someone to serve today." Share any impact or outcome you noticed from sincerely praying this prayer.

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JESUS' EXAMPLE OF SERVING

Read John 13:1-16.

1. What are your first or your big picture impressions of the passage as you read it?

Jesus demonstrates what it means to serve others by washing the feet of His followers. Feet got dirty in a hurry in dry and dusty Palestine. Most homes had a wash basin to clean travelers' feet upon entry. Like a door mat is used to clean off shoes, the wash basin was used to clean off a person's feet. Typically, a person cleaned his own feet, or the lowest servant would clean the feet of a guest. The master of the home never cleaned the feet of a visiting guest - it was considered a menial task.

2. What did Jesus know that the disciple didn't? (v. 1,3,11) How does this knowledge add meaning to the passage?
3. Luke 22:24 tells us that as the disciples shared a meal, "a dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be the greatest." Imagine you are one of the disciples involved in that dispute. What standards of greatness might the disciples be considering as they figure out the pecking order of greatness? (One might imagine that they began the dispute by agreeing they were all, in fact, great - just some slightly more so than others.)
4. This is not the first time Jesus addressed this dispute with the disciples. Read Luke 9:46-48. What differences do you notice between Luke 9 and John 13?
5. As Jesus readies himself for the pain of the cross, the disciples rate their greatness. How is this ironic?
6. A parable is a story that uses earthly elements to explain spiritual realities. How is Jesus' action here a living parable?

Jesus' time has come – time to humble himself and endure the cross - in order to restore to us that which we could not restore by our own efforts: peace with God.

HOW DID JESUS START?

By taking off His outer clothing and wrapping a towel around His waist. The King of Kings knelt to do a humiliating chore to define greatness and leadership in a new way. Imagine going to work and seeing your organization's top leader cleaning your desk and vacuuming around your chair as you arrived. We might find satisfaction in this image, but in reality it would be a bit awkward. Our reaction would be the same as the disciples: "Please, don't do that, it's not right." Though not a perfect correlation to Jesus' act, this example helps us think about how the disciples might have perceived His washing their feet and their struggle to receive from Him in this way.

7. What might be a good modern day parallel to the complete humiliation that Jesus modeled in His act of service in washing the disciples' feet?

Jesus insisted on washing the disciples' feet because He was making a point about inner transformation. A follower should become a visible representation of Jesus' values to the world, making a statement about what unity and love look like. Service softens the heart, removing the barriers of pride and selfishness so that love can flow in from God and back out to others. Without true service, there is no love and no union.

As you carry out your group service project and serving in general, take time to recognize that you serve, not from a position of strength or wealth, but rather from brokenness and need. We were in absolute trouble. We needed help beyond description. Until God intervened, we were truly hopeless. But God came to our rescue. He humbled himself and not only helped us, but saved us. We have been served by Jesus in our greatest time of need. Now we have the opportunity to be used by God to serve others who might be where we once were. Any of us would wash our Lord's feet. He instead washes ours and tells us to wash our neighbor's feet. We serve because He first served us, both as a response of gratitude, and of following His example. So seek and embrace opportunities to serve.

The dirty disciples may have been able to wash their own feet, but they could not wash their sins away. That is the bigger reality that Jesus shows the disciples. As humbling as it is to wash feet, Jesus is willing to endure much more humiliation in order to wash their sins away.

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“Man’s humility does not begin with the giving of service; it begins with the readiness to receive it.”

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APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

8. A mark of healthy Christian community is being in reciprocal relationships, relationships where you both give to and receive from others. Describe a time when you helped someone out of a tough spot. Now describe a time when you needed that kind of help from someone else.

9. How does receiving help when we need it relate to giving help when others need it?

10. What is it like to serve when needs arise that are humiliating or menial tasks? Or when you are feeling needy and broken inside? How can you rely on and experience God when you serve at times like these?

11. In your spiritual life, who stands out as someone who has washed your feet? Is receiving harder or easier than doing for you? Why?

Reflect on this follow-up question on your own: Are there people in your life who would name you as the answer to this question?

EXERCISE:

Service is a discipline of many “little deaths” of going beyond your self and it has to work itself out in practical life. Every day for the next week, ask your spouse, roommate or a colleague or friend, “What can I do for you today?” Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you see about yourself?

NEXT STEPS

Carry out your planned service project as a group using the planning guide from lesson 3. Use the reflection questions at the end of lesson 5 to record the reactions or responses you experience as you serve.

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SHARING REFLECTIONS
FROM LAST TIME

Reflect back on your spiritual experiences. When have you sensed God presence in a powerful way?

When you've helped someone, how does that affect your spiritual life?

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YOU SERVE THEM

A lasting spiritual experience happened when I served at a homeless shelter. I was a new Christian and not very familiar with "ministry." Someone asked if I would join them in going down to the homeless shelter to serve a meal. I remember being intimidated by the process and unsure of what to do or how to respond. As I served the meal that day, something transformational took place in my heart. I did not see homeless people; I saw individuals created in the image of God. I saw hurting people who had been beaten up by life's storms. I sat down and listened to their stories and realized my heart was changing as I listened. I experienced God through serving others that day.

As I share that story with others, people tell me they've experience God's presence in a similar fashion. Friends state, "I've had that same experience," either on a short-term mission's trip, serving at a camp or helping out in an under-resourced community.

It's through serving others that we are able to see the hand of God at work and the acts of service from a humble heart change us from the inside out. Jesus used a hungry crowd as an opportunity to show His power and teach His followers what it means to serve others.

READ LUKE 9:10:

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. ¹² Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." ¹³ He replied, "You give them something to eat."

1. Consider the statement in v.13. Why do you think Jesus said that to His disciples?

Consider their response:

“They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.”¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. ¹⁶Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. ¹⁷They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”

2. What did Jesus see that day?

3. What did the disciples see that day?

4. Why do you think the disciples were hesitant to respond to the crowd?

5. List what you see as some of the biggest needs of people in your city? Neighborhood? World? What do you think Jesus sees?

MY CITY		MY NEIGHBORHOOD		MY WORLD	
Needs I see:	Jesus sees:	Needs I see:	Jesus sees:	Needs I see:	Jesus sees:

In the context of this passage, it's important to continue reading verses 18-20 since it's here that we see a powerful transformation take place in the lives of the disciples:



¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" ¹⁹ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."²⁰ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

6. Imagine yourself in this story as one of the last ones to receive food that day. What are you thinking and feeling as you receive what will satisfy your hunger from the basket?

The crowd that day might not have known that Jesus was behind the miracle. Imagine trying to feed five thousand people with so little to start with. When the baskets reached the last group, the recipients might not have known where the food came from however they did know the food was there in excess. The disciples knew the source of the miracle, though. They knew they had had next to nothing and Jesus had supernaturally made it become more than enough to provide for the thousands of people there.

7. In light of what you know about Peter, what does his response in v. 20 reveal about the impact that serving miracle had on his faith?

That serving event forever altered the trajectory of Peter's life. Not only did it convince him of Jesus' true identity as the Messiah, and it reinforced his desire to follow Him. It also gave him direct experience with the supernatural power of Jesus that he would never forget. Yes, people were fed who would have gone hungry that day, but, perhaps more importantly, Peter and the disciples' faith in Christ grew exponentially through participating in Jesus' multiplication. The same is true today. As you rely on God and make available whatever you can offer in your service to others, Christ magnifies whatever you bring in supernatural ways and forever changes you more into His likeness.



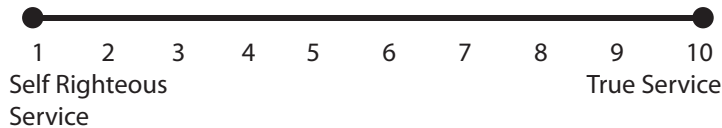
8. Have you ever experienced offering something little and/or inadequate in your service - ability, talents, time, materials, etc. - and seen God show up big to accomplish more than you could have done on your own or even more than you imagined possible? What impact does an experience like that have, both in you and for others?

9. Jesus desires His followers to be servants, not just people who do service projects. What is the difference?

10. What place do service projects play in our spiritual development?

EXERCISE:

Take one more look at the chart in the introduction to Serves. Considering all of the attributes listed in both columns and rate yourself from 1-10 on your service: Self-Righteous Service =1, True Service =10.



How do you respond to your assessment above? Where do you sense God prompting you to grow toward True Service at this time?

NEXT STEPS:

Continue to carry out or repeat your group's serving project. Complete the Reflections on Group Serving Experience at the end of this lesson. Take time to reflect on where God has spoken to or prompted you during this Serves series. Your leader and group will decide if you will meet a separate time to share and pray about your reflections. Regardless, you will get the most out of this series and your experiences if you will take adequate time to note your responses to these questions and write down takeaways from this series.





REFLECTIONS ON GROUP SERVING EXPERIENCE

Matthew 25: 34-36 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

37-40"Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

41-43"Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
Sick and in prison, and you never visited.'

44"Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?'

45"He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'

46"Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward."

REFLECTIONS ON THE PASSAGE:

1. Why would Jesus compare Himself to someone in each of these dismal circumstances (hungry, thirsty, homeless, shivering, sick and in prison)?

2. What impresses you about each action that Jesus outlines that the sheep did, seemingly without even being conscious of them (fed me, gave me, stopped to visit, came to me)?

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS FROM SERVES:

How did your group serving experiences and this Serves series deepen your understanding or help you grow related to the following themes and objectives from each of the five lessons bulleted below? You may want to turn back and review your responses from each lesson to glean what was most meaningful to you as you connect each lesson's themes with your thoughts and experiences. Write any reflections and thoughts you have below. Use additional paper if more space is needed.

Lesson One:

- God's heart of compassion and justice
- God's heart inclines toward mercy, compassion and justice.

Lesson Two:

- Cultivating Jesus' heart of humility
- Humility is vital for Christ like serving

Lesson Three:

- Good word and good deed go hand in hand
- Sharing the good news of Jesus and doing good deeds are inseparable.

Lesson Four:

- Jesus' example of serving
- Jesus' example humbly serving His disciples motivates our supernaturally energized service.

Lesson Five:

- You serve them.
- It is through serving that we experience the presence and power of Jesus and multiplication of our efforts.

SERVES OTHERS



LESSON ONE: GOD'S HEART OF MERCY, COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

Question 1:

In the well-known Bible story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus communicates very important truths about the Kingdom of God. First of all, He points out the attitude of the man who wants to justify himself. Human nature tends toward self-justification, rather than God's justice. The Pharisee's question was simple: "What is the least I have to do to get into heaven?" His intention was to find the easiest way to gain personal eternal life. Jesus corrects the man's erroneous thinking by pointing out that following God is about loving God and others first.

Question 2:

- Leaders guide—See John 4:7,9. Instead of avoiding Samaria as Jews often did, Jesus passed through this area that Jews considered inhabited by spiritual and ethnic half-breeds. (notes on John 4:7-30). "...and their ways of worship didn't look like the Jews."
- The two who walked on by would have been the ones the experts in the law would most have identified with.

LESSON TWO: CULTIVATING JESUS' HEART OF HUMILITY

Question 1: Possible answers.

- United with Christ
- Comfort from His love
- Fellowship with the Spirit
- Tenderness and Compassion
- Love

Question 2:

- Be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit and purpose (v. 2)
- In humility, consider others better than self (3)
- Do nothing out of conceit or selfish ambition (3)
- Look out for the interests of others (v. 4)
- Have the same attitude as that of Christ (v. 5)
 - Indirectly instructed to empty ourselves/make self nothing
 - Take on the nature of a servant and humble self

Question 4:



Guide the group to go deeper than “because Jesus modeled it I must do it” type answers.

- Perhaps address obedience, not wanting anything to stand in the way of my relationship with God—to please and honor God
- To be an instrument of God’s love to others, to reflect God’s character, to cooperate with God’s kingdom principles, not fleshly
- Because these are true relationship builders
- Sacrificial service gets my eyes off me and onto others, which is Christ like.

LESSON FOUR: JESUS’ EXAMPLE OF SERVING

Question 1:

Notice and draw out that Jesus was motivated to do this to demonstrate His supreme love for them.

Question 2:

- v.1. The time had come for Him to leave the world and go to the Father
- v. 3. The Father had put all things under His power that He had come from God and was returning to God.
- V. 11. He knew who was going to betray Him (Judas was unclean)

Questions 3-5

- The focus on the issue of who is greatest points out the brokenness of the individuals Jesus chose to be foundational leaders of His church on earth.
- It also provides emphasis on our natural tendency to compare and try to position ourselves above other and our need to humble ourselves.

Question 7:

Try to really brainstorm humiliating acts of service in our society or world today, in harsh conditions, that would demonstrate and be Jesus to those in need. Things most would not normally happen upon or choose to do.

- i.e. Caring for an AIDS patient who cannot control his or her bodily functions, lying in his or her own filth, and loving enough to clean the mess up.

Question 10:

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- Moving forward in faith that God will meet our needs, we can serve out of his strength and the life He brings us in relationship with Him. In these times, we experience blessing in giving to others, even as we know our need for Him. When we are weak, we become strong.

LESSON FIVE: YOU SERVE THEM

Question 5:

It's interesting to note Peter's response. He clearly declared that Jesus was more than a teacher, prophet or good guy. The disciples knew at that moment that Jesus was God, the Messiah.

REFLECTIONS ON SERVING EXPERIENCES SECTION:

Encourage your group to complete the reflections section with enough time to respond to each question. It provides an important culmination and will draw them to how God has been speaking to them and how He might be prompting them in their individual walks with Him in regards to their service.

You as a leader can decide, based on various factors like time available, group dynamics and needs and individual preferences, if it would be fruitful to come back together for an additional meeting and share responses from the Reflection section of lesson 5. One suggestion is to plan an additional meeting to share reflections from Serves together, and then have an extended time in prayer for one another related to where God is prompting each of you in this arena.

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