



grow. pray. study.

SUNDAY October 25, 2020

“Serve: Here I am Lord, Send Me”

Five Essential Practices for Living the Christian Life

“Choose this day whom you will serve...
but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”
Joshua 24:15

“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
Matthew 20:26b, 28

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
Ephesians 2:10

MONDAY 10.26.20

Serving others is serving Jesus

Matthew 25:31-40

Scholar William Barclay told this story: Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and a Christian. One winter day, Martin met a beggar who was blue and shivering with cold. Martin took his worn and frayed soldier’s coat, cut it in two, and gave half of it to the beggar. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and Jesus amid the angels. Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier’s cloak. An angel asked, “Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak?” And Jesus answered softly, “My servant Martin gave it to me.” *

- People who don’t have enough to eat or wear, can’t afford care if they’re sick, are in prison, are different from you—most of us are willing to do a little something to help them. But Jesus called such people “these brothers and sisters of mine.” To truly “buy into” in God’s world-changing work of service means seeing that the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the outcast are not “them”—they’re “us.” What has helped you grasp the truth of Jesus’ words?

- In Jesus’ story, those he said had helped him were surprised: “When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?” They saw need, not a chance for reward. What can help you learn to see in the faces of the people you meet, especially those who are outcast or hurting, the face of Jesus? When have you found the freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because you know God cares about them?

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2, Chapters 11–28 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 326.

Respond: Kindness

Being kind to the people around us, especially those who are suffering, helps us to feel connected to them rather than separate from them.

Loving kindness meditation Pray in love for:

1. Family & friends
2. Someone with whom you are having tension or conflict
3. Strangers suffering
4. Self-compassion, forgiveness & self-love

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

TUESDAY 10.27.20

Serve each other with sincere love

1 Peter 4:8-11

Too often, we have a “one size fits all” idea of what it means to serve. In fact, there are as many unique forms of service as there are people. The apostle Peter’s letter called Christians to “use whatever gift you have received to serve others.” As Paul wrote elsewhere, “If our bodies were only an eye, we couldn’t hear a thing” (1 Corinthians 12:17). The call is to be yourself, as long as “being yourself” includes being a servant to God and others.

- In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul said that using our gifts without love renders them useless to God (and, most often, to anyone else). In today’s reading, Peter, in a shorter, less-poetic form, made the same point. What makes love so vital as the environment in which we use our widely varying gifts? Who do you know who is finding joy by using his or her gifts in love?
- What Peter said in verse 8 seemed to draw from the Hebrew wisdom of Proverbs 10:12. Of that passage, scholar John Goldingay wrote, “Honesty (v. 11) and self-giving build up the community (v. 12).” * We still hear heated debates about whether pure self-interest or community mindedness make for better human lives. Both Old and New Testament Scriptures came down firmly on the side of building community. How easy or hard do you find it to accept that wisdom?

* John Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p. 46.

Respond: Help

We all know that life gets messy, and in our hurry we might be overwhelmed with all that we have to do and cleaning becomes the furthest from our minds. Spend some time decluttering a space in an effort to allow a little space to breathe. Examples include: doing a chore that isn’t yours, picking up trash around your neighborhood or cleaning up a public restroom.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me not just to act loving on the outside, but to show “sincere love” to all your human children. Keep making my heart more like yours. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 10.28.20

Freedom for Spirit-guided service

Galatians 5:13-16

The Apostle Paul planted new churches in the Roman province of Galatia (modern-day Turkey). But after Paul left, “false teachers” came to Galatia and began convincing people they still had to follow certain rules and laws for God to accept them. Paul, in his letter, strongly resisted the false teachers. He urged his readers to claim their spiritual freedom in Christ, a freedom defined by the words Jesus identified as one of the “great commandments”: “love your neighbor as yourself.”

- In verse 13 Paul bluntly stated a truth we may struggle to admit. We all have selfish impulses, especially if given the ability to choose freely. He pointed his readers to the one who can give us the ability to live in love: the Holy Spirit: “Be guided by the Spirit and you won’t carry out your selfish desires” (verse 16). In what parts of your life do you want to invite the Spirit to empower you to more fully love your neighbor as yourself?
- Paul used strong words about the great commandment: “All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement.” He was echoing Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 22:35-40. But even many Christians have struggled to accept that. We add baptismal practices, specific ways of reading Scripture or doing communion, and a whole variety of doctrinal nuances to the list of things needed to “fulfill the law.” Can you trust, in your own walk with Christ and that of others, that “love your neighbor as yourself” truly fulfills “all the law”?

Respond: Converse

None of us agree on everything, and there is always something that we can learn from someone else. John Wesley reminded us, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?” (The Catholic Spirit) Take the time to connect with someone who thinks differently than you on an issue – give of your time by listening to them. How can you show love to this person? If you don’t feel comfortable having a conversation, take the time to read an alternative viewpoint. Pray for God to open your heart and mind to show love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, “loving” sounds so simple, but in real life it gets harder to apply. As I draw nearer to you, through your empowering Spirit teach me more and more what it means to love as you love. Equip me to do that. Amen.

THURSDAY 10.29.20

World-changing service, not ceremonies

Isaiah 58:5-8

When Jesus said to love your neighbor, many in his day wanted to limit that to their Israelite neighbors—and even then, it was a hard ideal to live up to. Isaiah 58 spoke to Israelites who did many “religious” things, including fasting, but did so from self-serving motives. (Isaiah’s contemporary Micah made the same point in Micah 6:6-8.) Why, they asked, didn’t God honor their feasts and fasts? The prophet said their piety was only skin-deep. They didn’t need showy, external fasts. They needed to “fast” from mistreating other people.

- Fasting is a helpful spiritual practice, whether from food or some other valued activity. But the Israelites' fasting only seemed to go skin-deep. Isaiah 58:3-4 noted sadly that the pious "fasters" kept abusing their workers and fighting each other. How do verses 6 and 7 speak to your heart and your life today? What is one step you can take this Lenten season to make your spiritual practices truly life-changing, as the prophet called Israel to do?

- Jesus echoed Isaiah and Micah when he said, "Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13)? How have you seen your spiritual practices change your heart and lead you to a life of greater service? How are you growing in your ability to show mercy to others? To whom can you extend mercy today?

Respond: Remember

When we take the time to remember how someone we know has offered grace and love to us, it inspires us to live a life of service. Think of a time someone served you.

How did their gift free you up to attend to what you needed to do?

How did it make you feel?

Send them a thank you note.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for opening my eyes and heart to care for and show mercy to your children in need. Use me and whatever good things I have so that through me "your light will shine in the darkness." Amen.

FRIDAY 10.30.20

God's call: serve those who need it most

Psalm 82:1-4

In this psalm, the entire "divine council" heard a basic principle of God's rule: to ensure justice and rescue for "the lowly and the needy." Some Hebrew writing drew from images common in the nations around them, like the image of a council of gods. Israelites, however, saw the one true God as presiding, with angels or heavenly spirits as council members (cf. also Job 1:6). With no legal or social status, and no male relative to take their side, widows or orphans in that society simply had no way to help themselves. Yet in the psalms and in many of Israel's laws, it was clear that God cared passionately about helping the most helpless.

- Psalm 82 represented a whole strand of Israelite worship. For example, Psalm 146:9 sang the praises of "The Lord: who protects immigrants, who helps orphans and widows." But God usually acts through people, through us, to accomplish divine purposes. In what ways, big and small, can you partner with God in carrying out God's wish for justice and rescue to take place on earth?

- A key part of our heritage as Methodists came from John Wesley's stress on holding together the "evangelical gospel" (the good news of salvation as God's gift, received by faith) with the "social gospel" (the good news that God actively seeks justice and help, particularly for the weak and powerless). When have you needed spiritual salvation? When (if ever) have you felt powerless, and needed justice or help? Why is it important that God's people address both needs?

Respond: Volunteer

This is an opportunity to give of your time freely to offer hope to those who are in need. Call a charity of your choice and ask, one of these questions:

1. What is your greatest need now?
2. How can I volunteer my time?
3. How can I pray for your team or your volunteers?

Prayer: Lord God, I trust you to be my help and my strength, even when all else fails me. Use me as one of your instruments to bring justice to your world. Amen.

SATURDAY 10.31.20

She served by sewing

Acts 9:36-42

There are many ways of serving others. There's no record of a church building in the city of Joppa, but the church was there. Exhibit A was a marvelous seamstress named Tabitha (Dorcas – meaning “gazelle” – in Greek). There's no evidence that she ever preached a sermon, but God equipped her to sew, and gave her a heart for the poor. The “show and tell” time in verse 39 is a deeply touching scene. Tabitha lived her faith in such beautiful ways that God used Peter as a channel to allow her to keep living it longer.

- Tabitha loved people, lived out her love through her gift of sewing, and changed a whole city. What are you able to do that God can use to bless others? To what extent do you think behavior like Tabitha's is a matter of natural inclination, and to what extent do you believe it reflects intentional moral choices? God used both Peter, the apostle, preacher and healer, and Tabitha, the seamstress with a compassionate heart, to lead many to believe in Jesus. What role(s) has God equipped you to play in serving others? How committed are you to doing your part in helping others to “put their faith in the Lord”?

Respond: Offer

Think about the things that you love to do. What brings you joy, and how might you be able to share that joy with someone else. Love kids – offer babysitting to a neighbor or friend. Love to knit – make a shawl and bring it to the hospital. Love to fix things – connect with a neighbor and ask if there is something around the house that you could fix.

What brings me joy?

How might I share that joy in the form of service?

Family Activity: Serving others helps build relationships that honor and glorify God. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Gather your family for a late night drive out to the country. Find a place where the sky is dark and the stars shine through the darkness. Depending on the weather, place blankets on the ground, lie down and look up at the sky. Take the first moments to simply be still and give thanks for God's beautiful creation. Invite everyone to try and count the stars. Discuss the difference the stars make in the night sky. Imagine together what the sky would look like without any stars. Read the above quote from Dr. King and also Matthew 5:14-16. Share ideas about ways each of you can be lights in the darkness for God by serving others. Pray and ask God to help you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me never to think, “All I can do is _____, and that doesn't matter.” Make my life, and whatever abilities I have, count as much for you as Tabitha's lovely life of service. Amen.