



Ancient City
BAPTIST CHURCH

40 Days of Serving



*"Each one should use whatever gift
he has received to serve others..."*

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Welcome to the ***40 Days of Serving!***

The ***40 Days of Serving*** begins Sunday, January 26, 2020
and goes through Thursday, March 5, 2020.

God has called us to be a community of faith, hope, and love. As such, we are to minister to one another, helping each other along the journey of life. But there's more. He wants us to expand the community by sharing the message of faith in Jesus Christ with others and including them in our community. One of the most powerful ways of sharing the message of Jesus is by serving others in the Name of Jesus. Our world around us has heard enough "talk"—they need to see our faith in action that gives credibility and authority to our message. But how do we go about serving? That's where the ***40 Days of Serving*** comes in—it is designed to give biblical and practical help as we seek to grow in this area of following our Lord Jesus.

We are excited that you will be joining us in this journey! **The format is simple: there is a short (one page) "chapter" for each of the 40 days.** We pray that this will both encourage you and equip you in your desire to minister to others.



This emphasis is part of our plan of balanced Christian living we call **DiscipleLIFE**. Every Christian should grow in ***head, heart, hands, and feet.*** Stated simply:

- **A Disciple Learns (HEAD)**
- **A Disciple Loves (HEART)**
- **A Disciple Serves (HANDS)**
- **A Disciple Shares (FEET)**

While the primary emphasis of ***40 Days of Serving*** is the ***hands***, you will notice that it includes all four components of growth.

Thanks, and may God bless us all through the ***40 Days of Serving.***

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DAY 1

ARE YOU WILLING?

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Mark 1.40-42

In the very first chapter of the short but powerful gospel of Mark, we see that Jesus had already established a reputation for doing good works. Much later, Peter shares, ***"You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him"*** (Acts 10.37-38).

Serving others was a huge part of the ministry of our Lord.

Isn't it interesting how this man with leprosy approached Jesus? He had complete faith that Jesus would be *able* to help him. What he wasn't quite sure about was his *willingness*. But Jesus, filled with compassion, was indeed willing.

As we embark on this journey called **40 Days of Serving**, that is the real question that we likewise face: Are we willing? How about you?

- Are you willing to listen to the voice of God as he speaks?
- Are you willing to let God use you?
- Are you willing to sacrifice time and resources for others?
- Are you willing to develop more compassion for those in need?
- Are you willing to discover and develop areas of giftedness?
- Are you willing to allow God to change your mind and change your life?

There is no question that if you are willing, you can help meet some needs in ministry. There is no question that God is calling you and me to be involved in ministry. There is no question that God will equip you to do his ministry. There is no question that you will actually delight in ministry when you find and follow God's plan for you.

Really, the only question is, "Are you willing?"

Let's begin our **40 Days of Serving** in prayer, asking God to speak to us, asking him for wisdom, admitting any fears, apprehensions, or even misgivings we may have about ministry, and finally, by saying, "I am willing!"

Spend a few moments with him right now...



Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.

Mark 10.43-45

Do you have aspirations of greatness?

I guess all of us have—or have had—such a desire on some level. Most of us have a desire to be all that we can be and to accomplish some great thing with our lives. We want our lives to count, to have real meaning.

In the mindset of this world, greatness is defined by who serves you and how many people you can tell what to do. Jesus himself recognized it, as you can see if you read the verses preceding the ones printed above. His own disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest, and they were using worldly standards. How easy it is to slip from being godly to being worldly, because it is all around us every day! Today, greatness is seen in how much you can acquire, the size of your house, the make of your car. While the details may have changed a bit, the scorecard in general is the same. It's the natural mindset we inherit because of our sinful nature and living in this sinful world.

But Jesus said that it was to be different among his followers: ***“Not so with you!”*** The standards for greatness have changed. If we really want to be great—truly great, for God is the final judge—we have to adopt his mindset. Jesus said that the greatest are those who serve.

So, how are you doing by Jesus' scorecard? *How's your serve?*

And please note that Jesus didn't tell his disciples, “Do as I say, not as I do.” The King of Kings came down from heaven to earth and did not demand to be served. Instead, he set an example for us that we should and can follow: ***“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.”***

Jesus was willing to cure the leper we read about yesterday.

Jesus was willing to serve you even to the point of becoming a ransom to save you from the consequences of your sins.

Again, are *you* willing? Are you willing to not only accept but to *embrace* the idea of finding and following God's will for your life in serving him and others? Are you willing to acquire true greatness?

Serving—this is the secret of greatness!



DAY 3

SAVED TO SERVE (Not Serve to Be Saved)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2.8-10

As we embark on **40 Days of Serving**, we will look into God’s word and see many commands and admonitions to minister, to serve, to help. It can be easy for us to fall into the error of most man-made religions in the process. What is that error? Simple: thinking that by doing enough good deeds, we are earning our way into God’s good favor, earning our way to heaven. If you ask people at random how to get to heaven, the majority of people across our country and our world would give some version of, “You have to be good enough.” They may think there is a certain standard of righteousness or simply that your good deeds must outweigh your bad, but most people think we have to earn our way to heaven. For those who really want to go, that sets up great pressure on a daily basis: *“Am I good enough?”*

I can tell you right now: you are *not* good enough! Nor am I. Yet, I know that I am going to heaven. How? It is not based on *my* goodness but on *God’s* goodness. I am going to heaven because I have become conscious of my sinfulness, realized the consequences, turned from my sin and turned to God, confessing his Son Jesus as my Lord. To put it succinctly, I have been rescued by God from death and hell by the gift of his grace, as the verses above so clearly state! It is a gift, so I don’t have to worry about the future. I have assurance that I belong to him, just as my children have assurance that they belong to me.

But here is where another error, an opposite error, can come in. Some believe that because salvation is a gift and not earned, we can do whatever we want. But didn’t we confess him as *Lord*? Doesn’t that mean that we have given him ownership of our lives? Some of the saddest words we may ever hear from Jesus: ***“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not do what I say?”*** (Luke 6.46).

I can assure you that you were not rescued from sin so that you might continue in sin! Nor were you rescued from sin that you might ignore the words of your Savior. Look again at the verses at the top. Note the wonderful balance: we are saved by grace—not by our works—but likewise we are saved to serve! We are God’s work, and he has prepared good works for us to do. We were created to be partners with God in his work; we were created to join the family business! We don’t serve to be saved; we are saved to serve! Let’s never get this out of order. But understand: when we are not serving, we are not achieving our purpose.



“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” *Matthew 25.34-40*

I told you so! Just yesterday. I told you that as we look at many passages of Scripture dealing with our serving, we might be tempted to think we are saved *by* serving, that we earn our way into the kingdom. These are Jesus’ own words, part of a larger passage (that you may want to read in its entirety—Matthew 25.31-46), in which Jesus addresses both eternal life and eternal punishment.

If these were the only words of Jesus that we had, we could think that salvation *is* based on doing the kinds of things he mentions here: feeding the hungry, befriending strangers, clothing the needy, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison. But as we read all the words of our Lord, his meaning comes more into focus.

When we truly come into a relationship with Jesus, we are changed. We are born again. Essentially, we get a “heart transplant.” We are not yet in full blossom when we first respond to Jesus’ call to follow him, but the seeds are planted that will result in full blossom when nurtured in good soil and proper nutrients.

From the Parable of the Sower and the Soils (Matthew 13), we know that not all seeds take root. Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord really embraces him as Lord. How do we know if we are really “planted and taking root” in Jesus? He said it himself in regard to teachers: “You will know them by their fruit.” And as we grow, we too will be known by our fruit. Will we multiply, yielding many times what was sown, as the parable says of the seeds planted in good soil? Or will we live among the thorns, choked and unfruitful, always wondering if we are really his?

In today’s passage, Jesus gives those who claim to follow him a sure sign that we have indeed been saved: we will be serving the “least of these.” Others may serve from other motives, but the one who knows Jesus and is growing in him will surely serve. Yes, serving will be prominent among the saved. What does your serving say about your faith?



WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? **Orphans and Widows**

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

As we get ready to serve, a logical question is, “Who needs my help?” In the next few days we will try to answer that question by looking into the heart of God. Who is on God’s heart? Who needs serving?

James, the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, wrote a letter that included several insights for those who want to follow God in serving. He knew of many people who claimed to be “religious,” but whose lives did not back up that claim. Just before the words above, he called such “religion” worthless. James, following in the same vein of his brother and Lord, wrote to the early believers that their faith is proven by their actions. Here he mentions two categories of people who are very much on the heart of God: orphans and widows who are in need.

God has a special place in his heart for orphans—those who have lost their parents and perhaps their homes. He wants them to be shown care and taken in. It is no accident that the Bible speaks of what God does for us in our salvation: we are *adopted* into his family.

We know that God wants orphans who are in distress cared for. The question for each of us and as a church: how can we serve orphans? As we seriously ask God, we know that he can lead us in a variety of directions. Some may be called to adopt. Some may be called to give financially to help support an orphanage. Others may be called to insure that gifts to orphanages and other homes for children are actually doing the work effectively that they say they are doing so that we can give with confidence. Some may be called to foster care. The list goes on.

And what about widows? Some may not be in distress financially, but they may be lonely or need some help around the house to do chores once performed by their husbands or chores they are no longer able to easily accomplish themselves. In the book of Acts, we see that the church helped take care of the feeding of the believing widows who could not feed themselves and who had no families that could or would take care of them.

As we begin to ask, “Who’s on God’s heart?” we see that he is concerned for those who cannot take care of themselves—people like orphans and widows. But that’s not all. Let’s continue to ask: “Who’s on God’s heart?”



DAY 6

WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? The Poor: Their Needs

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
James 2.14-17

James continues challenging the idea that one can truly have faith in Jesus without serving. In fact, he is brutally honest: such faith is dead!

Here he speaks of someone "without clothes and daily food." He is talking about the poor. Throughout the pages of Scripture, we see that God has a special place in his heart for the poor as well as for orphans and widows and the like. In the Old Testament, landowners were told not to go over their vineyards or fields a second time during harvest to pick up what they may have missed or to reap from the very edges of the field. Why? ***"Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God"*** (Leviticus 23.22).

The Law of Moses also admonished, ***"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs"*** (Deuteronomy 15.7-8).

Jesus often included the poor in his preaching and in his directions to his followers and would-be followers. He told the Pharisees that, instead of concentrating on the cleanliness of a dish, ***"Give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you"*** (Luke 11.41). He preached to the masses, ***"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out..."*** (Luke 12.33). You can likely think of others as well.

We are called to serve the poor by helping to meet their needs.

What are some ways we can do that? You may meet the poor along your journey. You may give to the church benevolence fund. You may volunteer regularly or occasionally in a local feeding ministry or help with a local food drive. You may participate on a mission trip to a more depressed part of our country or the world. Paul often took up offerings on his journeys to help those experiencing famine in other areas.

But there is more we must say about the poor than simply giving a handout or a meal or a temporary place to stay. Let's see what else God's word says to us about the poor in the days ahead as we continue to think about God's heart.



WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? **The Poor: Their Dignity**

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 2.1-4

The poor do not just need a handout, according to God and his word. They need to be treated with dignity. James goes on to tell his hearers, ***"You have insulted the poor"*** (James 2.6).

The Lord's Cafe is a ministry in McCreary County, Kentucky (a part of Appalachia), that I am well acquainted with through several previous mission trips. Essentially, *The Lord's Cafe* is a feeding ministry. The meals are all free, and anyone who comes is served. However, this particular cafe approaches the ministry in a little different way than some other feeding ministries that I have been acquainted with. (And please understand, I am not criticizing any other ministry that feeds the poor but simply celebrating this one!)

When guests arrive, they are greeted by a host or hostess and seated at a table. A waiter comes by to take drink orders, announces the menu (which not only changes day to day but sometimes moment to moment, depending on the supply), and takes the order. There are not many choices to make, but there are some. When the waiter returns with the food, not only is the food placed on the table with a smile but he (or she) announces that he wants to say a blessing for the food and asks for any prayer requests. The waiter then leads a prayer, departs, and later returns with the day's dessert menu.

You get the picture.

The poor are not just given food; they are given dignity. They are treated just as if they were visiting a restaurant where they were paying. They are not insulted.

One way that you can serve the poor, even when it is not possible or you think it unwise at the moment to give money, is dignity. God does not show favoritism, and neither should his people.

Read the words of James at the top of the page again, and ask God how you can serve those you meet with dignity.



WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? The Poor: The Message of Faith

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to [Jesus]. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4.17-21

Jesus, as he was attending synagogue, read a passage from Isaiah that was a prophecy about the Messiah, the anointed one. He says that the passage is fulfilled in his own life. Did you notice the very first sign mentioned? ***"He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."*** Yes, the poor have a special place in God's heart, but it is not simply that they be fed or that they be treated with the dignity afforded the wealthy. The greatest ministry that Jesus gave to the poor was in his sharing the good news of the kingdom of God, and our service to the needy—whether the poor, the orphan, the widow, or others—will be lacking unless we likewise share the hope of eternal life.

The apostle Paul says that we have been entrusted with the "ministry of reconciliation." Through Jesus, God is reconciling the world to himself and himself to the world. Although the poor have a special place in God's heart, they are not righteous because they are poor. While some are impoverished because of where they live or their family circumstances, there are many who are poor because of their own behaviors. Like the rest of us, the poor are sinners, too. Like the rest of us, they need the message of hope through Jesus.

Jesus says we are to do ministry in his Name. Any time we serve others, we should ask God for wisdom in helping others to know that we are serving them on behalf of God, to show his love and compassion. We should ask for and take opportunities to share with others the story of what God has done for us. We should seek to relate the message of the gospel. Sometimes that will come all at once; sometimes it takes place over weeks, months, and even years of consistent ministry.

As we think of being balanced disciples, we want to ***serve***, but we also want to ***share*** as God gives us opportunities.



WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? The Poor: Establishing a Balance

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

2 Thessalonians 3.6-10

The Bible is a wonderfully balanced book, for we have a wonderfully balanced God. Sometimes we see a "balancing" truth to other truths we see in the Bible so that we do not go to extremes, so that we can establish proper boundaries. For the last several days, we have noted that the poor and needy have a special place in the heart of God, and we must acknowledge that in any study of ministry. Not only must we acknowledge it, but we must serve the poor as the Bible so clearly indicates. However, we should come to expect, from those who are able, some partnership, some response. Sometimes we can actually perpetuate poverty by not requiring anything.

In the passage above, some were clearly taking advantage of the generosity of the church. They sat around and did nothing, being idle when they were able to make a contribution.

In the Old Testament passages referred to earlier, landowners were not asked to *gather* the harvest for the poor but to leave some margins so that they could reap *themselves*. We must ask God for wisdom to know when we are being a real help to those in need and when we may be inadvertently helping others to live idle lives.

While we need to share this balance, there is the danger that some of us will use this as an "out" to never help the needy! With the weight of the Scriptures as they speak of ministry to the poor, it seems the better choice is that if we err, we should err on the side of being generous rather than being stingy when we have resources.

We must admit that we cannot fill every need, either as individuals or as a church. Once a crippled man asked Peter and John for money. Peter replied, **"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you."** As apostles, Peter and John were able to heal the man.

We must likewise do what we can for the poor. Whether filling needs, praying for and with them, giving words of encouragement, sharing the gospel—we should do what we are able to do, for the poor are revealed in Scripture as being on the heart of our God.



DAY 10

WHO'S ON GOD'S HEART? The "Foreigner"

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.
Deuteronomy 10.17-19

The passage above once again tells us that orphans and widows are on God's heart; it also adds another category: what is called in various translations as "aliens," "sojourners," or "strangers." He is speaking of those who are not native to a land or culture. Surprisingly, the reason given for loving the foreigners in their midst is that they were once foreigners in Egypt! God is saying to his people, "You remember what it is like to be strangers in a strange land. You even know what it is like to be mistreated and enslaved. Don't do that to others. Treat them with love and kindness." In other words, this was an application of what today we call the Golden Rule: treating others as you would like to be treated rather than as you *have* been treated.

I have traveled several times to the African nation of Uganda. Especially on the first trips I often felt a bit out of place, a bit out of step with the culture. I can only imagine the way that is magnified for those who come to the United States to live longer term, trying to make sense of our language and customs, trying to fit in here without losing their own identity. Many who settle in our nation come because of refugee status, not because they wanted to leave their countries.

These people who have come to this foreign land are on God's heart. He wants to place them on our hearts, too. The church I pastored in Atlanta for many years sponsored and housed an Asian Indian congregation and in more recent years opened their hearts and doors to a Bhutanese-Nepali congregation that continues to thrive.

You see, our church in Atlanta was situated near an area of refugee resettlement. That's why the Bhutanese-Nepali and other people groups were there. Are there groups here as well who have relocated from other places with different cultural and religious values? Serving them in love is often the first step in introducing them to the One who truly is "the way, the truth, and the life." In Atlanta, some of our people ministered to some of them by tutoring. What are ways we can minister here?

Those who are foreigners on our soil: another group that is on God's heart as needing ministry. Are they on our hearts as well? Remember what Jesus said? ***"I was a stranger, and you took me in."***



And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. *Matthew 9.35*

This verse summarizes the practice of Jesus' ministry as he traveled: teaching, preaching, and healing. We see two main reasons that Jesus healed the sick as he traveled: first, the healings were a sign that Jesus was no ordinary man. Miracles were one of the ways that the Father showed us that Jesus was his unique Son and the Messiah who had been promised. The other main reason for the healings we saw on Day 1 of our **40 Days of Serving**: Jesus was filled with compassion for hurting people. That's why he was willing to heal so many: he cared!

Now, you may say that you don't have the ability to heal. We are taught in the New Testament that some are given a special gift to heal the sick. I have often wished I had that gift, but I do not. We are all able to pray for the sick, asking for God to work in giving healing, comfort, or strength, according to the need and according to God's plan. Some go to school to get training in healing professions and utilize their knowledge and skill to help bring about the healing of our bodies and souls. But the truth is, ministry to the sick is not reserved for only these people; we don't need to be able to heal to minister to the sick.

In the passage in Matthew 25 we looked at earlier, Jesus says to those he approves, ***"I was sick and you looked after me."*** The Good Samaritan was not able to heal but looked after the man who had been hurt. We can all participate in serving the sick.

We can pray. We can visit. We can drive people to appointments. We can give words of love and encouragement by calling or by writing notes. We can offer to help take care of the house and yard while some are incapacitated. We can provide a meal. There is so much that we can do, both as individuals and as Life Groups or other gatherings. I serve as a volunteer chaplain at the hospital here. Most of our chaplains are laypeople, not pastors. Is that something you might consider?

Yes, God has a special place in his heart for those who are sick and suffering, whether they are maladies of the body or the mind or both.

As we are looking at the Scriptures to learn who is on God's heart, what is he saying to you?

Let's look at one more category of those who are on God's heart, and then we will turn our attention to learning how, since we are ***"created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,"*** we can put that into practice in life more and more, day by day.



"... I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25.36

Who's on God's heart? That's a question we have been seeking to answer in the last few days, and we have been getting our answers from God's word. We are letting him reveal to us who is on his heart rather than making our own judgments.

When we say that God has a special place for such people in his heart, please understand that this does not mean that he likes them better or that they are more important. Several times in the Bible we are told that God does not show favoritism. Just as there are many admonitions to help the needy, the Law-Giver Moses also made sure to tell the children of Israel not to show favoritism to the poor in a lawsuit or show partiality to them in matters of justice simply because of their need.

Why, then, do some of these we have mentioned have a special place in God's heart? Because of his compassion. Because of their needs. Because of their struggles. Yes, due to their circumstances, they are in a state where they need help. It's not the orphan's fault he has no parents. It's not the widow's fault that her husband has died. The stranger needs some help in a new culture. The poor cannot always get out of that poverty without the kindness of others.

And prisoners are also included on that list. Some in Jesus' day were in prison because they could not pay their debts. Others were there for crimes they had committed. Still others may have been locked up unjustly. Later, of course, many would be jailed *because of* their faith in Jesus. People in prison need to be remembered. Prison is a time when many men and women, in danger of losing hope, turn to the God of hope. They discover Jesus while incarcerated. There are prison ministries with which to volunteer and/or materially support. Some ministries reach out to the families of those imprisoned. And what about when prisoners are released? The people of God need to receive these as brothers and sisters when they come to worship God and grow in their faith. Yes, God wants to reach out and touch the prisoner as well.

To sum it up, we can return to Matthew 9 to see who's on God's heart:

When [Jesus] 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 9.36-38).

God's heart goes out to those who are "harassed and helpless," those who need a shepherd. When we minister in the Name of Jesus, serving and sharing, we can help in leading them to the Good Shepherd.



Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3.1-4

In the Bible, we read over and over about hardness of heart. It's not just Pharaoh or the Pharisees—we also read of the hardness of heart of Jesus' own disciples! The truth is, my heart can often be hard as well. The sheer number of people who come asking for help and the sheer number of stories that are told that are later revealed as false make it difficult at times to want to help others in certain circumstances or at least not to have a built in suspicion regarding their truthfulness.

That's why I need to be reminded of who's on God's heart.

Yes, I have to make judgment calls along with others when we have limited resources to share among what appears to be unlimited needs. And we will note on our journey some of the principles that we use to help make those determinations. But for today, I just want to admit that who is on my heart is on some days different than who is on God's heart. That's why I need the encouragement from the Scripture above that says, ***"set your hearts on things above... set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*** What does that say to you as you seek to serve? Take a few moments and meditate on your own heart. Jot down a few comments about your heart, where it is, and what changes you might like to see:

We are going to be thinking more and more about how those who are on God's heart can get translated into being on *our* hearts during these **40 Days of Serving**. But it begins with prayer.

At a crisis time in his life, it was revealed to King David that his heart was no longer set on God the way it once had been. Here's what he prayed: ***"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."***

Yes, that's a good place to start. If we want to grow in our discipleship, we must be servants. And to be godly servants, we need godly hearts. Let's ask God to give us pure hearts.



And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

2 Corinthians 8.1-5

Jesus said, ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*** How can we become pure in heart? Yesterday we saw that the place to start is in prayer: ***"Create in me a pure heart, O God."*** Only God can change our hearts from hearts of stone into hearts of compassion. We begin by asking him; we continue by walking with him and allowing his word to do its work in us.

The Macedonian churches are a prime example of this. As you read the words above, you realize that this behavior is not natural; it's nothing short of miraculous! Out of severe trial and extreme poverty comes rich generosity? Apparently, Paul was concerned that they were giving too much! Still, they *begged* to be able to give!

Looking back through the passage above, I think we discover one of the keys to a godly and pure heart: *overflowing joy*! These people had truly come out of darkness into light; their lives were transformed from despair in their poverty to seeing themselves as rich in grace! They wanted to join in the ***"privilege of sharing in this service"***! They did not see ministry as a burden, a chore that had to be done; they saw ministry as an extension of their joy in the Lord.

Let me say it again to let it sink in: *they were joyful because they had been saved out of their sins*. Could it be that some of us who have been in church all of our lives don't really think we have ever been "that bad"? Others might need an extreme makeover; we just needed a little polishing up! Don't ever let the blessing of being raised in a believing home blind you to your absolute need for a Savior. When we realize our utter sinfulness—and our great salvation—we too will be filled with joy!

A second key to a godly heart we see in the passage above: ***"they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."*** Look closely, and you will see that Paul is describing the Great Commandments in practice: ***"Love the Lord... with all your heart... soul... mind... and strength.... Love your neighbor as yourself."***

Are you willing to serve? Don't look at the people *first*. Look to God. When we love him with all of who we are, he will be working in us to give us godly hearts, generous hearts, hearts of compassion.



DAY 15

DEVELOPING A GODLY HEART

Seeing with the Eyes of Jesus

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.
Matthew 14.14

This is the third time we have looked at Scripture that speaks of the compassionate heart of Jesus. Elsewhere in Scripture, we are told that the Father is ***“the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”*** (2 Corinthians 1.3) and that the Lord ***“is full of compassion and mercy”*** (James 5.11). The Old Testament also frequently speaks of the compassion of God for his people.

How do we acquire a compassionate heart so that we will desire to serve others in their need? We have already noted a few ways: asking God to create in us pure hearts, remembering the joy of our salvation, and truly loving God with all of our hearts that will in turn lead to our loving others as well.

A practical tip for acquiring a compassionate heart is found in the passage above: ***“When Jesus... saw a large crowd, he had compassion.”*** Seeing people in their need is a key component in God creating in us pure, generous, and compassionate hearts.

Try this today: take some time to be a “people watcher” and truly *see* people. Don’t just see a laborer or a waiter or a salesperson or someone you suspect is an undocumented worker—see the *person*. It may be easy to see the needs in those who are sick or without jobs or homeless, but what about the needs that are not as outwardly apparent? Earlier, we noted that ***“When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”*** (Matthew 9.36). Jesus didn’t just notice the sick. He noticed those who were harassed by those who were in authority over them. He noticed those who were helpless, overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. He could see the pain in their very souls.

As we love God and become more like Jesus, we will be able to see with his eyes. Yes, look at people today. But don’t just look with your own eyes. Look through the eyes of Jesus. See what you notice. At the end of the day, jot down what you saw as you looked around through his eyes.



Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...
Philippians 2:3-4

I love me! I like to spend time around me—and it's a good thing, because I don't have any choice in the matter. I try to take care of me—I eat several times a day, work out 2 or 3 times a week, and try to get enough sleep. I also am kind to myself: I often give myself dessert or some other type of treat. Because I like my life, I also take care of my interests. I pay bills on time, mow the lawn, and file my tax returns.

Jesus told us that the second greatest commandment of all is to love our neighbors as ourselves. James calls this the “royal law” (James 2.8). Paul says that the entire law is summed up in this command (Galatians 5.14). And that is exactly right. We should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. That means we must have a healthy self-love.

But Paul realizes as he thinks of himself and watches other believers that sometimes it is hard to simply maintain a healthy self-love. It easily crosses the line into “selfish ambition” and “vain conceit.” So he gives us *a way of thinking* that can help us keep things in godly perspective so that we might serve others also instead of just loving ourselves. What Paul really gives us is a mental “trick” that can help us see more accurately with the eyes of Jesus rather than our own eyes.

Notice what he says: ***“in humility CONSIDER others better than yourselves.”*** It's not that others *are* better than you; it's just that it is likely, as we are just beginning to develop godly hearts, that our habit is to put more emphasis on ourselves and less on others. So Paul says to *consider* others better or more important.

If you thought someone was more important than you, how would that change your behavior? Think about it for a moment. [*Consider!*]

You would probably do as Jesus told his disciples when they were arguing about who was greatest: you would put that person first. I think that's what Paul has in mind. When you think of someone as better or more important, you are more likely to notice his or her needs. (Your *own* needs are pretty obvious since when *you* are hungry, *you* feel it.)

Paul's next sentence is the logical outcome of *considering* others more important than yourself: ***“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** Ah... that's where Paul is heading! He is trying to help us develop a compassionate heart for others. And as the cherry on top, he says to us that Jesus has already done this for us in coming from heaven to save us. As we devote ourselves more to Christ, we will display his attitudes as our own.



“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” Matthew 6.1-2

It is absolutely clear: while we are not saved by serving, part of God’s purpose in our lives is for us to minister. It is not an optional part of our faith in Jesus. Jesus himself says that serving others is how we show greatness. Paul said we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Of course, the evil one wants each of us to live for ourselves. He hopes to keep us on the sidelines, never becoming involved in service at all. When that fails, he tries to trip us up in more subtle ways. He tries to make us selfish even in our service, to get the attention (and our hearts!) again off of others and back onto ourselves. One of the most notable ways he does that is by trying to get our motives confused.

You see, not only is God interested in *what* we do but *why* we do those things. God wants to build our hearts and character through our service, but Satan hopes that *if* we serve at least we might become more self-centered through our service. *We can be doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons!*

There’s an old joke: a wealthy man stands up in the midst of a charity fundraiser and announces to all, “I would like to pledge one million dollars... *anonymously.*”

As we will soon note, the fact that we serve and others see it is *not* the problem. The problem comes when we perform acts of kindness just so people will notice or we do *not* perform acts of kindness unless we can be sure to get credit. Look again at the passage above. Jesus is speaking of our inward motivation: *“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.”*

That’s why we have spent the last few days looking at how to develop a godly heart. We want our service to be an extension of God’s work in our lives, not a way to be noticed by others.

What are some proper motives for our serving? We will look at some of these in the next couple of days, and we will note that rewards have their proper place, but they are rewards from God based on the development of godly hearts, not the accolades of men based on the needs of our selfish hearts.

Why do you do *your* acts of kindness?



“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6.3-4

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” Matthew 10.42

How do we know our ministry motives are right? One way is to minister when possible without anyone else seeing it and without our calling attention to ourselves. What does this do? Well, it does at least one thing for *us*—it helps us know our own motives. If we only serve or do right things when others are noticing, we have cause to wonder why we do as we do. When we minister when no one else notices, it helps us see that our hearts are truly being developed by God into pure, godly hearts.

Again, it is not that God is concerned that others see us doing good, as we will make more clear tomorrow. It is simply that God wants us to see the progress we are making in our spiritual lives, where motives are important. And today we see that rewards do indeed make up part of the proper motivation—the right stuff—for our ministry. However, who we are looking to for the reward is paramount. We should be seeking the praise of God rather than the flattery of men. In other words, our hearts should be on heavenly things, not earthly things, as Paul wrote in Colossians 4 that we considered a few days ago. Elsewhere, Jesus gave warning to ***“anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God”*** (Luke 12.21).

When we give out of godly, generous hearts, Jesus says that the Father who sees will reward us. Even when we give a cup of cold water in the Name of Jesus, we will receive a reward. What kind of reward? Well, with a godly heart replacing a worldly heart, you can imagine that the reward that pleases us will be different than what would have pleased us before. Jesus said to the disciples on one occasion, ***“I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life”*** (Mark 10.29-30). He also spoke more than once of those who are faithful: ***“Great is their reward in heaven.”***

While our rewards may include blessings here on earth, the primary rewards of our ministry are eternal treasure and eternal values. Jesus told us to store our treasures in heaven rather than on earth, as earthly treasures perish while heavenly treasures last forever. When you give up time and resources to minister, it is a wise investment of your life!



"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5.14-16

In the same message in which Jesus told us to try to perform our good deeds in secret, he also says to live in such a way that men "may see your good deeds." What's going on here? Is this an inconsistency in the words of our Lord Jesus? Not at all. We have to look at the purpose of each of these statements. In the passage we have considered in the last couple of days, Jesus is concerned about our motives. He was speaking against hypocrites who only had an *outside religion* rather than an *inner faith*. They did good only so that people would notice them. God wants us to be consistent people. If we do good only when we are being watched, it's a sign of spiritual danger!

But those in whom God is developing pure, godly, and generous hearts will be performing acts of kindness routinely. It will become more and more the natural habit of our lives. There would be no way to keep such a lifestyle a secret from everyone else. But because we are doing it out of a love for God and compassion for others, there will be a marked difference in *how* we do it. Remember the people mentioned in the passage in Matthew 6? They did "acts of righteousness" only so they themselves could be noticed by others, not out of love for God or compassion for the needy.

But notice again the passage for today: ***"...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*** You see, *the manner and tone with which you minister will likely reveal why you are doing what you do*. Yes, some are better actors than others and may be able to fool many of us, but no one can fool God.

The one person, while doing good deeds, draws attention to *himself*; the other person draws attention to *God* so that he is glorified and praised. This can happen through words, of course, as someone shares that the ministry is done because he or she is a follower of Jesus; but it can likewise be demonstrated in the manner and tone of the ministry. One who seeks to minister from a pure, godly, and generous heart serves humbly, giving dignity to the person being served, and obviously tries to stay out of the limelight even while letting his light shine. God wants good deeds to be seen when they truly point to him, because ministry is a powerful witness to others of God's love and care. When our light shines properly, we see people drawn to Jesus, the Light of the World!



After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go....

"Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you....'" The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

Luke 10.1, 9, 17

The verses above are three key verses in a lengthier passage as Jesus sent out 72 disciples into villages to prepare the way for him. Besides preaching the gospel of the kingdom, they served the people by caring for the sick, healing them with the power Jesus bestowed on them.

Note their reaction when they returned: they were overwhelmed with joy as they saw the results of their ministry! Whether you call this a motive or simply a result, a sense of deep satisfaction that is best termed "joy" often accompanies our ministry.

Many seek happiness in money and in what it can buy. When they discover that living just for pleasure or simply accumulating possessions inexplicably does not bring the inward happiness they seek, they look for meaning in all kinds of meaningless and often destructive activities and philosophies. Jesus knows about the paradoxes of life. He tells us, ***"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"*** (Matthew 16.25-26).

Joy comes to the soul who gives his life away. Though we may sometimes be tired and weary from ministering to others, there is inwardly a sense of satisfaction, a sense of joy from being a conduit through which God works in this world.

After a mission trip to Kentucky previously cited, our team shared a report time with the larger congregation. Following the report, some of the team members continued to share with each other what a meaningful event the trip was in their lives. One of the men who worked on a construction team all week said, "Going on a mission trip like this, even with all the work, is better than a vacation." A woman who had spent all week working in *The Lord's Cafe*, serving food to the needy, agreed. "Exactly," she said. "It really was better than a vacation."

Many who read these words cannot understand such sentiments. They believe those who say such things are greatly exaggerating or being downright dishonest. But neither is the case—nor are these people mentally unbalanced! I have seen it over and over and over again: when we are accomplishing our meaning in life, there may be difficulty, but there is joy! Our main purpose in life is to *know God*; but as we have seen, we were likewise created in Christ Jesus for good works. As we serve, we find joy. How are you going to serve today?



In those days... the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Acts 6.1-4

We have already seen that widows have a special place in the heart of God because of their needs. The early church in Jerusalem did not want to miss providing this ministry that God wanted done, so they made a plan to make sure it was accomplished. There was a daily distribution of food. Even when planned, later it was discovered that some of the widows were being overlooked. This was not on purpose; it was likely a case of the church in Jerusalem being more acquainted with the Jewish widows of a Hebrew background than the Jewish widows of a Greek background. When this was discovered, the apostles suggested giving responsibility for this ministry to wise, Spirit-filled men so that the ministry would be more effective. (This is thought to be the forerunner of the deacon ministry; the word *deacon* means *servant*.)

We also see a second planned ministry in this passage: the ministry of sharing God's word with others. It is likely that this included both sharing the message with those who were not yet believers in Jesus and teaching the word to believers so that they might grow in their discipleship.

As we discover needs in our community that are on God's heart, we need to plan these ministries so that they will be as effective and as efficient as possible. Planned ministries should include caring for those in need and ministering the word to all. As we will see more in days ahead, not everyone can or should do every ministry. In the above situation, the apostles realized that they did not have time to both minister the word *and* continue to lead the ministry to the widows. Knowing that their gifts and their priority from God was in ministering the word, they sought others who could use their gifts and their wisdom in leading the ministry to the widows.

Yes, it is a good thing to plan ministries and to improve them when we see they are not accomplishing what *could* be accomplished. Here is what I want you to do today: think about needs in our community or within our reach. What are some of these needs? Are there already planned ministries toward this need? If so, might God be calling you or some of us to participate in such a ministry? If not, might God be calling you or some of us to establish a ministry? Pray about this today...



As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said.... Looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.... and the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls... left over. The number of those who ate was about 5000 men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14.15-21

While we should become involved in planned ministries to care for others, we should not limit ourselves to planned ministries. There will be many occasions for ministry as we walk through our daily lives.

In the story above, the disciples **saw the need**. They were the ones who noticed that the crowd had not eaten any physical bread all day; they had been feasting instead on the Living Bread as Jesus taught them. They told Jesus it was time to let the crowd disperse so that everyone could eat. What Jesus said in return must have been one of the most surprising things they had ever heard—at least to that point! What are some needs to which your attention is called as you walk through the traffic patterns of your life? Do *you* notice needs around you?

After they saw the need, the disciples **heard the command**. Jesus spoke to them about the need they had seen. When we see needs, we must pay attention in our spirits: *Might God be speaking to us about this need?* Let me say that a wise person once told me, "*An opportunity is not a call.*" He went on to say that there are ministry opportunities 24/7/365—which is absolutely right! But he said, "You are not called to do all of them." The apostles learned that lesson in the story we read yesterday about the ministry to widows—it was an opportunity for them, but God had called them to first and foremost minister the *word*. I neither want you to always feel guilty because you "could do more," nor let you off the hook by telling you "an opportunity is not a call." I would like for you to listen to the voice of God and ask him what he is commanding *you* to do.

This sounded impossible: "*You feed them!*" But we note that although the disciples did not have much—five loaves and two fishes that they found with a young boy—they **took what they had to Jesus**. That's all he asks of us! We often protest that we are not *this* or don't have *that*, but when he calls us to perform ministry, we only present to him what we *have*. And he can take that and do miraculous things!

Not all ministry we are to do can be planned. We must hear the voice of God as he calls us to ministry as a way of life. Will you pray that God will help you hear and obey any ministry call *today* as you go through life?



Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6.9-10

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12.13

Sometimes the question comes to mind: are we to minister to *Christians* or minister to *nonbelievers*? Some believe we should concentrate our ministry on those who do not believe so that our ministry will be a testimony to the love of God and the love we have for neighbors. Others believe that since we are called to be separate from the world, we should concentrate on ministry to other believers.

Rather than simply seeking to see the logic in such either/or positions regarding ministry, we should seek to know what God instructs us through his word. In the passages above, we see that ministry is not either/or regarding believers and nonbelievers—it's both/and! We are called to minister to both unbelievers *and* believers. In the Galatians passage above, we are called to ***“do good to all people.”*** It certainly is true that we should seek to minister to those who do not yet believe and that God will often use our ministry to draw those people to himself.

But please also note that God has a special place in his heart for his own people. In both passages above, we are called to minister to all—but note in the Galatians passage: ***“especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*** Likewise, the Romans passage says on the one hand to ***“share with God's people who are in need,”*** which puts focus on God's people. But the next sentence enlarges the ministry pool when it says to ***“practice hospitality,”*** a command that goes to all people.

Jesus speaks about those who minister to ***“one of the least of these brothers of mine....”***

You see, sometimes there are limited resources for ministry. Actually, *all* the time there are limited resources! As a church and as individual members of the body of Christ, we should seek to minister to all those that we can. Still, the Scriptures say that we are to help *especially* those who are in the family of believers. While we should not use this as an excuse not to minister to those who do not yet believe, we should remember that God does call us to use priorities at times. In another place, when it was difficult for all widows to be fed, Paul even says to especially consider those who have been the most faithful in life when deciding such questions. We don't like to make hard choices like these, but sometimes we must. So let's remember the basic truth: ***“Do good to all—especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”***



Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4.10

Look carefully at the verse above. It is very short but very potent. Take another minute or two (literally!) to meditate on the words and phrases, asking God to speak to you. *[Pause to meditate...]*

Done? This is one of the most clear and concise verses in the Bible telling you God's plan for your life regarding your ministry or service. Let's see if your meditation picked up on the same things as mine...

"Each one": Peter is speaking to each and every believer. No one is left out or left behind. This isn't just for *some* believers. It includes you.

"Should use whatever gift he has received": There are many different gifts, as we will note more in the days ahead, and each person has been given at least one gift for use in serving others. Since it is a gift, it is not something earned but something bestowed. Since he says "*whatever* gift he has received," it leads us to graciously accept *whatever* gift or gifts we have rather than favorably or unfavorably comparing our gifts with the gifts of others. This phrase likely leads us to seek to determine just what gift or gifts that God has given us or is giving us. (We will also look at this question more in depth in the days ahead.)

"To serve others": Although each of us has received one or more gifts from God, the gifts are not really for our own benefit—or certainly not for our benefit alone. Our gifts have been given so that we might *serve others*. In this sense, these gifts that God gives are like tools that enable us to "*do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Just as a carpenter needs a hammer, a baseball player needs a glove, and a musician needs an instrument, so each of us needs the gifts God gives in order to fully accomplish the purposes he has for each of us. So we cannot stop with discovering our gifts; we need to also determine how those gifts can be used to serve others.

"Faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms": Yes, God's grace comes in various forms, because different ministries are needed. It's a blessing that we are not all gifted alike; we need a variety of gifts to accomplish what God wants to accomplish through his church. Ahead in our **40 Days of Serving**, we will note the great variety of gifts that are mentioned in the Bible, and there is no reason to think that all of God's gifts are mentioned there. So for today, as we consider this last phrase, let's concentrate on the words "*faithfully administering.*" The big deal is not which gift(s) you have and which I have. While we can ask for a specific gift, the giving of the gift is the decision of the Spirit. What we do have some control over is *how faithful we are* in administering the gifts. Think and pray: *How faithful are you in using your gifts to serve others?*



"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Matthew 25.14-30

Perhaps Peter had in mind this parable of Jesus as he wrote the words we read yesterday. Remember, we closed by highlighting the words, *"faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."* In this great parable, the gifts are varied—the three men were given different amounts. The point was not how *much* but how *faithful*. The one with 10 talents could just as easily have been the faithless one. Those commended were not commended on how *much* but how *faithful*. Though amounts were different, each received a reward based on faithfulness. Though we again see the idea of rewards for faithfulness, I think the greatest reward for any of us will be to hear Jesus say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"*

Here are the tough questions: *Who are you in the parable? How faithful are you in serving others? What are you going to do about it today?*



If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.
1 Peter 4.11

The parable of the talents is very challenging to us. We looked at it yesterday in conjunction with Peter's words to us in 1 Peter 4.10: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* Fortunately, Peter followed that up with the verse above! Peter writes this from the crucible of experience. Remember when Peter wanted to walk on water? As long as he kept his focus on Jesus, all was well. When he lost that focus because of his fear, he began to sink. Remember when Jesus was about to be crucified? Peter boasted he would die before disowning Jesus. A while later, Jesus gave him good advice—to pray that he would not fall to temptation. Instead, he was overcome with fatigue and fell asleep. Rather than having God's power and overcoming, Peter worked in his own power and fell to temptation, denying the Lord.

We may feel overwhelmed when we realize that we are *"created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* It may again bring us thoughts and pressure of earning our place with God. But step back a moment and relax. Remember that God is the one who gives us the gifts. He provides what is needed. And while we are called to be faithful in using those gifts, notice that God doesn't say, *"Well, I have done my part; now it's time for you to do yours!"* No, it is partnership with God from beginning to end. Look again at the verse at the top: when we serve, we *"do it with the strength God provides...."*

We are not left on our own. Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15.5).

Successful ministry—from God's perspective—is when we use the *gifts* of God in the *strength* of God to do the *work* of God! We are told not to become weary in doing good; we will receive a harvest in due time. Likely, we *will* grow weary if we try to go it alone. Let's make sure we serve while walking with Jesus, having his Spirit flowing through us to give us strength. Although that will help us avoid "burn out," Peter says there is an even more important reason for us to serve in the power of God: it ensures that God will be praised through Jesus Christ and that others will be pointed to Jesus, who is *"the way, the truth, and the life."*

Our desire is **not** for people to say about us, *"What a great guy!"* (And possibly become dependent on us.) Our desire is for people to notice our ministry in the strength of Jesus and say, *"What a great God!"* (And become dependent on *him*!)



Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12.4-8

Get used to the passage of Scripture you just read. We are going to be meditating on it for several days! In other places, notably 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul speaks of the body of Christ and gifts. This passage in Romans 12 is more succinct, so we will use it as we address in more detail the whole idea of discovering and using the gifts that God has bestowed upon us to serve others.

A big mistake that many Christians make is treating faith in Christ as simply an individual matter. While we rightly emphasize that each person must individually confess Jesus as Lord, we are wrong when we make Christianity too individualistic! The whole biblical idea of gifts makes no sense if we are going it alone. The metaphor of the body says that your gifts must complement the gifts of others so that there can be wholeness and completeness as we share the gospel and live out God's purposes for our lives. Gifts differ because there are different ministry needs. But gifts also differ because a single ministry often needs a variety of gifts involved. For example, some may lead the ministry, others may donate toward it, and still others might be hands-on in serving, to note some of the elements mentioned in the passage above.

But I want us to focus on the first sentence in the passage above today before we seek to discover our own gifts: *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*

Have you ever thought about where the term "membership" comes from, whether in a club or in a church? *It comes straight out of the Bible!* Yes, the concept of church membership comes right from Scripture. But what is jaw dropping to me is the phrase: *"each member belongs to all the others."* Let that sink in for a moment.

In what ways do you feel that you belong to others here? In what sense do you feel that others belong to you? If we are truly going to serve, we must take seriously the concept of the church—the body of Christ—and how we as members come together to perform the work of God.



Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12.4-8

If we are going to be successful as a church serving as the body of Christ, each one of us must be willing to serve *in* the body of Christ. Each of us must embrace our gifts and use those in ministry. Too often, perhaps because in our worship services we are all seated and listening to the preaching of God's word or to an individual or group ministering to us in song or testimony, we unconsciously get into the idea that we are the audience and perhaps even sit in judgment of the spiritual and perhaps the entertainment value of what is presented and whether it meets our own ideas of how we best like to worship in terms of style and substance. But listen to what the writer of *Hebrews* says to us: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."* Hebrews 12.1-2.

This passage rightly puts us as believers as those being cheered on by the crowd of others who have gone on before us. They ran their races during their lifetimes; it is now our turn to run! We are not spectators; we are the athletes!

The Bible writers use such athletic metaphors from time to time; however, since there were not "team sports" so much in that day, those metaphors captured our need to participate but not so much our need to work *together*. That's why the metaphor of the body is so powerful—not only does it recognize that all of us need to work together to do the work of God, it also helps us see that we are not in competition with each other regarding relative worth or position. Just as a body needs just one head and two arms, for instance, it also needs, as Paul says elsewhere, "ligaments and sinews" to support it and hold it together. He lets us know that *every* part is needful. We need to be serving in the body in which we are placed. Your service is needed for Jesus to fully accomplish his work. Here is the sobering truth: ***to whatever extent you and I fail to exercise our gifts in service, we are literally handicapping the body of Jesus in the world and in our community.*** Is that what you want? Meditate on these thoughts for a few moments.



We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12.6-8

"What are my spiritual gifts?" That's a question we each need to ponder. But a more basic question might be, "What *are* spiritual gifts?"

There are many ways to answer that question, and we have already covered some of them. Are spiritual gifts different than talents? Most would say yes, and I would concur, though talents are still gifts from God, and remember that we are to use "*whatever* gifts we have received to serve others." Some spiritual gifts may be spiritually enhanced talents. We may have had the rudiments of the gift even before we were believers, but it became a spiritual gift as God gave focus and spiritual power to it. A spiritual gift is given to be used for a spiritual purpose.

Often spiritual gifts are heightened qualities of general Christian character. In the list above, for instance, teaching is listed as a gift. In another place, the writer of Hebrews implies that all Christians should be able to teach others. And that is true, but the one with the *spiritual gift* of teaching is especially gifted to share God's word in ways that help others grasp it. Serving is also listed as a gift. Surely we know that all Christians are to serve—that's what this entire **40 Days of Serving** emphasis is about! But some have a giftedness beyond the normal serving that all Christians are called to do. Surely, all of us are to encourage and show mercy and give; some are simply especially gifted in these ways. All of us have the privilege of praying for the sick; some may be gifted with the gift of healing.

We are not to ignore all other areas of Christian character and behavior as we discover our spiritual gifts, but God gives us these gifts as a way to focus our lives and to help us work together with others to accomplish his purposes. We will all at times serve in areas where we are not as gifted; however, we will be most productive and likely most satisfied as we serve predominantly in the areas of our giftedness.

Are all the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture? While some think so, since each listing has some variance, we are likely simply given illustrations of common gifts. I notice what seems to me to be spiritual giftedness in others in areas not mentioned in the lists, so I believe the lists in Scripture are not exhaustive. Remember what Peter said? "Each one should use *whatever* gift he has received to serve others..."



DISCOVERING OUR GIFTS **Experimentation**

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12.6-8

Let's return to the question we began with yesterday: "What are my spiritual gifts?" Let's recall that God's word tells us that every believer has one or more spiritual gift(s). Let's admit that the same gift can seem more powerful in one person than another, so because your giftedness doesn't seem as "strong" as someone else's doesn't mean you don't have a particular gift. The Holy Spirit gives gifts as *he* desires, not as *we* desire (though we are told that it is good to desire spiritual gifts, particularly that we might make God's word more understandable—see 1 Corinthians 14.1). We should be grateful for any gift that God chooses to give us!

Today, there are tools available that may help Christians discover their spiritual gifts: there are spiritual gifts inventories and seminars that seek to bring understanding. Feel free to use some of these. We may offer classes that will assist. But the truth is, most Christians in most times have not had such tools, yet they were able to discover and use their gifts without them!

Let me offer two suggestions for discovering your gifts that you can begin using right now: *experimentation* and *affirmation*.

By *experimentation*, I simply mean trying out ministries to see whether you "fit" and whether you are effective. While we can ignore or misuse gifts, I am firm in the belief that for the most part we will find our greatest satisfaction—a sense of *blessedness*—when we are faithfully using the gifts God has given us. Likewise, while we might have to study and practice and hone, as a musician who takes up a new instrument, we will in time see *effectiveness* in the use of the gift.

Not sure if you have the gift of teaching? Try it a couple of times—we might all be discouraged after a first try! Be an assistant under another teacher. Are you able to clearly share what you are teaching? Does the content seem to "click" with the students? Experiment with other gifts as well. When a need arises, volunteer on a short-term basis. Find where God is blessing others in your service while blessing you as well.

Do you know your gifts? What do you see as possibilities? Take the initiative to do some experimentation. We hope that you are taking advantage of experimentation during these **40 Days of Serving!**



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Romans 12.6-8

Yesterday we suggested that there are two good ways of discovering our spiritual gifts: *experimentation* and *affirmation*. As we experiment with different forms of ministry, we are afforded the opportunity to see how well we seem to “fit” in a particular type of ministry. It is always an advantage when we can experiment under the watchful eyes and tutelage of those who are already involved in those ministries. And that is where *affirmation* comes in.

We can't simply discover our gifts by what we like to do; there must also be a judgment of effectiveness. I may personally love to get up and sing in front of a crowd. Unfortunately, the crowd would probably **not** love it! We should not think or feel badly about ourselves simply because we try something and discover that we are not gifted in that area; instead, we look for *other* areas of service as we seek to find the Spirit's giftedness in our lives. (Remember, though, not to give up prematurely! Most gifts need to be “polished” a bit before they really start to shine.)

As I am seeking to discover my gifts, one of the best and most trustful methods is the affirmation of others. *What do people say you do well? What do you do that blesses others?* Questions like these strongly point to areas of giftedness. I remember when I was sensing that God might be calling me to be a pastor/teacher. I was excited but then began to wonder if it was just me wanting to be up in front of others. I also had self-doubts: why would I think that God was calling *me* to be a pastor? What did I really have to offer?

At just that juncture in my life, God sent several people to affirm those inward feelings. One was the Youth Minister who said, “Have you ever considered going into the ministry as your life's work? I think you have gifts for that.” Without such affirmation, I may never have been able to fully discover my gifts. Again, what do people say you do well? What do you do that blesses others? These are powerful signs that point toward your spiritual giftedness.

When we think of affirmation, we are no longer looking only at ourselves in regard to gift discovery. We realize that others may be waiting on *our* affirmation to be fully confident of their gifts. Even as you seek your own gifts, do not neglect to be a channel of God for his calling out his giftedness in others! Who can you affirm this week?



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Romans 12.6-8

Did you know that spiritual gifts can not only be *used* but *misused*? Some look at the gifts as signs of spiritual maturity, but they are not! If you are looking for something from the Spirit that is a sign of spiritual maturity, it is the *fruit* of the Spirit, not the *gifts* of the Spirit (See Galatians 5.22-23). In the church in Corinth, all kinds of trouble arose because people were bragging on themselves based on which gifts they had received. Paul was appalled, and he spent three chapters—1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14—trying to correct their errors. Many were *misusing* their spiritual gifts!

How can you misuse your spiritual gifts? First and foremost, by not using them according to their purpose. Paul said about spiritual gifts, ***“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good”*** (1 Corinthians 12.7). Gifts are designed to be used by each of us for the *common good*, for the building up of the church, the body of Christ. They are not given to call attention to ourselves or to edify self but to edify the church. When the church is edified, we ourselves are likewise edified, but the converse is not necessarily true. We can try to edify ourselves without edifying the church.

Perhaps the easiest way to misuse your gifts is simply not to use them!

Look at the passage above. Note how simple Paul's instructions are. If you have the gift of service... uh... *serve*! If you have the gift of teaching... uh... *teach*! If your gift is encouragement... uh... *encourage*! If you have been gifted with making enough money to be able to help those in need... uh... *be generous*! Need I go on? Do you get the picture?

Paul is saying for us not just to discover our gifts but to *use* them! They are not medals or badges; they are the tools of ministry in a world of need. In another place he tells Timothy, *“Do not neglect your gift...”*

Meditate on your gifts. What are some that you think you may have? How are you actively using your spiritual gifts in ministry? In what ways might you be neglecting your gifts? Please understand: we are not wanting anyone to feel guilty for not spending 24/7 in ministry. But God has given each believer gifts and he wants each believer to be involved in ministry. What is God saying to you today?



We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12.6-8

Today will be our last day using this passage. It says we have different gifts, and then it mentions some of them. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, we see another list of gifts, and yet another in Ephesians 4. Some gifts are mentioned in just one of the lists, others in more than one. What we see are some of the *typical* gifts needed in the body of Christ. Let's note some of them simply as examples to help as we continually seek to discover our own gifts—and to affirm the gifts of others...

Prophecy—this gift refers more to clearly speaking the word of God than to an emphasis on telling the future. The Bible says one with this gift “speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.” Because of this, Paul encourages the people to really desire this gift if they desire any at all.

Serving—helping those in need, taking care of the details that need to be done in practical ways

Teaching—giving instruction, especially of God's word

Encouraging—exhorting or comforting

Contributing—being blessed with the resources and the ability to share

Leadership—ability to plan, lead, and administrate

Mercy—showing grace, kindness, favor, compassion

Evangelist—a person who brings the good news with heightened effectiveness

Pastor/Teacher—a shepherd who looks after and instructs the flock

Apostle—those sent out, particularly able to connect with those of other cultures and establish churches

Sign gifts—there are also “sign gifts” to help others see the miraculous powers of God, such as speaking in languages previously unknown or having gifts of healing or a special gift of faith to see extraordinary things happen from the hand of God.

Have you been given some of these gifts? Do you see them in others?

Remember, these are examples. The Spirit gives gifts as needed. For instance, I notice that some have *talents* in music; yet some seem to have a *spiritual gift* in music. What are some of your possible gifts?



Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4.10

In one of my favorite movies, *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey is asked, "Georgie, don't you ever get tired of just reading about things?" That's a good question for many modern day believers. We go to Bible study after Bible study and read the Bible ourselves and read book after book, assessing the ideas and theologies and methodologies presented. You are reading right now. Don't you ever get tired of just reading about things? Don't you want to *do* something? If so, let's start with something simple. Get something to write with. Write down some stuff!

Some possible gifts I have (Be generous here; put down even slightly possible ones!): _____

List some things others have said you are good at doing:

Gifts aren't the whole thing. If you have a gift of teaching, for instance, you may find you are more effective with children or teenagers than with adults (or vice versa). **Looking at what has been written above, with what group or groups do you seem most effective, if any?**

Your passions and interests are also involved. Some have a special passion for the poor, others for the displaced, others for those involved in sex trafficking, etc. **Who are you passionate about for ministry?**

Ask God to give you wisdom as you assess your gifts with your passions and experiences! Tomorrow we will begin to consider different ideas for ministry that may spur your thinking.



Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"

Acts 3.6

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 8.12

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion....

2 Corinthians 9.11

There are countless *examples* of ministry in the Bible alongside all the *teachings* about serving. There is Peter helping the handicapped beggar. There is a lady named Tabitha who "was always doing good and helping the poor." There was Cornelius, a centurion who "gave generously to those in need...." You may wonder what you are able to give, particularly if you have more limited means. Just as in the first example of Scripture above, remember that we are never asked to give what we *don't* have but what we *do*. And what we do have comes from God, just as Peter proclaimed in the aftermath of the miracle noted above: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong." As is clear from the second Scripture listed above, it is your willingness that is paramount. And just as Peter was given an extraordinary power to heal as an apostle, Paul gives words of encouragement and hope to those of us who have a willingness to serve: "*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion....*"

If you read over 2 Corinthians 8-9, you will discover that when Paul says "rich in every way," it is obvious that this includes but is not limited to money. *God wants to make us what we want to become: generous givers of our time, talents, and treasures.* Don't be concerned with what you *don't* have; concentrate on what you *do*—and look for God to add to you!

I hope that you have had some opportunities in the past few weeks to experiment in ministry. I hope you have been involved in intentional ministry and that God has led you to serve others simply as a way of life. This isn't limited to ***40 Days of Serving*** but is life long! You may sense God calling you to ongoing ministry but may wonder how to get involved. For some, it is a matter of networking: plugging into what is already there. For others, God may be calling you to lead a ministry or to begin a certain type of ministry in our community.

For our next couple of days we will give an "idea list." Look it over and prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to begin speaking to you about ministry opportunities. These are just types of ministries; don't be limited by what you see here. He may take one idea presented here as a leaping off point to direct you to something that is not here. In fact, begin to think now: what are some ongoing ministries God may be calling you toward?



MINISTRY POSSIBILITIES *Inside the Body of Christ*

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. *Galatians 6.9-10*

As we noted earlier, one of several ways to categorize ministry is ministry inside and outside the body of Christ. Sure, they overlap, but today let's note some ministries that are primarily within the church. Take careful note (check if using a paper version) of some that you already do or might bear further exploration as you seek your service...

- ☐ Life Group (Sunday School) Leader (various age groups)
- ☐ Child Care during Life Group or Worship (on rotation basis)
- ☐ Music and worship ministries—various opportunities in groups or as individuals, playing instruments, etc.
- ☐ Missions emphases and education
- ☐ Deacon ministry
- ☐ Drama ministry
- ☐ Sound, Lights, and/or Presentation technician
- ☐ Greeter, Usher, or Host/Hostess for Guests
- ☐ Wednesday night ministries for preschool, children, and youth
- ☐ Vacation Bible School and similar special short term ministries
- ☐ Leading or facilitating short-term DiscipleLIFE classes
- ☐ Serving through one of our Ministry Teams (*Education, Worship, Fellowship, Ministry, and Missions/Evangelism*)
- ☐ Serving through one of our Administrative Groups (Trustees [Finance, Building and Grounds], Personnel Committee)
- ☐ Homebound Care (cards/calls/visits/etc.)
- ☐ Senior Adult Ministry (Keenagers, physical assistance, etc.)
- ☐ Hospitality: ministering in times of need (meals, etc.)
- ☐ Prayer Ministry
- ☐ Publicity/Social Media
- ☐ Special focus Bible studies
- ☐ Landscaping
- ☐ Building upkeep
- ☐ Media Library
- ☐ Other: _____

I am sure some ministries were not listed here, but you get the idea. Again, circle or note some ministry ideas that spark an interest in you. Can we help connect you?



MINISTRY POSSIBILITIES *Outside the Body of Christ*

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. *Galatians 6.9-10*

The verse above, while telling us to especially take care of the family of faith, also instructs us to do good to all. While there is overlap, the following ministries are primarily to those who may be outside of the body of Christ, or at least outside of our local church. Which ones prompt more exploration from you?

- ☐ Prime Time Singers (music in area nursing homes, etc.)
 - ☐ Tutoring, etc., for students
 - ☐ Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) (training provided)
 - ☐ Pregnancy Resource Centers (e.g., Life Services)
 - ☐ Bible Clubs for children
 - ☐ Working with Sexual Exploitation/Trafficking Ministries
 - ☐ Habitat for Humanity or other construction opportunities
 - ☐ Volunteer at food banks, etc.
 - ☐ Food and clothing drives
 - ☐ Operation Christmas Child (pack boxes)
 - ☐ Angel Tree ministries for families of prisoners
 - ☐ Feed My Sheep (summer feeding ministry for students)
 - ☐ Good News Clubs in schools
 - ☐ Mission trips
 - ☐ Evangelism (examples: contact with church guests, visits, cards, newcomer welcome, block parties, special events)
 - ☐ Adoption/foster care
 - ☐ Hospital chaplaincy
 - ☐ Community volunteerism (such as Care Fest, in hospitals, etc.)
 - ☐ Teaching community interest classes
 - ☐ Providing services for the needy (car repair, etc.)
 - ☐ Initiating/leading support groups for community
 - ☐ Young Lives, Alpha-Omega, etc. (Ministry to single moms)
 - ☐ Other ideas: _____
-

Let us help connect you! Contact us!



“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” *Matthew 25.34-40*

In our DiscipleLIFE model, we speak of disciples growing in “head, heart, hands, and feet.” Stated simply:

- **A Disciple Learns (HEAD)**
- **A Disciple Loves (HEART)**
- **A Disciple Serves (HANDS)**
- **A Disciple Shares (FEET)**

This is *balanced growth*. No disciple should settle for being only one or two dimensional. The passage above lets us know that using the “hands” is not optional. It is a sign of maturity.

You see, not only do we learn, love, serve, and share, we go through various stages of development. When we first come to believe, we are “infant Christians.” We need others to “spoon feed” us. And that’s okay—for a while. But we need to move on to the “growing stage” where we are still learning but do more and more ourselves. And we keep going until we reach “maturity.” While we never quit learning, in the maturity stage we are able to reproduce ourselves by training others and by taking leadership roles as God enable us.

God desires for every believer to regularly serve, both in planned ministries and as a way of life. Meditate on that sentence for a minute. Do you agree with it? If not, how would you summarize all the Scripture we have explored during these days?

Jesus served us by giving his life for us that we might be saved; we have the opportunity to serve Jesus by serving others—by “doing good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

It is time to step up and embrace God’s full plan for your life, a plan that includes ministry. What are some of the ministries you believe God may be calling you into? What are your next steps in this pilgrimage?



If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13

The church in Corinth had many challenges. One of the most pressing was a sense of spiritual one-ups-manship: church members were using their spiritual gifts for personal reasons rather than for kingdom purposes. Those with more “showy” gifts began to think they were more important than those who did not possess such gifts. Paul addresses this prideful attitude in a large section of the letter—what we call chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians. In the midst of this passage, which is the main teaching anywhere in the Bible on spiritual gifts, their use and misuse, Paul writes some of the most beautiful verses ever penned. (*See above.*)

The first few verses tell us loudly and clearly: **everything else is nothing without love!** Spiritual gifts are nothing without love. Great faith is nothing without love. Total sacrifice is nothing without love.

Let us serve, but let us always serve in love for God and others. Let us serve, but never let us serve to gain attention or accolades. Let us serve, but let us serve to fulfill the needs of others and to advance the kingdom of God. Let us serve, but let us remember that there are a variety of ways to serve but the same Lord over the service. Let us serve, but let us not demand that others serve in the same way we do. Let us serve, and let us inspire others to find their own places of service. Let us serve, and let us join with and help train others who feel called to a similar service. Let us serve, but let us remember that we are part of something larger, that we are part of a community of faith, hope, and love. Let us serve; but more than anything else, let us love, for the greatest of these is love.



DAY 40

40 DAYS OF SERVING: The End, or a Beginning?

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. *Ephesians 2.10*

Over the past forty days, we have been emphasizing one of the great callings of the Christian life, the call to serve. We have been very careful to note that we cannot earn our way to heaven, that we are saved by the grace of God through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we have been just as careful to note that serving is not an optional part of our lives as the children of God. Part of the purpose of our lives as designed by God is to serve; therefore we will never be fully fulfilled in life when we simply bask in the luxuries of life. There will always be something missing when we do not take seriously God's plan for ministry. Look once again at the verse above: we are God's good work, and he created us in his image to do good works. He even prepared them in advance for us to do, and he has gifted us to do them.

We are at the end of our **40 Days of Serving** emphasis, but I hope and pray that for each of us, it is a new beginning of opening our eyes to the good works around us that God has prepared in advance for us to do.

Surely, some of those good works will pop up in the midst of a day, just as we see in Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Read Luke 10.25-37). We will be called by God to interrupt what we have been doing so that we can help others on the spur of the moment. We must be sensitive to God's Holy Spirit as he speaks to us.

But other ministries need to be performed in an ongoing fashion, and surely God will lead each of us to be part of a team so that these good works God prepared in advance will be carried out.

It is God's will for you to be involved in ministry.

Where are you in the process?

Have you discovered your place(s) of service for this season of your life?

If not, what are you doing to seek to discern God's plan for you?

Are there ministries already in existence you can join?

Are there ministries the church or your Life Group could perform?

Are their ministries elsewhere that God is calling you to support?

Imagine a body of believers where each one is using whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. Imagine the impact within the church. Imagine the impact the church can make on the community and throughout the world. Let's do our part—as individuals, as Life Groups, as Ministry Teams, as a church—and let's join with other churches in following our Lord Jesus, who did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.



40 Days of Serving

Notes

