

“Living True Service”
Luke 9:46-48, John 13:4-5, 12-17 and Philippians 2:1-11
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Prayer for Understanding Eternal God, whose word silences the shouts of the mighty: Quiet within us every voice but your own. Speak to us through the passion of Jesus that by the power of your Holy Spirit we may receive grace to show Christ's love in lives given to your service. Amen.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will help all of us understand and live the practice of service. Before this week I thought I knew what service was and often served however my research has made me aware that I am just a beginner in understanding and living service. So Holy Spirit we need your help to translate my words into inspiring words that make sense and guide you, who may be way ahead of me when it comes to practicing service.

Pastor John Ortberg entitles his chapter on servant hood “Appropriate Smallness”. Ortberg reveals what true service is by talking about a parent caring for their sick child in the middle of the night. Obviously it is not service when one hears their child cry and they fake being asleep then as their spouse leaves to care for their child they say a few words very groggily, as if they would have tended the child but they are just a heavier sleeper so it’s too late now. This is a selfish attempt to get both the credit for wanting to serve and the luxury of staying in bed. Clearly this is not service.

Let’s say the person gets up and provides excellent care but is resentful or thinks about other things they need to get done, or they lament their loss of sleep or even if they serve joyfully and are focused on the person they are serving, yet think, “wow what a wonderful person I am for serving”, none of these are true service. These are all examples of self righteous service.

True service would be getting up in the middle of the night and being thankful for the child, the opportunity and the ability to serve. Now extrapolate that to a stranger, a enemy serving them eagerly and expecting nothing, not even a thank you in return, now you are practicing service. When we are able to serve joyfully with no thought of the opportunity cost of the service then we become free and less addicted to having to have our own way. Ultimately true service frees us from selfishness, makes us humble and enables us to truly love God and others.

Practicing true service is challenging so it takes lots and lots of practice. Often we need to start with self righteous service and keep practicing until we achieve true service. As you grow in service push your circle of service further and further out until you are able to serve strangers and your enemies thankfully and joyfully.

True service is much more than going on a mission trip once a year, doing volunteer work and serving your family and friends with the expectation of a thank you. I will confess that’s where I am, a mere novice at service. I have grown to the point where I often thankfully and joyfully serve my family, however I often announce look at this wonderful service I did for you, so I can get a thank you and a hug.

That’s pretty much where the disciples were after three years of performing self righteous service. On the surface it appears the disciples were offering true service. They willingly left their homes and families to serve with Jesus. Gradually they grew to where they could serve strangers and even their enemies. They went out two by two to serve. However they were still stuck in self righteous service for they asked Jesus, “what will our reward be for the service we are providing?”. They compared their service and tried to out do one another. They argued over who was providing the best service.

Luke 9:46-48 “An argument arose among the disciples as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put the child by his side, and said to them, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.””

Ortberg writes, “Jesus took a little child in his arms and said, in effect, “Here is your ministry. Give yourselves to those who can bring you no status or clout. Just help people. You need this little child. You need to help this little child, not just for her sake, but more for your sake. For if you don’t, your whole life will be thrown away on an idiotic contest to see who is the greatest. But if you serve her—often and well and cheerfully and out of the limelight—then the day may come when you do it without thinking, ‘What a wonderful thing I have done.’ Then you will begin serving naturally, effortlessly, for the joy of serving. Then you will begin to understand how life in the kingdom works.”

Foster writes, “As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service. When Jesus gathered the disciples for the Last Supper they were having trouble deciding who was the greatest. Whenever there is trouble over who is the greatest, there is trouble over who is the least. That is the crux of the matter for us, isn’t it? Most of us know we will never be the greatest; just don’t let us be the least. Gathered at the Passover feast, the disciples were keenly aware that someone needed to wash the other’s feet. The problem was that the only people who washed feet were the least. So there they sat, feet caked with dirt. It was such a sore point that they were not even going to talk about it. No one wants to be considered the least. Then Jesus took a towel and a basin and redefined greatness.”

John 13:4-5 & 12-17 “Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord-- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Ortberg says “The primary reason Jesus calls us to servanthood is not just because other people need our service. It is because of what happens to us when we serve.” True service enables us to die to selfishness, harmful pride and comparisons setting us free to love.

Foster says, “In service we must experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves. In the disciple of service there is great liberty. Service enables us to say “no!” to the world’s games of promotion and authority. Service abolishes our need and desire for a pecking order. How like chickens we are! In the chicken pen there is no peace until it is clear who is the greatest and the least. A group of people cannot be together for very long until the pecking order is clearly established.” Jesus wants to set us free from this fruitless competition, struggle and quarrelling by having us serve one another. Jesus wants us to be a worldwide community of equally beloved sinners serving each other. Jesus said, **Matthew 23:11** “**The greatest among you must be a servant.**”

Foster says, “If true service is to be understood and practiced, it must be distinguished clearly from “self-righteous service”.” Self-righteous service is impressed with the big deal, it wants

to make impressive gains, where as true service does not distinguish between small or large service. Self-righteous service craves rewards, wanting people to see and appreciate the effort. True service enjoys serving whether or not the service is ever acknowledged. Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results, often eagerly waiting to see if the person served will reciprocate. True service delights in service even if there is no change. Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve. True service serves enemies as freely as family. Self-righteous service is affected by moods, whims and circumstances serving only when there is time, resources, energy and a feeling to serve. True service is a life style serving instinctively and spontaneous to every need. Self-righteous service is insensitive and views service as something you do for another. True service cares and views service as something you do with another. Self-righteous service fractures community, it seeks self glorification, puts others in debit and becomes a destructive form of manipulation. True service unites and builds community.

The practice of service creates deep soul renewal. Foster writes, “More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the discipline of service. Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition. It will devise subtle, religiously acceptable means to call attention to the service rendered. If we stoutly refuse to give in to the lust of the flesh, we crucify...pride and arrogance.”

Ortberg says, “At the deepest level, pride is the choice to exclude both God and other people from their rightful place in our hearts. Jesus said that the essence of spiritual life is to love God and to love people. Pride destroys our capacity to love. True service enables us to love.”

True service goes beyond mission trips, volunteering and serving your family to continual active helpfulness. True service is a way of living every moment of your life. True service serves continually in small ways. Bonhoeffer writes, “The service one should perform ...is that of active helpfulness. Simple assistance in trifling, external matters. Nobody is too good for the lowest service. One who worries about the loss of time that such ...acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of their own career too solemnly.”

True service guards the reputation of others with speech that affirms, builds up sometimes lovingly corrects but never gossips, slanders or damages another’s character.

True service lets another serve them by graciously receiving their service and never feeling the need to repay the service.

True service is being fully available to others, making their needs your priority.

True service is courtesy, gentle, respects another’s customs, acknowledges their unique beauty and affirms their worth.

True service constantly provides gracious hospitality.

True service listens. Foster writes, “Anyone who thinks that their time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and others, but only for themselves and their own follies.”

Early Christians realized practicing service was so vital to their soul renewal that the church described how Jesus served with a hymn so they could continually be reminded to serve. These words from Philipians are the foundation of that early hymn.

Philippians 2:1-11 If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if Jesus' love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own

advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. Jesus had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, Jesus set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a servant, became human! Having become human, Jesus stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. Jesus didn't claim special privileges. Instead, Jesus lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted Jesus high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that Jesus is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”

Our attitude should be the same as Jesus who thankfully and joyfully served. Jesus freely gave up his status so he could pour himself out in serving everyone. Jesus reveals to us who God is by serving. God is the Infinite Servant. We are all called to serve. Amen.

Soul Renewal

Spiritual practices for your extreme makeover

Service

Service is ...

- † Service is joyfully and thankfully helping others like Jesus serves us.

Practice service by...

- † helping others.
- † living in a continual attitude of humble active helpfulness.
- † building up others.
- † working with others.
- † graciously receiving service.
- † being fully available to others
- † being courtesy.
- † being a good listener
- † affirming the worth of others.
- † providing gracious hospitality.
- † being thankful and joyfully for the opportunity to serve.
- † serving freely, lovingly and graciously.
- † loving everyone.
- † eagerness to serve in big or small ways, fun or dreary tasks.
- † serving instinctively and spontaneously to every need.
- † caring and praying.
- † building community.
- † expanding who you serve to strangers and enemies.
- † being “appropriately small”.
- † freely giving of yourself to those who can bring you not status or clout.