

SESSION 01

Love

Overview

Service has always been a defining characteristic of those who apprentice under Jesus.

In the first century, this obscure group, who called themselves “followers of the Way,” took their Rabbi Jesus’ teachings and example seriously. They called the marginalized “brother” and “sister,” cared for the sick at the cost of their own health and reputation, and willingly lived with less so that the needs of others could be met.

In a time when humble service was seen not as a virtue but rather as a duty of the powerless, ordinary people following Jesus chose a wholly different way of relating to those around them.

This kind of life is the result of true spiritual formation — that we would be transformed into people of self-giving love. Maturity, according to Jesus, is not *primarily* measured by our current emotional state, the consistency of our spiritual practices, or even the quality of our moral decisions, but by a life given in loving service to the world around us.

This makes service not just a practice for those of us *in* Jesus’ Kingdom, but a gauge of how much his Kingdom is truly in us.

Opening Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What brought you to the Service Practice? What are you hoping to see God do in your life through it?

- 02 What is one question you would like to explore in this Practice?

- 03 What's your primary feeling around living more deeply into Jesus' vision of service? Excitement? Overwhelmed? Inadequacy?

- 04 Share about a time when someone loved you by meeting one of your practical needs, whether big or small. What made that experience memorable for you?

Teaching

Key Scripture

Matthew 7:16-20

Session Summary

- All spiritual practices are meant to transform us into people of love.
- When we mistake the how (spiritual practices) for the why (becoming people of love) in our spiritual formation, we do not bear fruit.
- Our maturity (or fruit) as apprentices of Jesus is evidenced by love practically expressed through service.
- To become a person of love is to be a firstfruits of God's Kingdom on earth.
- We step toward this by serving where we are, starting today.

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about the teaching. Pause the video for a few minutes to discuss in small groups:

- 01 What stood out to you from today's teaching?
What feelings came up for you throughout it?

- 02 Consider the implications of Jesus' words about Himself: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." In what ways do these words inspire or challenge you?

- 03 How have you typically measured your spiritual "temperature" or health? How is this the same or different from Jesus' metric of "love expressed through service"?

- 04 Reflect on where you are currently when it comes to practicing service. What could it look like for you to "start where you are"?

Exercise

One act of service

For this exercise, start by serving someone in your family or relational circle, not a stranger. This act could be as small as:

- Cleaning the dishes when you don't need to.
- Getting a cup of coffee for a coworker.
- Running an errand for a neighbor.

You don't need to announce or draw attention to what you're doing — it's okay if it goes unnoticed. Just quietly love this person by meeting a practical need of theirs. And as you serve, let the love of God come through your heart, allowing him to love others through you.

Reach Exercise

Guided listening prayer session

Begin serving in the context of your local church.

Find out where there is a need in your community, and make yourself available to meet that need. Consider looking for opportunities that are far from the stage: working in children's ministry, setting up early, caring for the facility, greeting or hospitality, or cleaning up after the gathering.

Practice Reflection

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139v23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

The South African writer Trevor Hudson has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”*

If you want to get the most out of this practice, you need to do it and then reflect on it.

* Trevor Hudson, *A Mile in My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2005), 57.

Before your next time together with the group for Session 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel joy?

03 Where did I most experience God’s nearness?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.

Read

The Active Life by Parker Palmer (Chapters 01-02)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 01)

Continue the discussion

If you would like to slow down this four-week Practice to give your community more time to sit in each week's teaching and spiritual exercise, you can pause and meet for an optional conversation in the Appendix.

Closing Prayer

Take a few deep breaths, become aware of God's presence, and pray this prayer slowly, leaving short silence between each line.

Jesus Christ, you came not to be served,
but to serve. More than giving what you had,
you gave of yourself in love.

Help us to follow you in the way of love —
to be led to people and places we would not
otherwise go if not for you.

Amen.