

Topic 28: Service

Laying Down Your Life for Others

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

—1 Peter 4:10

The parents at Bayside Church approached their minister and church board with a request that the church hire a new youth pastor. “We’re a young church that’s filled with preadolescent kids,” they reasoned, “We’re located just two blocks from Bayside High. We should get someone to come in and work with our teens and shepherd them through the tough teen years.”

The board agreed. After much prayer and a regional search lasting several months, Bayside hired Jason, a sharp, energetic guy with teens of his own to come and serve in this capacity.

Everything was great for three months. The new youth pastor spent time asking lots of questions, meeting families, getting to know kids, becoming familiar with the community. Then he called a parents’ meeting. In that meeting, he presented an ambitious plan built around youth small groups. It’s a plan that calls for a *lot* of adult volunteers.

The next day several parents called the church office. “We hired this guy to minister to our teens. But now he’s asking *us* to sign up to work with them!” they complained. “Doesn’t he understand the job description of a minister!?”





1. What do you think of when you hear the word “minister”? Write down any words, phrases, images, or thoughts that come to mind:

“One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbour; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us.”
—John Wesley

Check out the Apostle Paul’s description of how Jesus designed his church to function. (Note: It’s the passage that Jason uses to guide his own ministerial philosophy):

“He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12, ESV).⁴

2. According to these verses, what is the role of church leaders? What is the role of “the saints”—regular church members?

How about that? According to this passage, it isn’t the professional clergy who are supposed to do all the hands-on working and serving and ministry. It’s the saints—regular church members. The Apostle Paul describes a system in which pastors and teachers and other church leaders spend their time and efforts “equipping”—training and encouraging—the members of the congregation.

⁴ The NIV translates this last phrase “to equip his people for works of service.” All through the New Testament those two words—ministry and service—are used interchangeably. To minister is to serve. To serve is to minister. All of God’s people are to work at serving.



3. Read the following examples of churches.

- ▶ a church with five very gifted and talented staff members and a congregation that mostly sat back and watched the professional clergy use their gifts
- ▶ a church staff of three pastors committed to helping 100 willing and available volunteers discover and develop and use their gifts to minister to others

Explain which church would have the biggest impact and why.

In this lesson we will see three things about ministry or service:

- ▶ Disciples are *called* to serve
- ▶ Disciples are *gifted* to serve
- ▶ Disciples must be *obedient* to serve.

Bible Study

Disciples Are Called to Serve

- ▶ “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 10:45).
- ▶ “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:5–7).
- ▶ “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Galatians 5:13).

It’s clear that Jesus came to serve. It could be argued from Mark 10:45 that his entire life was one continuous act of service. It’s also clear that those who follow Jesus are expected to act like Jesus.



4. What can make it difficult to follow Jesus and serve others?

Disciples Are Gifted to Serve

In four different places—1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4, the Scripture speaks of something called *spiritual gifts*. A spiritual gift is best defined as a

God-given ability for service to and through the body of Christ.

“The Great Commission is the greatest command, given by the greatest Commander, to the greatest army, for the greatest task ever. . . . Unfortunately, some have forgotten that the God who assigned us this great task also assigned us the means to fulfill the task—people, men and women whom God has equipped to fulfill that task, men and women with God-given gifts—spiritual gifts.” —Larry Gilbert

God sees to it that every believer has at least one gift (1 Corinthians 12:11, 18; 1 Peter 4:10). These supernatural abilities aren’t given to call attention to the individuals who have them, but to glorify God and bless others. All these divine abilities are important for the healthy functioning of the body. The Greek word for these gifts is *charisma*—a form of *charis*, the word translated “grace.” God distributes these gifts, or graces, as he sees fit, and never on the basis of merit (1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 11).

Most Common Christian Understanding of the Gifts:

- ▶ Some believers hold firmly that these four gifts were limited to a period between Jesus’ ascension and the death of the last Apostle, Jesus’ beloved disciple John (about AD 90). People who hold this view are known as *cessationists*.
- ▶ Other Christians affirm the continuation of all of the gifts. They are *continuationists*.
- ▶ Many other believers fall in an in-between category, “open but cautious.”
- ▶ Still others believe that some of the four gifts continue, while others have ceased.

Whatever view we take, we must remember that according to Paul, the spiritual gifts are meant to promote the unity of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:12–13). In the letters of Paul, the unity of the body is necessary for the church’s growth. The alternative, disunity and spiritual arrogance, tears down the church.



5. Up until now, what has been your understanding of spiritual gifts?

Disciples Are Obedient to Serve

“Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.” —Corrie Ten Boom

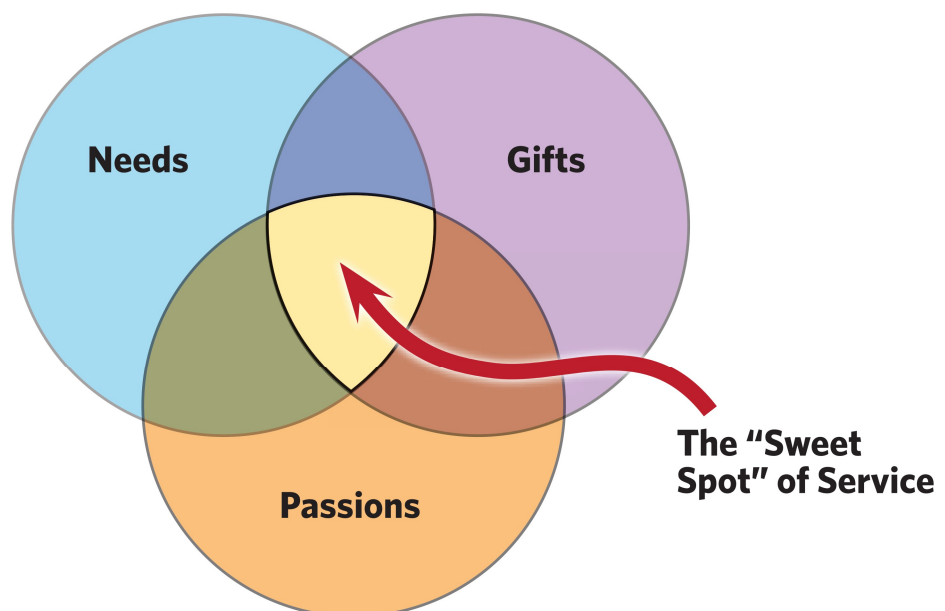
Our verse for this lesson says: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

In Bible times a steward was the most trusted servant in a household. This individual was given authority over the master’s estate and possessions. Anyone in the household with needs would ask the steward, who would then dispense whatever was needed.

The “Sweet Spot” of Service

Sometimes needs arise and we have to do things we may have zero desire to do or engage in tasks for which we are not exactly gifted. But when we get to address real *needs* that we have a *passion* to solve using our unique *gifts* and abilities, that’s a very special blessing.

The apostle Peter tells us that the Lord has given each disciple a spiritual gift which others need (1 Corinthians 12:7). When we use our gift(s), we, in effect, dispense God’s grace to others.





Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? You can prayerfully discover your gifting in a variety of ways:

- ▶ *Examination* (via spiritual gift questionnaires—like the one on the following two pages)
- ▶ *Evaluation* (of your Christian history and experiences); *experimentation* with various new ministries
- ▶ *Enjoyment* (considering which acts of service have been most fulfilling to you)
- ▶ *Effectiveness* (considering where you have seen the most fruitfulness in ministry)

As with faith, prayer, and evangelism, it's not enough merely to study this topic. Being a follower of Jesus means rolling up your sleeves and diving in. We have to take action and get busy.

6. Now that you've studied a bit about this idea of being called and gifted to minister to others, what—specifically and practically—does service look like in your life today? What would you like it to look like in the days to come?



Take-Home Reflections

Good Reasons to Serve	Bad Reasons to Serve
Jesus served and we're called to be like him.	To avoid looking like a slacker
"Servant" is every disciple's new, true identity.	To alleviate guilt or pressure that others are laying on me
God has graced us with important abilities, skills, experiences, and blessings.	To show myself spiritually superior to those who don't serve
The world is a needy place. Jesus called us to serve the needy.	To put others in my debt
We are transformed as we engage in the process of serving others.	To try to win God's approval—and to avoid his displeasure for not serving
Serving is rewarding (both now and forever).	To compel others to serve me in return

Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, 1 Peter 4:10.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

2. Read carefully and meditatively the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John 13. On a separate sheet of paper journal any insights or "aha!" moments.
3. Complete the "Spiritual Gift Questionnaire" that follows.

Spiritual Gift Questionnaire



This questionnaire is one of many tools to help you discern where you fit in the church's many ministries. It can help you to either learn or confirm areas of affinity—areas that you naturally tend to focus on. But as with most spiritual gifts tests, it is not meant to definitively tell you what your gift is. Simply knowing your spiritual gifts is not the goal, but rather knowing how to serve God as a member of Christ's body and serve are the real goals.

- › Ask God for guidance and wisdom to find your place in the church's ministry.
- › Your life experience can be a good guide to find your interest and abilities.
- › Be mindful of the needs of your church. Sometimes, God will call you to minister—serve—in places you might not prefer. The calling may be temporary or long term.
- › Be ready, willing, and courageous. Obedience is challenging.
- › Listen to the encouragement, wisdom, and guidance of other members of the body of Christ.
- › Be prayerful about finding God's will for you.

For each question, choose a response between 0 and 3 as follows:

3 Consistently, almost always true **2** Most of the time, usually true **1** Some of the time, once in a while **0** Not at all, never

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. ____ I am able to communicate effectively the message of salvation through Christ Jesus. | 19. ____ I can discern where God wants a group to go and help it get there. |
| 2. ____ I make critical decisions when necessary. | 20. ____ I have the ability and desire to teach. |
| 3. ____ I rejoice when meeting needs through sharing my possessions. | 21. ____ I am sensitive to what people need. |
| 4. ____ I enjoy studying. | 22. ____ I have experience making effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group. |
| 5. ____ I thrive when trusting God in difficult situations. | 23. ____ I can explain Scripture in simple and accessible ways. |
| 6. ____ I actively meet physical and practical needs. | 24. ____ I spend time digging into facts. |
| 7. ____ I can analyze events or ideas from different points of view. | 25. ____ Sharing Christ with nonbelievers comes naturally to me. |
| 8. ____ I naturally encourage others. | 26. ____ I can discern the motivation of persons and movements. |
| 9. ____ I am acutely in tune with the emotions of other people. | 27. ____ I can delegate and assign meaningful work. |
| 10. ____ I am a cheerful giver. | 28. ____ I detect when people experience stress and distress. |
| 11. ____ Yielding to God's will gives me great joy. | 29. ____ I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries. |
| 12. ____ It is very important for me to do things for people in need. | 30. ____ I can relate God's truths to specific situations. |
| 13. ____ I can identify those who need encouragement. | 31. ____ I can organize facts into meaningful relationships. |
| 14. ____ I am sensitive to the hurts of people. | 32. ____ I can detect honesty (and dishonesty) when people share their religious experiences. |
| 15. ____ I am sensitive to new truths and to how they apply to specific situations. | 33. ____ I look for ways to encourage and comfort others around me. |
| 16. ____ I have experience with organizing ideas, resources, time, and people effectively. | 34. ____ I am able to help people flourish in their ministries. |
| 17. ____ I am able to discern when sermons or teachings do not conform to the Scriptures. | 35. ____ I can make complex ideas and doctrines simple and accessible to others. |
| 18. ____ I can trust in God even in very difficult moments. | 36. ____ I look for opportunities to establish relationships with non-believers. |



Write your answer for each question, then add your answers for each gift. Pay attention to 2's or 3's. These are likely the gifts you are currently leaning toward.

Gift	Question Number	Your Answer	Total
Discernment	17		
	26		
	32		
Exhortation	8		
	13		
	33		
Evangelism	1		
	25		
	36		
Faith	5		
	11		
	18		
Giving	3		
	10		
	29		
Guidance	16		
	22		
	27		
Help/Serving	6		
	12		
	21		
Knowledge	4		
	24		
	31		
Leadership	2		
	19		
	34		
Mercy	9		
	14		
	28		
Teaching	20		
	23		
	35		
Wisdom	7		
	15		
	30		