

Finding joy in service

Lessons in serving others

Introduction

The world is made up of different kinds of people, which means that we live in an incredibly diverse world, but there is one area that links a large group of people together, it is self-interest. If we are going to be honest then most of us are linked to this group. If I do this will it make me feel, good? Will it increase my pleasure? Will it make me look good? Will it forward my concern? Will it increase my worth? It is probably true to say that self-centredness has the greatest grip on our thoughts, decisions, values and relationships than we could ever imagine. It is a problem that was challenged by the Son of God when he said, '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 10v 45]

The challenge for a follower of Christ is to be a servant than one being served. To face this challenge is to face one of the greatest challenges known to man in our generation. The pursuit of such a life is not easy, but it is a pursuit, which brings great satisfaction and immense joy.

Study 1

Challenging the Me first attitude

Introduction

The message our culture is me-first. It's the mind-set, which says that the no1 pursuit in a person's life is to indulge yourself, fulfil your dreams, satiate your appetites, pursue, your pleasures, take off all restraints. The promise of this is that this will bring you happiness. The road to contentment our culture says is the road of me-first. Such an approach produces a pathologically self-centred person, who ignores the needs of others, and leads to a mind-set which is life controlling.

The wide view

1. What are some of the signs of a me-first mind-set

In the market place

In the church

In families

In our country

In the media

A Biblical view

Read Mark Ch 8 v 31-38

2. What do you learn about Jesus' view of Himself in this passage?
3. What do you learn about Jesus' view of his followers?
4. Jesus was clear about his commitment to suffer and to die for his followers. Why do you think Peter tried to stand in the way of Jesus' plan?
5. Why was Jesus' response to Peter's resistance so severe?

6. Jesus tried again and again to expose and attack the self-centredness of his disciples. One day they were arguing amongst themselves, he asked what they were talking about they went quiet, the Bible says 'they argued about who was the greatest' [Mark 9 v33-34]
What are some of the warning signs and symptoms you see in your life when you are striving for a 'position of greatness'?

7. What would your life look like if you developed a greater passion for service?

8. What might our service look like when we approach it with one of the following attitudes
I will serve those who have influence, power, or who can repay my kindness
I will serve those who are like me, those whom I understand and around whom I feel comfortable
I will serve those with needs, regardless of their status, or position in life

9. Who were some of the people Jesus served when He walked on this earth?
10. How does his example influence your view of whom you should serve?
11. How does our culture encourage and praise those who strive for positions of power and prominence?
12. How does our society treat those who don't compete for first place?
13. What implications does this have for the Christian who is committed to following Christ's example?

Our view

14. Describe one area in your life in which you are presently working to gain a position of power and prominence
15. How do these efforts look in the light of Christ's teaching on the 'me-first' mind-set?

Study 2

Challenging self-centred attitudes

Introduction

Over the course of three years Jesus' followers had heard many sermons, and seen many examples calling them to change from a 'me-first' mind-set to a 'Father-first' one. They had seen Jesus model this lifestyle many times. Now as Jesus draws near to the end of his earthly ministry, his disciples had still not got the message. In a final effort to communicate the critical message of breaking self-centredness Jesus gives them one more lesson, he washes their feet [John Ch 13]

World view

1. In Jesus' day washing feet was one of the lowest forms of service. What are some of the acts of service in our culture today that many people avoid doing because they feel 'above it'?
2. What is one specific task, chore or act of service that you avoid, hoping that someone else will do it?

Biblical view

Read Luke Ch 19v1-10

3. Zacchaeus was a self-centred, greedy businessman. Talk about the changes that occurred in his life?
4. What caused the change in Zacchaeus?
5. What were the outward signs of inner change in his life?
6. What part did Jesus play in this life-changing encounter?
7. What part did Zacchaeus have in this transformation?
8. How do you see the partnership of God and man in this process of change?

9. Zacchaeus discovered a powerful truth. The first blow in destroying the power of self-centredness in our life is meeting Jesus face-to-face. Describe when you first met Jesus, when he first became real to you.

10. How did this encounter impact the way you view yourself and others?

11. Describe if you can a classic case of someone you have seen pursuing a 'me-first' mind-set.

12. What were or are some of the consequences they have reaped or are reaping because of this lifestyle?

Our view

13. Describe a time in your life when you had to face the hard consequences of living with a 'me-first' mind -set
14. How does remembering this experience deepen your desire to have a service-centred mind-set?
15. Describe someone in your life who lives with a clear servant's mind-set?
16. What are the results of this person's servant lifestyle?
17. How has this person inspired you to be more of a servant?

Study 3

Channelling the gift of service

Introduction

The old saying goes 'hindsight is a wonderful gift'. It is only after something has happened that we understand the fact. We often learn about something by seeing it work, and that can be true of spiritual gifts. It is also true that we can't often see what is under our own noses, and that we need someone else to point out to us what they have seen in it. We often discover a gifting by attempting things for God, by being open to serving God, and by offering what we have to God. The truth is that the only ability we really do have is our availability, and when we offer that, then we have given God our everything.

Wide view

1. What is one way you serve others that feels natural and brings you joy?
2. How can this ability add to the lives of others?

Biblical view

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 12 v1, v7-11 and 14-26

3. What various spiritual gifts are listed in this passage?
4. What do you notice about the diversity of these gifts? What are some of the different ways these gifts can be used?
5. The Apostle Paul compares the church to a physical body. What are some of the ways the two are similar?
6. Respond to one of the statements [or if time both of them]
 - a. Let's be honest there are some people in the church who are just dead weight. We'd be better off without them
 - b. I have nothing to offer in the life of the church, if I left, no one would miss me.
7. A working definition of spiritual gifts is divine enablements or special God given abilities entrusted to every follower of Christ in order to involve them in advancing God's purposes. With that in mind what is one spiritual gifts God has given you and how are you using it to help advance his purposes?

8. If you are not sure what your spiritual gift is, what is one area of ministry or service that excites you, and that you would like to know more about?

9. Describe if you can a clear and profound sense that God was using you to bring him honour or to touch the life of another person.

10. What makes this experience so memorable for you?

Our view

11. God has gifted you according to His wisdom. He took into consideration your personality, your heart, [what you like doing] your abilities [your natural talents] your experiences of life, and, your true potential, and then He gifted you. With that in mind

a. What would you communicate to a person who says, 'My gifts are used mostly behind the scenes, but I really wish I had the gift of teaching. I would love to get up in front of others and be in the spotlight.

b. I know I have the gift of leadership, but I get tired of the pressures being a leader can bring.

c. I wish I had a different gift that was more behind the scenes.

12. What is one area of giftedness you sense God is wanting you to investigate or develop?

13. How can your group members encourage you as you seek to grow in this area of giftedness?

Study 4

The service survival kit

Introduction

Most of us will have seen a bell shaped curve. A flat line with a bell shape in the middle. We may well have seen one representing the life cycle of a product. Think back over products, which have come and gone on a wave of popularity. CB radios, leggings, shell suits.

Many fads and products can be tracked on a bell curve. You can even apply this bell shaped curve to your life of Christian service. It could go through the following

Not yet excited about or committed to service- fired up to serve- serving with all your strength- hit a plateau growing weary of serving- stepping back from serving- happy to let anyone else do it

Wide view

1. Take a moment to plot your life cycle of service on a bell shaped curve.

Where do you see yourself today? Circle of the following

- Not yet committed to serve
- Fired up to serve-
- Serving with all your strength-
- Hit a plateau of service-
- Stepping back from serving-
- Happy to let someone else serve

Biblical view

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 15v58 and Galatians Ch 6 v9-10

2. Paint a verbal picture of what it looks like to one of the following

'Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.'

'Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.'

3. In both of these passages if we follow them to the letter we realise that service has the potential to wear us out. What warning do you hear God giving through these words?

- a. 'stand firm let nothing move you'
- b. let us not become weary in doing good'

4. Have you experienced weariness in doing good? Or were you simply 'busy'?

5. One major cause of service drop out is motivation, with that in mind what will service look like when it is driven by one of these motivations.

The need to soothe the personal feelings of guilt
a desire to earn God's good favour
a need to be praised by others

6. Describe a time in your life that you were driven by one of these motivations?

7. Bob is a follower of Christ who has been gripped by a false motivation, Brenda is a follower of Christ who is gripped by the amazing love of God, and she is moved in service. Contrast Bob and Brenda in one of the following ways

Attitude when Service is difficult

Feelings when no one says thanks for your service

Response when asked to serve for the 'long haul'

Answer when asked to serve in an area no one will notice

8. When we serve inside our gift area we tend to be charged up, when we serve outside our gift area we tend to be depleted. With this in mind describe a time when you have served in an area where you were not gifted. How did this impact your level of motivation?

9. Describe a time you served that matched your spiritual gifts. How did this impact your motivational energy level?

10. Sometimes we can overdose on service. We buy into the idea that more service is better, that service is next to godliness, that busyness is good. God loves those who live in the edge of exhaustion

With this in mind. What are some of the consequences when we overdose on service?

Our view

11. What does a healthy life of service look like?

12. If you are under-serving right now, how can your group members encourage you to serve more faithfully?

13. If you are over-serving, how can your group members keep you accountable to slow the pace and find balance in your life of service?

Study 5

Serving through sharing

Introduction

The truth is that you can't get anything out of an empty cup, no matter how hard you try, same is true for empty people when it comes to serving. However if you take a cup and fill it to the full, then just a gentle nudge and it's contents will spill all over the place. The same is true for people when a person is filled with Christ then what comes out of them will refresh and refurbish parched lives all around them. When the cup of a person's life is full they serve out of their surplus, they have something to give.

Wide view

1. What fills you up and makes you ready to serve?
2. What empties you and makes it hard to serve?
3. If you were to describe your life like a plastic cup, how full or empty are you today?

Biblical view

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 12 v14-15 and 1 Thessalonians 2 v6-9

4. In 2 Cor 12v15 Paul writes 'I will gladly spend for you everything I have.' How did Paul spend himself in his service of the churches and people he loved?
5. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2 v7 uses the image of a mother caring for her children. With real life examples describe how a mother serves and shares herself with her children?
6. How can this image of selfless servanthood shape our view of how we can care for other people?
7. Describe someone who served you with his/her spiritual gift[s] and how he/she made an investment in your life?
8. How has this person's investment impacted you as a follower of Christ?

9. How can you invest yourself more fully in the life of someone in one of these areas?

In your home and in your family

In your home and with your spouse

With someone in your neighbourhood

With a seeker with whom you have established a friendship

With a person who is part of your church

10. Describe if you can a time when you used a skill, talent, or ability to serve someone in one of these areas

In your neighbourhood

In another country or culture

In your church

11. How did you feel when you used this ability to help another person?

Our view

12. What is one talent or skill you have that you want to offer to God today?

13. Who will you serve with this ability and when will you serve them?

14. Is there material need in your church right now that your group could meet together? How can you use your combined resources to one of these groups in your church?

The children's ministry

The youth ministry

Those who are shut-in due to health or age

Some other area of need

Study 6

Living sacrifices of service

Introduction

The theme of sacrifice runs through the Bible, yet it is not always an easy topic to discuss. The image of a dying animal is not very attractive, yet the image of sacrifice weaves its way through the biblical story. Like a crimson thread from the book of *Genesis* to the last book in the Bible *Revelation*, the Bible holds that sacrifice is at the core of the Christian faith, We need to have our eyes opened to see the challenge and our ears opened to hear again the call of offering ourselves daily as a living sacrifice

Wide view

1. What is one of the greatest sacrifices another person has made for you?
2. How has that person's sacrifice influences your relationship with him/her?

Biblical view

Read Hebrews Ch 13 v11-16

3. How does this passage portray the following sacrifices?
Animal sacrifice in the Old Testament
The sacrifice of Jesus
The sacrifice we should offer to God
4. What are the results of the sacrifice of Jesus?
5. What are the results of our sacrifice to God?
6. One of the sacrifices we can offer to God is that of our words, through our lips, it's about allowing his praise to be on our lips. With that in mind.
What is one thing you want to praise God for today?
7. What is one of God's character traits that cause you to worship Him?

8. Another way of being a living sacrifice is to do good, and sharing with others. With that in mind. What is an act of sacrifice and service you could offer to one of these people?

A friend

A seeker

A family member

A church member

A neighbour

A work colleague

9. How can your group members pray for you and encourage you in this commitment?

10. In Philippians Ch 4 v 18 Paul writes about a monetary gift being an act of sacrifice to God. With this in mind. How have you experienced giving as an act of sacrifice and worship?

11. How could you deepen your worship of God by giving more sacrificially?

Our view

12. How has your understanding as a servant been shaped and impacted as a result of this study?

13. What is one new way you are/ consider serving God as a result of this study?

14. Reflect on ways you can deepen your sacrificial service in each of the following ways

Through your lips

Through acts of service

Through material ways.

Read as a conclusion Romans Ch 12 v1-2.