

“Spiritual Habits for Ordinary People - service”

Scripture: John 13:1-17

Graphics: hands, service, humility

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to humble themselves for true service in the name of Jesus.

Focus Phrase: True service disciplines the feelings rather than allowing the feelings to control the service.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

B. Jesus said lots of things that make us truly believe that **service to others** is a main characteristic of anyone who would be one of his followers.

- i. He said things like, “And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:44-45)
- ii. “And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35)
- iii. And, “The greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Matthew 23:11)

C. Clearly, one of Jesus’ main teaching points is for his disciples to be servants. And He proved and modeled that by serving them, serving the world, and by going to the cross to die as a suffering servant, for you and for me and for the world.

D. If we look around us in our every day lives, we DO SEE people serving other people and serving the greater good.

E. But we also, just as often or even more, see people or systems who are serving themselves...SOMETIMES even while SAYING that they’re serving others.

F. And almost every time someone or some system is operating in such a way as to serve itself or themselves, the things that Jesus has to say about being a servant go out the window and that person or entity engages in what we call **the pecking order**. It’s “I’m first, I’m biggest, and I’m best, so y’all need to back down and let me be the one.” This phrase “pecking order” comes from the social construct of none other than the chicken coop.

G. I have a short video that will help us. Here’s what it looks like (play **pecking order video**).

H. “Oh, MARY!” lol

I. The pecking order is real! This phrase gets applied to us when, in reality, we’re acting like chickens as we strive for more...strive to be first...strive to be best.

Which is directly opposite of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23:11 when he said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant." We learned that last week.

- J. Today, as we open the scriptures and hear the words of Jesus, we will also SEE Jesus, in our minds and in the text, not only teaching about being disciples engaged in service to others, but SHOWING his followers what that looks like.
- K. This is the fourth message in our series called **Spiritual Habits for Ordinary People**. WE are those ordinary people - ordinary followers of Jesus.
- L. So far, we're building a habit of **prayer**. We're building a habit of **study**. We're building a habit of **simplicity**. If you haven't yet taken the first step into those three areas, today's the day. You're not too busy. You're not too tired. You haven't mastered these things yet. Let's commit to doing these together.
- M. Today, we'll learn what Jesus has to say about the spiritual habit of **service**.
 - i. The first things we'll do is read the scripture.
 - ii. Then, we'll make a distinction between self-righteous service and true service.
 - iii. Then, we'll get some practical application as we learn about 9 different things true service looks like.
- N. Spiritual Habits of Service for Ordinary People.
- O. Let's open our bibles to John chapter 13, starting in verse 1. This story is most likely a familiar one...so let's take a look at Jesus washing his disciples' feet.

2. Scripture

A. READ John 13:1-17

- B. We picture, in our mind's eye, Jesus surrounded by his disciples, all eating the meal, eager to listen and do exactly what Jesus said, together, right? I mean, we've seen the painting of Jesus eating with his disciples and it's looks like they all get along.
- C. Well, sort of. It wasn't too long before this that two of the disciples, James and John, went to Jesus one day and asked this in Mark 10:35-37, "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he [Jesus] asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."
- D. "Oh, Mary!" It's the old pecking order coming out...and amongst the disciples, nonetheless!
- E. I wonder how many of the disciples around that table, especially James and John, were confused when, after the meal, Jesus knelt before them and did the unthinkable - He washed their feet. Heck, James and John were gunning to ride this all the way to top of the pecking order just a few days ago!

- F. Instead, here's Jesus, kneeling before them, washing their feet like a common servant. You don't know where my feet have been, Jesus!
- G. In fact, because the disciples hadn't had their feet washed as soon as they got in from the dusty streets, we know there was no common servant present to do what servants do. Now, we have no idea if that was something they were even thinking about or not.
- H. During dinner, someone may have said, "Man, my feet are nasty!" Or James was like, "John! Get your grubby feet off my feet!"
- I. I'd like to think that Jesus got an idea, if that was the case. These men and women (there were certainly women there) were ready for servanthood 101. Jesus COULD have probably called in a servant to wash their feet, but instead, Jesus took the role of the servant.
- J. The MASTER TEACHER knelt down before the STUDENT FOLLOWERS.
- K. This, for the disciples, would've been upside down and backwards. And I can only imagine that they sat there in shocked silent disbelief as Jesus did that.
- L. Until, of course, Jesus got to Peter who just can't ever keep his mouth zipped.
- M. "Are YOU going to wash MY feet?" "You will NEVER wash MY feet!"
- N. To which Jesus replied, "You don't know what I'm doing, but you will soon get it." "Unless I wash your feet, you will have no part of me."
- O. Peter was thinking about THAT moment. Jesus was thinking about the **bigger picture**. Peter responded with **emotion**. Jesus calmly washed his feet to point to a bigger reality.
- P. After Jesus finished washing their feet, he sat back down and said, "Do you know what I have done for you?" "Ummm....washed our feet, Jesus?"
- Q. (facepalm) "Let's review...I am your Teacher and Lord, and yet I have knelt before you and washed your feet. SO...I expect you to do the same thing to each other and others. DO what I DID, IN the WAY I DID it.
- R. And then, in verse 16, Jesus brought it home when he said, "Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them."

3. Application

- A. If you're taking notes this morning, write this down, "The people of the Panama UMC are called to humble themselves for true service in the name of - and in the example of - Jesus."
- B. According to Richard Foster, in his book Celebration of Discipline, there are two types of service: there is **self-righteous service** and there is **true service**. Jesus shows us, in this one scene, every aspect of **true service**.

- C. Self-righteous service is:
- i. temporary (even once and done). “Welp...that’s that!”
 - ii. It’s controlled and affected by emotions and feelings.
 - iii. Self-righteous service picks and chooses who to serve and when.
 - iv. It requires external rewards from others.
 - v. It’s impressed by the “big deal.” The showier the better!
 - vi. Self-righteous service is born from human effort.
 - vii. It is insensitive to those being served. It’s not about them, but me.
 - viii. Self-righteous service fractures community.
- D. None of those aspects of self-righteous service are evident in anything that Jesus said or did, ever in his life on earth. Instead, Jesus exhibits TRUE service, which is service that’s pure.
- E. True service is:
- i. a life-style. Jesus served all and everywhere...all the time.
 - ii. True service disciplines emotions and feelings rather than allowing feelings to control the service.
 - iii. It’s indiscriminate. True service doesn’t pick and choose who to serve.
 - iv. It doesn’t require reward, other than a simple nod from God.
 - v. True service doesn’t care whether the service is big or small.
 - vi. It comes from a relationship with God and powered by the Holy Spirit.
 - vii. It’s marked by patience and thoughtfulness with and to those being served.
 - viii. True service builds community. Every time.
- F. Self-righteous service wants to SAY “I’m serving YOU”, but actually is serving the person who is doing the serving.
- G. True service serves the other with humility and grace without needing anything in return.
- H. Richard Foster wrote this: “Service is not a list of thing that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same thing as living in the Discipline of service. Just as there is more the the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to act like a servant; it is quite another to be a servant. As in all the Disciplines, it is possible to master the mechanics of service without experiencing the Discipline.”

- I. To boil that down a little, Foster is saying that you can serve others without developing a habit of service, not allowing yourself to truly serve **IN THE WAY THAT JESUS CALLS HIS DISCIPLES**.
- J. The goal of the spiritual habit of service is not to tally up a number of people who have had their needs met, but to develop a day-in-and-day-out desire to listen, look, and act as directed by the Holy Spirit, in the world around us.
- K. But, see, there's the rub. The people around you won't always know what to do about your service. In fact, they may **reject your service**. Peter tried that with Jesus, but Jesus was so in-tune with **WHY** he was serving, that it obviously didn't phase Jesus.
- L. You and I are called to develop a habit of serving which includes the humble confidence to serve as led without having to get anything in return. Ever.
- M. Let me give us 9 aspects of true service that you can begin to pray about and experiment with this week. Some of these you've come to understand as service, others you may not have. In order to build a **SPIRITUAL** habit of service:
 - i. #1 - start by **being served**. I know that sound backwards, but unless you understand what it feels like to **BE** served, you won't have the right mind-frame to do true serving. Peter had to let Jesus serve him so that he would know what Jesus was asking Peter to do.
 - ii. #2 - practice **common courtesy**. This may seem outdated, but common courtesy is politeness that would normally be expected. Let's start there. Jesus didn't yell at Peter or rebuke him...he simply said, "I'm doing this for you so you'll see how it's done." When you serve, be polite. Smile even!
 - iii. #3 - True service is one of **hospitality**. This may be the most visible form of service, especially if you open your home or share a meal. The launching pad for Jesus washing his disciples feet was hospitality. How can you grow a habit of hospitality?
 - iv. #4 - **Guard the reputations of others**. As you serve, always be aware that the person you serve may be in a vulnerable spot. Don't talk about him/her to others. Defend that person if others talk about them. Service in this case goes beyond simply acting, but caring for the well-being of another.
 - v. #5 - True service is one of **hiddenness**. Sometimes your act of service will be visible to others. Yet, as in the case of Jesus, he didn't go out from there and tell everyone that he washed the disciples' feet. Nope...pretty soon after that meal he silently climbed a hill with a cross on his back and died on it. Let your service be humble and quiet...and sacrificial.
 - vi. #6 - Let your service be a lot of **small things**. Jesus simply washed their feet. If you do small acts of service every day, pretty soon, you'll develop a

habit of serving others with no effort at all. And the Holy Spirit will lead you into MORE service from there.

- vii. #7 - Practice the service of **listening**. What? Listening. Look people in eye, close your mouth, and simply listen. We're way too interested in telling other people about OUR thing. Ask questions and then listen in order to build a habit of serving.
- viii. #8 - **Bear the burdens** of others. Serving others by helping bear their burdens is one of the most profound, humbling ways to build this habit. You can only do what you can, but if we look at Jesus' example, his service ranged from simply bearing the burden of dirty feet...all the way to the burden of their sins. Of your sins. Of MY sins. Practice bearing other people's burdens. And finally, probably THE most important aspect of true service is:
- ix. #9 - **share the Word** of Life with those you serve. Jesus revealed to the disciples, as he finished washing their feet, that they were to follow him, the one who would be betrayed and die and rise again. As you develop a habit of service, begin to naturally share Jesus' love and His words with them... words of healing... words of provision... words of forgiveness and love... words of grace and mercy. Look into the gospels and write down some verses to share with those you serve. It will be the most important aspect of your habit of service.

4. Conclusion

- A. Despite what the world says, we're called to humble ourselves for true service in the name of Jesus. This is NEVER and WILL NEVER be about a pecking order, unless you are intentionally taking the lowest place in that order.
- B. When you feel that tug to turn away from others, or to show them how great you are, think of the guy on the video this morning. Just think, "Oh, Mary!" "Oh, Steve!"
- C. Humble yourself and serve like Jesus.
- D. Imagine a church whose members are all smiling and ready to serve without having to get a reward or accolades.
- E. Every year, during Pastor Appreciation Month, I'm humbled by all of you. You pour out gifts and accolades, and yet, it's YOU who are serving without compensation or reward, other than the simple nod from a loving God who came to serve and not be served. And from a grateful pastor who loves it when the people respond and serve with humility and grace.
- F. Foster ends this chapter of his book by writing, "The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of the towel. Such a ministry, flowing out of the inner recesses of the heart, is life and joy and peace. Perhaps you would like to begin by

experimenting with a prayer that several of us use. Begin the day by praying, 'Lord Jesus, as it would please you bring me someone today whom I can serve.'"

G. Bring me someone I can serve today, Lord!

H. Let's pray...