



# Spiritual Disciplines: Service/Volunteering

**iFOLLOW**

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

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# The Spiritual Discipline of Service/Volunteering

*This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.*

## Learning Objectives

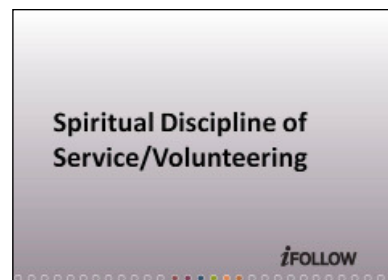
1. Understand the kind of service that God desires
2. Discover whom to serve
3. Find attitudes that will encourage the capacity to serve
4. Learn how to serve in the church and Christ's mission
5. Understand the relationship between spiritual gifts and service
6. Learn what the Bible means by charity

## Content Outline

1. What do we mean by service and what does God mean?
2. Bible links service to love and worship of God, and love of others
3. What Jesus' life of service teaches us
4. Jesus shows what love can do
5. No one class or group needs service; we all do
6. Some negative attitudes that interfere with service
7. Positive attitudes about service
8. God's system of benevolence in the Bible
9. Contemporary volunteering
10. The connection of spiritual gifts and service

## Background Material for Presenter

Serve. Service. Servile. Servant. Server. Servitude. Serving. [Take just two or three minutes to collect reactions to these different words.] It's odd, really, the wide variety of ideas and reactions to these very similar words. The first seems somehow positive and noble, at least usually. "How may I serve you?" Or it might be a tennis or volleyball term. The last one might be a description of an action, or a description of a certain amount of food. A recent story tells of a housekeeper who was deeply offended and angered when someone



referred to her as a **servant**, but I am sure she would have been pleased by a mention of her years of faithful **service** to the family who employed her. Why do some of these words carry such negative connotations? Today we use the word “server” for those who wait on tables, as being somehow less or degrading. Yet we sing, “Make me a servant, humble and meek.”

Then there’s “wait staff;” certainly much more imposing a term than servants or even than waitress or waiter. Has it occurred to you that “wait on the Lord” means “serve the Lord,” not just “be patient until He accomplishes His design.” Can you possibly be seen, or see yourself, as one of God’s personal servants, standing by, waiting for a request, then moving swiftly to fulfill it? What is it that we mean, when we exhort each other to serve God and humanity? More to the point, what is God looking for?

## Service in the Old Testament

*Strong’s Concordance* has pages and pages of “serve, serving, servant, servanthood,” etc. It soon becomes clear that in Bible times “servant” was a widely-used term. People were forever referring to themselves as “your servant” to show respect, and such notables as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, David, Daniel, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, are called servants of God. What higher calling could there be?

In *Strong’s* one sees that frequently “loved and served” or “worshiped and served” appear together. Sometimes people, rather than loving and serving the Creator, are loving, serving, and worshiping other gods, such as the sun, moon, and host of heaven, as in Jeremiah 8:2. But mostly such people are said to have “gone and served,” or “left and served.” They have wandered from their true purpose in life. On the other hand, Psalm 100 equates serving the true God with praise and joy.

So service to God seems inextricably entwined with love and with worship. In Exodus, Moses’ constantly reiterated plea to Pharaoh is that God says, “Let my people go that they may serve me.” What does this entail? Is it just to hold worship “services,” as they were called thousands of years ago, (see for example, Ex. 12:25, 26; 27:19; Heb. 9:1) and as we call them to this day?

Deut. 10:12, 13 defines the service God asks of us quite clearly: “What does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you



today for your good?” (Fear, in this context, means to revere and be utterly loyal to. It does not refer to being afraid.) This passage sounds very similar to Malachi 6:8 and to Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the famous prayer of Israel. Serve, it seems, means love and obey.

Then, is our service to God complete with our relationship to and worship of Him as Lord, Redeemer, and Creator? We might think that to be true, if it were not for the fact that the vast majority of those “commandments and statutes” have to do with how we treat and serve each other.

## Service in the New Testament

In Galatians 5:13-14, Paul admonishes us to “serve one another in love,” and reasserts what had been repeated from Moses to Christ, the whole law is love. Truly loving service often doesn’t even feel like service. The person receiving the service may express deep gratitude to the person giving it, and the giver may say in surprise, “I didn’t do anything!” Or “I only did what anyone would have done.” Or, best of all, “I only did it because I love you.”

2 Corinthians 9 and 10 provide a clear picture of how loving liberality is linked to greater joy, and even, according to verses 10 and 11, growing righteousness! Those in need, in this instance, were brothers and sisters who were afflicted by famine, and possibly persecution as well. There is a strong sense in these chapters that this could happen to anyone, and the giver might next be the one who needs.

To get the very best picture possible of what loving service is all about, of course we turn to Jesus’ life. From the moment He arose (if He hadn’t spent the night praying) to the moment He lay down to sleep (ditto), His dual wish was to serve His Father and to serve those around Him. How did He do this? Let’s look at three stories. You could choose any story in the gospels, almost at random!

**Matthew 8:1-4**—There are at least three principles at work in this passage. Perhaps you see more.

**1. Jesus was led by the expressed needs of this man.** He didn’t seek out the leper and ask him if he wanted to be cleansed. He let the leper come to Him and ask. However, He had made no secret of His ministry, so people who needed Him knew where to find Him and had heard rumors, at least, about what He could do. How often have we put a burden on people by pressuring them to receive



something (even the gospel) that they don't think they need? On the other hand, are we clear about the ministries our churches, or groups, or we as individuals provide, and are there clear and self-respecting methods for accessing them, when someone does feel a need?

A young woman sat in a church one day and listened to an angry rant from another member about how “there should be no welfare state—the church should take care of its own!” She kept her gaze lowered and said nothing, but she was wondering, “Does the church know who is in need? Am I supposed to stand up and raise my hand and say, ‘I don't know what I'm going to feed my children tomorrow?’ As embarrassing as welfare is, at least there's a method in place for access to help.” If there had been an active Community Services program, offering cheerful and non-belittling help, things might have been different. Or, even if the man had not sounded so angry.

**2. Jesus met more than the expressed need.** He heard the request for cleansing, but He knew enough about leprosy in His day, and looked closely and lovingly enough into the man's eyes to know another, perhaps even deeper need that was felt but not expressed—the need for touch. No one touched a leper. It wasn't just dangerous—it was against the law. This man had taken his safety into his hands even to approach Jesus. His courage was rewarded not only by the miracle of healing, but by the miracle, accessible to us all, of human touch. We can't hand out miraculous healings. But our loving touch will amaze us with how often it is miraculously healing.



Perhaps the young woman in our example above should have been willing to ask for help. It was a small church, and not all can have an official community service program. If that had been a church where personal relationships were built and made a priority so that she could have talked to someone privately, she might have been willing to do so. Instead, she left and didn't come back. In her next church there was a couple who kept their eyes open, encouraged confidences, and were quietly instrumental in getting that family back on their feet. Their friendship meant more than the extra food. Either, without the other, would have been useless, as James makes so clear in James 2:14-20.

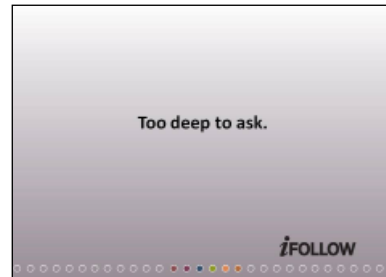
**3. Jesus did follow local custom and protocols.** He told the man to go to the priest and make the prescribed offering “as a testimony.” This had at least three effects. It gave the local priest a chance to be involved, (and perhaps turn to Jesus himself.) It gave honor to the law, which, after all, Jesus Himself had



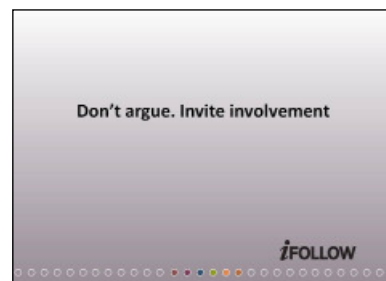
originally given. It also gave the healed man something to do on his own behalf, which may have helped his self-confidence.

**John 5:1-18**—For our second story, we'll look at one that appears to counter some of the above principles. Jesus did an infinite number of services for people besides healing, but these two are of interest because they show two different ways of working. What happened to waiting for expressed needs, as Jesus did in nearly every other story? What happened to following local customs, instead of healing deliberately and openly on the Sabbath, knowing it would cause controversy, not to mention bringing trouble to the healed man and his family? What principles of service can we find here?

**1. Jesus' heart was touched by a need so deep the needy one could not even ask for help.** How did He know? Well, of course, He was the Son of God, and "knew what was in man" (John 2:25). But we are looking for principles we can imitate. *Jesus paid attention.* He loved everyone He saw, and He was always in close contact with and led by the Holy Spirit. We can do that. We can build relationships so that we can sometimes give voice to something the other person can't speak. If she closes up, we can back away, apologize if necessary. But frequently our answer will be relief, even tears, as the person who has come to trust us realizes we have seen what she didn't dare to share, and that we are not shocked, and don't love or respect her any less.



**2. Jesus didn't argue about cause and effect, or try to change the man's mind. He invited the man to be involved in his own help.** The man's response may seem like excuses to some. "I wouldn't be here if only. . ." "It's someone else's fault." "I've tried, really I have." If you've ever been paralyzed by circumstances, though, you know how real his reasons were to him and how honestly desperate he felt. Jesus didn't lecture him about placing blame. He didn't exhort the man to try harder next time. If you read the whole story, you'll learn He didn't even *mention* the fact that this man's lifestyle had, in fact, been instrumental in his condition, until *after* the man felt enough better to come to Him again. He just made it possible for the helpless one to stand up, not helpless anymore.

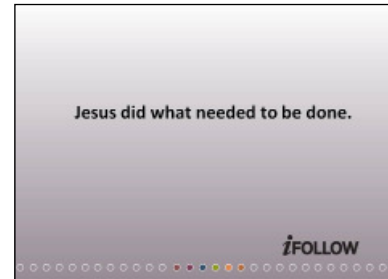


**John 13:3-5**—There is a great deal in this passage, particularly the fascinating insertion of "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God" as if this were the obvious reason



behind His foot washing. That juxtaposition bears more thought. But for our purposes, there is one overarching Principle here: **Jesus did what needed to be done.**

He didn't ask questions, He didn't look around to see if anyone else was going to do it, He didn't examine His soul to determine if He had the requisite skills. He saw a need, got up, set aside any right to reasonable self-consequence, and did the job.

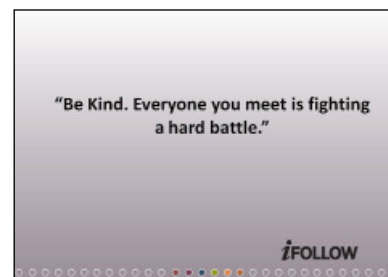


It's especially interesting to read this passage in light of Luke's commentary on the same evening: "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But it is not that way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.'" (Luke 22:24-27)

Was this before or after He washed their feet? Could they really get into a conflict over who was the greatest **after** watching Jesus take on the persona of the lowliest of all possible servants in Middle Eastern Society, the one who has anything to do with *feet*? The God we love and worship and serve came to become a baby, child, and man, and knelt down to serve us. What more could He possibly tell us about what He means by "Service"?

## Who Needs Service?

Today, the terms "service" and "volunteering" mostly tend to be linked to those acts of assistance we provide for those who are "less fortunate." So it is in the Bible, as well. From Genesis to Revelation, from the institution of gleaning in Leviticus 19:10, to the organization of the deacons in Acts 6:1-6, the strongest admonitions and the harshest condemnations have to do with the treatment of the poor—the "widows and orphans." According to *Strong's Concordance*, Psalms alone contains thirty-seven passages using the word "poor" (also translated as "afflicted" or "unfortunate,") and most of them are praising God for showing favor to them, whether poor in physical substance, such as Psalm 10:17, 18, "O Lord ... vindicate the needy and the oppressed" or feeling emotionally drained and needy, as in Ps. 69:29 "I am afflicted and in pain ... O God, set me securely on high."





However, the poor are not the only ones who need loving service. All humans need it. The book of Ruth shows how a well-to-do family may, through misfortune, fall on hard times and need assistance even in the basics of survival. The writings of David and Solomon are full of references to feeling helpless and needy, longing for friendship and support, even while they were kings. Examples may be found in Psalm 34:6, Prov. 17:17 and Eccl. 4:12. In the story of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus makes it very clear who needs help. Your neighbor does.

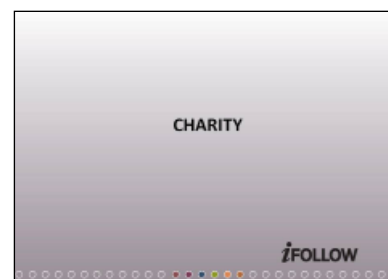
As if to remove all doubt forever, Jesus chose to become someone who needed help. First He was a fragile newborn. His family served Him in a thousand ways, as loving families always serve their children. As He grew, He learned to serve, too, from running errands for His mother, to helping Joseph in the carpenter's shop. All of this is valid Christian service. As an adult, as we have seen already, Jesus spent His life in service. Interestingly, though, He also continued to need service. Luke 15:40 lists some women who, in verse 41, "used to follow Him and minister to Him." Jesus wouldn't have had food or a place to sleep if it weren't for His friends.

Then He came to a dark night of the soul on which He nearly died, simply for lack of human ministrations, also called service. This passage is from Luke 22:41-46, emphasis added. "When He arrived at the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.' **Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.** And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'"

## Attitude Adjustments

It's always been a vexed question, this spiritual discipline of service. How, when, to whom? How much? Is a hand-out necessarily a good thing? What is "charity," and is it inconsistent with self-respect to be on the receiving end of it? More trouble is caused by confused attitudes than perhaps any other facet of serving.

[Ask participants to very briefly share first reactions to the word charity.]



It began the second humans chose "what I want" over

serving the Creator. Eve was already “like God.” What Satan hinted that she **ought** to want was to be the master, being served, rather than the servant, which just shows how skewed his ideas of service already were. Who served Adam and Eve, and for that matter, all the creatures on the planet? God did, willingly and lovingly. Who gave the man and woman to lovingly outdo each other in serving? Who, under God, was to serve and care for all of creation? Whom did the animals love and serve? It was a perfect circle, meant to be eternal.

God warned Eve right away that one of the results of her choices would be that her husband would now “rule over her.” Gen. 3:16. I wonder how quickly women came to be seen as the vassals and chattel they were for millennia and sometimes still are? Remember that word “servile”? God wept as He saw his beautiful daughters reduced to slavery, and His beloved sons reduced to slave-owners. Is this what it means to serve? Over the centuries, this attitude spread. My tribe conquered your tribe. You have to serve us now; do anything I say. My country wants what your country has. We’re taking over your land and you have to either move away or stay to be our maids and gardeners. Worst of all is the horrifying attitude; my race or gender is better than yours, by nature. You were **created by God to serve me**.

When it comes to poverty, people used to believe that people who were poor (or sick, or disabled, or otherwise needy) had been stricken by God, and really deserved the privation they suffered. Enlightened people today don’t believe these things anymore, and Christians in particular choose to believe that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) But we often don’t realize how holdovers from these attitudes still color our own.

“They could do better, they’re just lazy.”

“We do not accept charity!”

“Worthy poor.”

“I don’t deserve it.”

“Welfare queens.”

“My brother has plenty, but do you think he shares? He doesn’t care!”

“They have this sense of entitlement!”

In each of the Bible stories we have looked at so far, the attitude has clearly been “it could happen to anyone; it could have been me.” If we always keep in mind our own neediness and pray for humility, we will be protected from either reaching down from an imaginary pedestal to offer patronizing “service,” or feeling ashamed to ask for help ourselves. Keeping in mind God’s methods will help enormously with all these attitudes.

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## God's System of Benevolence

The first and foremost Biblical principle, not only in seeking to serve, but in all Christian endeavors, is to daily practice the two greatest commandments. **Love God. Love others. Do it with all you have!** Once that is clearly in place, we can seek practical specifics.

**1. Share**—Abraham fed strangers who passed his tent. (Gen 18:1-8) He did it as a matter of course, and Bedouins still do it, even if they are enemies. He offered Lot the first choice of land. (Gen 12:8-11) Lepers shared the food they found with a dying city (and people were starving enough to accept even from lepers!). (2 Kings 7:3-11) David shared his love of music with Saul, and with the world, for that matter, to this day. (1 Samuel 16:17-21, and many Psalms) Daniel shared his prayer request with his three friends. Those three friends later supported each other through a fiery trial. (Daniel 2:17, 18; 3:16-2) Esther shared her anxiety and prayer request with all her people. (Esther 4:15, 16) The prophets and Bible writers shared the Word of God.



More to the point, God asks it of us. In Exodus 12:4, when He is first giving instructions for the Passover, God tells Moses that if a household is too small to eat a whole yearling sheep, they are to combine households and share, and this became a custom for all the feasts. Some 900 years later, during the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah enjoined the people, “Go, eat ... drink ... and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord.” (Nehemiah 8:10) It doesn’t sound like he’s telling them anything new. This reads like a reminder—“this is a holy day, and this is what we do on holy days.”

Of course, the whole duty of the family of Abraham from the beginning was to share the truth about a loving God with all the nations around them. (They didn’t excel at this.)

Jesus told stories more than once of people giving dinners and sharing them with everyone they could find. (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:1-24) Maybe the ultimate food-sharing story is the feeding of the 15,000 or more people, including 5,000 men. Now there’s a sharing story. They didn’t even have anything to share until they decided to do it!

Rabbi Marcia Prager has this to say, speaking of the Jewish tradition of **tzedakah**, which is usually translated charity, though interestingly, it is from the same root as righteousness or justice and a “fully enlightened person,” or righteous one is called a **tzaddik**: “Giving is therefore not volitional charity. So strong is the sense of obligation that the **mitzvah** [good deed] of **tzedakah** is incumbent on all, not only the affluent. In

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fact, the only person Jewish tradition exempts from the **mitzvah** of **tzedakah** is one who literally does not know where the next meal is coming from. If I have only my daily sandwich, **tzedakah** obligates me to share it with someone who has none. I share it, even if at that moment I don't feel like it, because my relationship with God requires this of me." (Prager, pp. 152-53)

This is a very simple principle, really. Don't worry about who deserves, or who has, or who has not, or whose turn it is. Be a good kid, share!

**2. Gleaning**—Another major practice taught in the Bible is gleaning. Instructions for gleaning are found in Lev. 19:9-10. They are startling by today's standards.

"Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God."

To our individualistic, Puritan work ethic this seems wasteful, maybe even lazy. Don't pick up every apple? **Don't** combine the wheat too carefully? You're kidding! The closest we come to gleaning is to turn the cattle into the corn after it's been harvested, and let them clean up the pickings.

But think about it. This is a built-in way for a land-owner (in biblical times, a person who is wealthy by definition) to share something that really wouldn't be missed, and someone who didn't own land, or was far away from home, to *help herself and keep her self-respect*. This is one of the most essential attitudes we need to keep clear in our attempts to serve. People don't like to feel they are on the other end of a hand-out. Paradoxically, when they are forced to take such "charity" for long enough, even for generations, they may come to take it for granted, and develop the "sense of entitlement" so much decried by taxpayers. They begin to see no way out.

Gleaning didn't feel like begging, (though begging also was acceptable in that society and is in many societies today.) It didn't require filling out an application or even asking. It was the way things were done.

On the other hand, gleaning also protected against what some feared (and still do) as "wasting" their charity on the "unworthy poor." Are there really people who really are simply lazy? Who could help themselves, but won't?

An old joke, (not very funny) tells the story of the town sluggard. Someone got tired of his begging, labeled him worthless, and loaded him into a wheelbarrow to haul him to the dump. On the way, another villager, feeling sorry for the man, said, "Don't haul him away! I have a whole bushel of corn he can have!"

From the depths of the wheelbarrow came the slow question, “Is it shucked?”  
“Well, no, but ...”  
“Drive on,” said the sluggard.

Believe it or not, Proverbs speaks of just that attitude in 19:24: “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, but will not even bring it back to his mouth.” A person with this attitude wouldn’t get much from a system of gleaning.

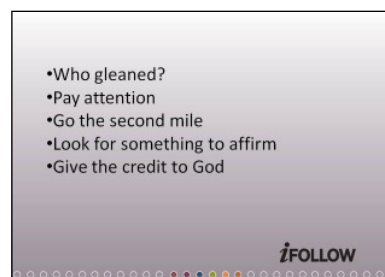
We can learn some principles from the story of Ruth. To recap, Naomi, an Israelite widow, and her daughter-in-law, a Moabite named Ruth, had come back to Naomi’s native town of Bethlehem, both “widows indeed”—that is, women with neither husband nor child nor even close family to care for them. This was a very desperate situation in ancient times. Most such women would die or become prostitutes. But this was God’s country, and God’s country had gleaning.

However, these were troubled times, and it wasn’t necessarily safe to glean just anywhere. Naomi did still have a relative there, though not a close one. His name was Boaz, and she advised Ruth to glean in his fields.

Boaz quickly showed himself to be a man who understood the real principles of caring behind the practice of gleaning. He found out who Ruth was, urged her to stay near his workers where she would be safe, offered her food and care above and beyond what the law required, and to make a long story short, romance ensued, and Ruth and Boaz became ancestors of the Messiah.

**Who gleaned?** Naomi didn’t. Ruth did. Not everyone should be required to work. The aged, infirm, sick, those who are unable, even new mothers with very small children need extra help, and it is the care of those who can to do for those who can’t. Safe daycare is good. Ways for single parents to support themselves and still be with their small children would be better. Someone who cares enough to help for awhile would be best of all. In this case, it was another needy person doing the helping. Ruth gleaned for both herself and her mother-in-law, so they could feel they were working together.

**Boaz paid attention.** We’ve noticed this before. Godly people keep their eyes open. They care about those they see, and they show it. This picture implies a well-known local benefactor. There must have been more gleaners there. Maybe Boaz left more of his corners unreaped than he had to, because he knew times were tough. But he knew who was there, and knew when he saw a stranger. He asked about her.



**Then he went the second mile.** He invited her to stay, glean nowhere else, even eat with his own hired workers. He didn't have to do this. And Ruth could have said, "Oh, no, you're doing enough for me already. I'll go home and cook some of the barley for Naomi and myself." Instead, she accepted the offered help, little knowing what effects these events were to have on her life. She did ask, though, "Why are you so kind to me?" See Ruth 2:10. People often will ask that. Boaz' answer is worthy of note.

**He looked for something to affirm.** "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me." Ruth 2:11. Kind words like this help to rebuild self-confidence damaged by a sorrow-weighted life.

**And he gave the credit to God.** "May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." (Verse 12.) Boaz took the opportunity not only to bless, but to plant a suggestion in the mind of this young woman with an idolatrous upbringing that it was God she could thank for the positive turn her life had taken, God who would shelter her under loving wings.

From the Bible it is clear that we need to share, help others to help themselves when possible, guard their self-respect, and always give credit to God. A contemporary example might be the thrift stores that are operated by Adventist Community Services, Habitat for Humanity, Goodwill Industries, and other nonprofits. They provide both jobs and inexpensive clothes and other items which could be said to come from the "corners" of a more affluent society's fields. They recycle useful materials to those who can use them, thus accomplishing two things; keeping unneeded items out of landfills, and getting them into the hands of those who do need them. Are there any other ways we could incorporate something like gleaning into our world today? Could this be done on smaller, more local, even individual levels? How could we take care to maintain the self-respect of all parties?

## Service and Volunteering in Contemporary Society

There are two broad categories of serving or volunteering today, individual and organizational. Perhaps the simplest for someone who is looking for a way to get started is the second. You may participate in a community ministry that your church sponsors or help an organization such as those listed in Handout 3. You can give money. Charity shouldn't be defined as just giving money, but it certainly does take lots of it! But don't stop there if you want to truly feel useful and fulfilled. Ask how you can volunteer. Can you write letters? Answer phones? Do surveys? Help with a local campaign? Serve on the board or in leading group activities?

Many Christians have come to think of what they do at church or Sabbath school on

Sabbaths as their service, but that is really very self-centered thinking. The fact that you play the piano for the Kindergarten Sabbath School or help take up the offering during worship is simply a more active way of participating in worship, not service in the sense that the Bible teaches. On the other hand, if you hold a responsibility at church that requires considerable time outside of the Sabbath, that is a type of ministry or service on the same level as volunteering at the community service center on Tuesday afternoons or being an active member of the fund raising committee for the United Way in your county.

When considering which service organization to become involved with, think of the old proverb: “Give a person a fish, and feed him for a day. Teach a person to fish, and feed him for a lifetime.” Is the organization you are considering giving away “fish,” or teaching practical methods of “fishing?” Is it really helpful to give truckloads of infant formula and disposable diapers to indigent populations? Would it be more sustainable to work for women’s health, and educate about breastfeeding and sanitary issues? Be sure you and the organization of your choice are considering the big picture, and the long-term results.

When looking for places to serve, start with your own local church. Does it sponsor a community service center or free clinic or food pantry or homeless shelter or similar organization of some kind? Does it have a team that helps the homeless or visits in prison? Is there a need to start an after-school program for the children in the neighborhood around the church?

You could also look in your local phone book or ask the local agency that coordinates volunteers for nonprofits in the area. The smallest town usually has a food pantry, service clubs, a ministerial association, a thrift store or day care center; the possibilities are endless. Be creative. Ask the Sheriff what he/she **wishes** were available in town. Get some friends together and start something.

If you have a need or desire for something structured, and someone to tell you what to do, the organizational route will be a good beginning for you.

Whether or not you are officially involved in one or more organizations, though, every Christian will also be doing individual, personal service for someone. This includes all the endless, loving details of things people do for other people. Random acts of kindness start at home. And explode in all directions from there! What are the things you already do in your own family that perhaps you haven’t recognized as acts of service to God and others? What things could you add? What might you do in your neighborhood? Mow a lawn, mend a fence? Visit someone lonely?



## What Can I Do?

It may seem like an unrelated issue, but do you know what spiritual gifts God has bestowed on you? There are classes and profile instruments designed to help church members discover their spiritual gifts. Examples of spiritual gifts are listed in Rom. 12:6-13; 1 Cor. 12:1-13; and Eph. 4:11-16. But these are not intended to be exhaustive lists of all spiritual gifts. The main principle is to refuse to allow anyone to make you think service or charity always means a certain thing. Everyone's gifts and talents are different. You don't **have** to sing in the nursing home. Maybe you'd rather offer a day of free babysitting to a harried mother you know. Look for things that appeal to you, that you are good at, and that you are affirmed in doing.



On the other hand, when an emergency arises, God enables any Christian to at least attempt to be all things to all people. You may not have a particular gift of hospitality, but when someone breaks down in front of your house in a rainstorm, they really won't mind if your living room is messy, and they won't expect you to be prepared for company. They just need someplace to wait for the tow truck. **Always remember** to be as wise as a serpent as well as harmless as a dove. This is a wicked world. Keep on paying attention and don't put yourself at unnecessary risk.

## Conclusion

"Charity." Are there different reactions to this word now? Why or why not? What is charity really? It's love. It's **agape**, the kind of unconditional, selfless love God has for us, and puts in us for others. Right now, today, there is probably a service God is asking you to do for someone, and a service God is asking you to accept from someone. Are you paying attention?

## Handouts in this Package

1. Principles From Some of Jesus' Actions
2. Principles From the Story of Ruth
3. Service Organizations



## Additional Resources

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Action Plan  
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Stassen, Glen H., and David P. Gushee (2003). *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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Willard, Dallas (2002). *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Wright, N.T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## Websites

**Volunteer Match** has become one of the largest online tools for volunteers to find service opportunities that match their skills, personalities and passions. It is used by more than 75,000 nonprofit organizations in North America. Web site at: [www.voluntermatch.org](http://www.voluntermatch.org)

**ServeNet** is a nonprofit organization that mobilizes and empowers volunteers to take on some of the toughest challenges facing local communities. It is the sponsor of Global Youth Service Day each year, involving 3.5 million young people last year from 155 nations. More information at: [servenet.org](http://servenet.org)

**1-800-VOLUNTEER** is a national database of volunteer opportunities powered by a volunteer management system for nonprofits. Available on line at: [www.1-800-volunteer.org](http://www.1-800-volunteer.org)

## Discussion Questions

1. Compare Deut. 10:12, 13, Malachi 6:8, and Deut. 6:4, 5. What are the basic points about serving God?
2. What relationship does serving others have to serving God?
3. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) Would you rather be on the giving or receiving end? Why?
4. Does it make any difference what is being given? Money? Time? Love? Service?
5. A thrift store operated by a community service organization recycles useful materials to those who can use them. Are there any other ways we could do something like gleaning into our world today?
6. How many hours per week or per month could you give to the spiritual discipline of service? Why or why not?

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Questions

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## Group Activities

### Activity 1

**Purpose:** To discern the role of intimacy in healthy service or sharing.

**Preparation:** You need room for pairs of people to have some privacy.

**Assignment:** Have the group divide into pairs and discuss the following: Explore what kinds of secrets you could and could not share with the person you are with, and why. Don't discuss any real secrets, unless you feel comfortable doing so. But do talk about what kinds of circumstances, characteristics, or events make it possible for you, personally, to be able to share deep things.

**Debrief:** In the group, share some of these insights, and discuss what this can tell us about the services we attempt to provide for others. What is the relation of relationship with the sharing or service we are able to give or receive?

**Time:** Allow ten minutes in pairs, and 15 to 20 minutes for sharing.

### Activity 2

**Purpose:** To share some stories of helping and being helped.

**Preparation:** You will need room for small groups, though this activity will work in the larger group if it is no more than eight or ten. You could post the topics on a board or flipchart.

**Assignment:** Have the groups discuss their choice of the following topics:

1. Tell about a time when you felt pressured to accept help you didn't feel you needed.
2. Tell about a time when touch created a miracle in your life.
3. Tell about a time someone intuited a need of yours that was so deep you couldn't express it.
4. Why do you think Jesus used the methods He did with the paralytic beside the pool? What do you think the "rest of his story" might have been after that?

**Debrief:** In the larger group, share insights and reactions.

**Time:** Two possibilities: if you let each group choose just one topic, you could do this in 15 minutes or so, with another 15 minutes for sharing with the large group. If

you choose to let the groups discuss more, or all of the topics, allow them 20 to 30 minutes.

### Activity 3

**Purpose:** To practice being the giver and receiver in some difficult situations.

**Preparation:** Put the following scenarios on 3x5 cards:

1. You are a single father who has just lost his job.
2. You are an abused child who is afraid to tell.
3. Your phone has just been turned off for lack of payment.
4. You have just had a fender-bender. It is your fault, and you are shaken up.
5. You are an older person who needs a ride to church.
6. You're lost at the airport and you've lost your ticket.

**Assignment:** Divide group into pairs. Pass out the situations, or others the group invents. Have each person in the pair take turns being giver and receiver.

**Debrief:** How hard or easy was it to play each role? Which was harder, giving or receiving? Have you ever been in some of these situations?

**Time:** Allow 10 minutes in the groups, and 20 for sharing afterwards.

# Handout 1

## Principles from Some of Christ's Actions

1. Be led by expressed needs.
2. Look for more than the expressed needs.
3. Follow local customs and protocols when possible.
4. Love can sometimes see needs too deep to express.
5. Don't argue. Invite involvement. Help them help themselves.
6. Jesus did what needed to be done.

## Remember

"Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

## The Two Commandments

1. Love God.
2. Love others.

## To Try At Home

In silence, contemplate the scene in Gethsemane and write down what you wish you could have said or done for Jesus. If you wish, find someone to share your thoughts with. Can we apply these attitudes to those in their own Gethsmanes?

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## Handout 2

### Principles from the story of Ruth

1. Who gleaned? Not everyone can or should work.
2. Pay attention.
3. Go the second mile.
4. Look for something to affirm.
5. Give the credit to God.

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## Handout 3

### Service Organizations

This list barely scratches the surface of service organizations and charities. There are also many specialties, such as American Heart Association, Breast Cancer Research Foundation, the Sierra Club and so on. You may wish to look online for an organization that appeals to you particularly because of some difficulty you or someone you love struggles with. Don't forget to check your own local telephone books and the volunteer clearinghouse for your area.

- 1. Adventist Community Services (ACS)** is the organization sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to meet needs in local communities. *The Church Manual* instructs each congregation to appoint a local ACS Director or participate in a Community Services Center cosponsored with one or more other local churches in the same metropolitan area or rural region. More information about this organization in the United States is available at: [www.communityservices.org](http://www.communityservices.org)
- 2. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)** is the international humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In some nations, such as Canada, ADRA and ACS are merged as one organization. The international headquarters of ADRA maintains this website: [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org)
- 3. Red Cross** is an international network of organizations in each nation on the globe. (In Muslim countries, it is called Red Crescent.) It provides basic humanitarian services such as food, shelter and first aid in times of war and disaster, even including major fires in apartment complexes, etc. ACS has a written partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) with the American Red Cross and ADRA coordinates with the International Red Cross in major disasters. Local Red Cross chapters provide first aid classes, CPR training, etc., and often operate local blood banks. More information at: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- 4. United Way** is a coalition of organizations in 45 nations with about 1,300 local units in North America that raises funds for charity, coordinates the recruitment of volunteers for local service agencies, and helps to develop a consensus on needs and goals for charitable work among community leaders. It is an excellent source of information about the needs of the various volunteer projects in the community and it uses volunteer service to staff most of its activity. The U.S. national conference of local United Way organizations maintains an informational website, including a place where you can click on a data base to "find your local United Way," at: [www.liveunited.org](http://www.liveunited.org)

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**5. Service clubs** are local organizations of professionals and small business owners who give time and money to meeting various needs in the community. The General Conference Ministerial Association recommends that Adventist pastors join one of these organizations and it can also be a useful place for lay members to provide service. There are several independent national and international networks of clubs of this type, including Rotary Clubs ([www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)), Lions Clubs ([www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org)), Kiwanis ([www.kiwanis.org](http://www.kiwanis.org)) and the Junior Chamber of Commerce ([www.jci.cc](http://www.jci.cc)), as well as many similar groups.

**6. The United Nations** has a number of affiliated organizations that work with local volunteers around the globe, including the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program and the World Health Organization. Information about local UNICEF activities can be obtained at: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

**7. The Council of AIDS Service Organizations** work with volunteers to combat the pandemic of HIV-AIDS in the world and local communities. Many independent agencies are affiliated with this larger umbrella group. More information about the need for volunteers to help the victims of AIDS can be found at: [www.icaso.org](http://www.icaso.org)

**8. Points of Light Foundation** operates the national clearinghouse for volunteers in the U.S. at (800) VOLUNTEER. It is an international network of local Volunteer Action Centers. You can find many resources about volunteering as well as the directory of local affiliates at: [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)

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