

Week 4: Day 22 - 28

Together We Can Do This

(Nehemiah 2:18 — 3:1-32)

The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion to help us fully connect with God and others. This is an important practice for believers because just as the undisciplined body becomes sluggish and out of shape, the undisciplined spirit becomes weak. This is why Paul tells Timothy: “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:7-8).

☰ Service: An Outward Discipline

In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster divides the spiritual disciplines into three categories: inward, outward and corporate. The discipline of service is categorized as an outward discipline. He categorizes service as an outward discipline, not just because it done to others for the benefit of others, but it is an outward reflection of an inward and spiritual reality. It is an attitude of the heart (inward) that is expressed (outward) to others and for the benefit of others.

(Please note that this outward reflection of an inward reality can be said of all of the spiritual disciplines. We will revisit this in Week 5 discipline of worship).

We want to view this spiritual discipline of service as an expression of our time spent in the disciplines of meditation, prayer, and pursuing the word. For service is not a list of things to do, but a way of living.

☰ A Note About Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are activities; they are not attitudes or even a thought process. Disciplines are practices and habits we engage in. Spiritual disciplines are things we do. They are not character qualities. We read the Bible. That is an activity. It is a spiritual discipline. We meditate on Scripture. We pray, fast, worship, serve, learn, and so forth. These are activities. We cannot attain good physical health just by thinking good thoughts, and in the same way we cannot attain good spiritual health by thinking good thoughts.

We must be active, consistent, and persistent in striving for good spiritual health. *We are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God*
— Titus 2:12



☰ Spiritual Discipline of Service

Service - Do it for the Gram!

The dictionary defines service as an act of helpful activity. This definition is very broad and generic. By this definition we see service all the time. Doing helpful things is a lucrative form of influence in our culture today. People pick up trash on beaches everyday. People are always donating resources to people affected by tragedy. The website dosomething.org has tons of resources for community service project ideas.

In fact the popular phrase, “Do it for the Gram” is a perfect description of some (certainly, not all) of what we see in our popular culture. (Do it for the Gram is when someone participates in an activity solely to post it on their Instagram feed, a.k.a. “showing off.”) So does this mean these people are practicing the spiritual discipline of service? Is the billionaire who gives away half of their fortune to fight hunger and disease practicing the spiritual discipline of service? Wait! Don’t answer just yet?

Service - Do It For His Glory!

Service is by no means unique to Christianity. But the spiritual discipline of service as taught and modeled by Jesus in Scripture is vastly different from the dictionary definition. It goes deeper than doing a good deed to post online for all to see.

We actually find a complete and thorough definition of Service in 1 Peter 4:10-11:

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

So we can define [spiritual] service as an action done to others for the benefit of others with right motives, by the strength that God supplies to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

All that we do as believers is in service to others by Jesus Christ for the glory of God. We learn in this verse that God gives us gifts for the purpose of serving one another and bringing glory to Him! We are serving God and serving others, showing kindness to others, and helping those in need is all for His glory, not our own.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24).

As we look at the context of 1 Peter 4:1-11 we see the kind of attitudes we should have. The verse teach us to have an attitude:

- to live for the will God (1-2)
- of wisdom (3-5)
- of sound judgment and sober spirit (6-7)
- of love for one another (8-11)
- that rejoices in suffering (12-13)



Overview: Nehemiah 2:18 - 3:1-32

Let's Unite for the Kingdom

In this chapter Nehemiah gives us an interesting detailed account of how the Jerusalem walls and gates were rebuilt after the return of the exiles. The key words in this chapter are the words, “repair” and “built.” The word, “repair” occurs 27 times. The word “built” occurs 13 times. It is the common work which all of the people committed themselves.

1. (1-2) Builders near the Sheep Gate
2. (3-5) Builders near the Fish Gate
3. (6-12) Builders near the Old Gate
4. (13) Builders near the Valley Gate
5. (14) Builders near the Refuse Gate
6. (15-25) Builders near the Fountain Gate
7. (26-27) Builders near the Water Gate
8. (28-30) Builders near the Horse Gate
9. (31-32) Builders near the Miphkad Gate

A QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Have you caught the vision?

In this section we learn the importance of working together to accomplish God’s purpose. To accomplish God’s purpose, we need a common vision, dedicated leaders, and willing workers who do their part. The Jews had been back in the land for over 90 years, but the wall hadn’t been built. But then Nehemiah came along and got everyone excited about the work. They went to work and put up the wall in record time, in spite of opposition.

Nehemiah was committed to the task. He wanted the wall to be built so that God’s name would be exalted in Jerusalem and His people would no longer be a reproach. And throughout this chapter we see those who joined the work - those who caught the vision. Recall what Pastor Aalim said in week 3:

When you’re doing what God has called you to do, you will need others to catch the vision, because anything that only requires you is a small vision. When people do catch the vision, they’re joining God where God is at work.

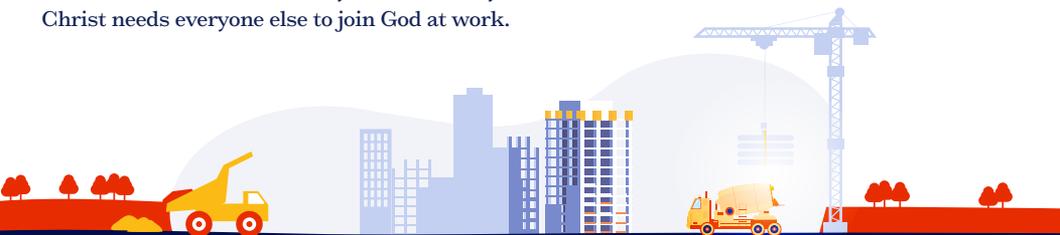
Nehemiah needed priests, goldsmiths, the Levites, rulers and other rulers to unite in doing the work. Paul also teaches this lesson in Ephesians 4:11-13, Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Everyone in the body of Christ needs everyone else to join God at work.



FULFILLING PROPHECY

Nehemiah 3:1

The recording of the construction project began when the high priest Eliashib initiated his work with his fellow priests to rebuild the wall starting at the northeastern corner of the Sheep Gate, and continued as far as the Tower of Hananel. This was a fulfillment of God’s promise in *Jeremiah 31:38*, *The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when the city shall be rebuilt for the Lord from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate.*



LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH

In week 3 we learned how all of Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us (2 Timothy 3:16-17), but that does not mean that all of Scripture is equally interesting or even readable. Many of us may see Nehemiah 3 as a very dull and boring chapter full of unpronounceable names and long forgotten people. But this is where the action begins.

The people heard Nehemiah’s vision and they responded, “Let’s arise and build” (2:18). Nehemiah got the support from the leaders and led them to work together to complete the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. Despite his leadership role, Nehemiah did not take sole credit for completing the project. Instead he gave credit to all who participated in this work, citing their names and the individual contributions to the rebuilding.

Test your reading comprehension by filling in the blanks below.

- (1) Then the high priest _____ set out to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. (3:1)
- (2) In Nehemiah 3:8, there were goldsmiths and perfume makers involved with the restored Jerusalem as far as the _____.
- (3) In Nehemiah 3:16, the Nehemiah mentioned there was not the author of Nehemiah. He was the son of _____, ruler of the district of _____ located in between Jerusalem and Hebron.
- (4) List the names of the ten gates listed in Nehemiah 3.

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____
- (4) _____
- (5) _____
- (6) _____
- (7) _____
- (8) _____
- (9) _____
- (10) _____



THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

The Discipline of Service means we are committed to serving others as taught and modeled by Jesus. It is about presenting ourselves in obedient, humble, transparent, honest, and genuine service to our Lord Jesus Christ in whatever we do. It means whatever you do — leading a Bible study, donating goods to needy family, or sweeping the floor after VBS — the common goal is for the glory of God.

We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. —2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

Called To Serve -Ephesians 2:8-10

These verses make it very clear that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. We can do nothing to earn salvation. It is only faith in Christ – and Christ alone – that saves. But true saving faith is never alone. It will always produce the fruit of obedient service. We are not saved *by* serving, but we are saved *for* serving.

In The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes it clear that grace is free, but it is not cheap. The grace of God is un-earned and un-earnable, but if we ever expect to become disciples of Christ, scripture says, *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24)*. This is a three-step process of self-denial, surrender, and servanthood.

Serving the Lord is hard work, and we need to discipline ourselves to serve Him. God is not pleased with half-hearted service offered only when it is convenient or easy. In a scathing rebuke God says to Israel that He hates their empty religious ceremonies. He says, stop bringing meaningless offerings. See Isaiah 1:11-13

God calls us to make serving Him the utmost priority in our lives; to serve Him faithfully and sacrificially.

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. — Ephesians 2:8-10



☰ Jesus' Example Of Service

True service is rooted in our identification as disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus came not to be served but instead had the heart of a servant (Matthew 20:28). We, His disciples, who are pursuing Christlike-ness should also have the heart of a servant. Jesus said: *I am among you as the one who serves* (Luke 22:27). And so if we desire to be His disciples, we must commit ourselves to serving others in love and humility as Jesus did. There is no way we can accurately represent Jesus without answering His commitment to serve others.

The core of service to one another comes from the example that Jesus Christ set for us. In Philippians 2:7 it says, *He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* Jesus lowered Himself, taking on the form of man, in order to serve mankind. In the same way, our service to others demonstrates the impact Christ made on our lives. It shows that same love and grace to those around us. It empties us of ourselves in order that we may serve others like Christ.

📖 Jesus' Attitude

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus — Philippians 2:3-5

📖 First Will Be Last

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

📖 Serving Others Serves Jesus

We are Jesus' hands and feet here on earth. When we see a need and meet it, we are doing His good work, and serving Him. *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. — Matthew 25:35-40*

📖 Serve To Be Seen Only By God

True service does not seek selfish rewards *Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. —Matthew 6:1-4*

📖 Jesus' Command to Serve

Jesus said "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" — Mark 12:32



ICONS OF SERVICE
**THE TOWEL AND
THE BASIN**
JOHN 13: 1-12

In John 13 Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. In doing this He redefined for them — and for us — the meaning of greatness. When Jesus washed His disciples feet, He took on the work of a servant. In Jesus' day, no one but the servants would wash the feet of those who came into a home. That night in the upper room, Jesus—the one who had healed multitudes of the sick, cast out demons, calmed storms, and walked on water—knelt down and washed the feet of those He loved and served.

After Jesus's startling act, he says, *Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord— and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:12 – 14).* After Jesus had served His disciples, washing their feet, He invited them to follow His example and serve each other in the same way: *For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you (John 13:15).*

Jesus is making the point that a true leader is a servant. Jesus was the model servant-leader, and He showed this attitude to His disciples. If even he, God in the flesh, is willing to serve, we his followers must also be servants, willing to serve in any way that glorifies God. Are you willing to follow Christ's example of serving? Who can you serve today? There is a special blessing for those who not only agree that humble service is Christ's way, but who also follow through and do it (see John13:17).

Even earlier when James and John asked for positions of authority over others, Jesus told them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. Jesus is shifting the focus off position or authority, and is pointing out that **greatness in God's eyes is found in serving.**



☰ Motivations for Service

Our motivation and purpose of the spiritual discipline of service is found throughout scripture. We see in Romans 12:1, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

When we are born again and our sins are forgiven, the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience, according to Hebrews 9:14, in order for us to “serve the living God.” Every believer’s Bible exhorts him or her to “serve the LORD with gladness” (Psalm 100:2, NASB). God’s Word has no place for spiritual unemployment or spiritual retirement or any other description of a professing Christian not serving God. Of course, motives matter in the service we offer to God. The Bible mentions at least six motives for serving.

1. **Obedience:** Every Christian should want to obey God and to obey God is to serve Him. *You shall serve him and hold fast to him. — Deuteronomy 13:4*
2. **Gratitude:** Serving is the right response to God’s goodness to us. *Serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you. —1 Samuel 12:24*
3. **Gladness:** We serve out of gladness and not grudgingly: *Serve the LORD with gladness! —Psalm 100:2*
4. **Forgiveness:** Like Isaiah, whose sins were forgiven and who then immediately volunteered to serve, we serve in response to the forgiveness shown to us: *Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. Isaiah 6:6-8*
5. **Humility:** We serve motivated by humility: *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. — John 13:14 -15*
6. **Love:** We serve because we love God and others: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. —Matthew 22:37-40*

Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence, and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. Acts of service give hands to the second greatest commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself.”



☰ Self-Righteous Service vs True Service

Self-Righteous Service comes through human effort.	True service comes from a relationship with God, watching for opportunities He places before us.
Self-Righteous Service is only interested in the “big” tasks.	True service does not distinguish the small from the large tasks.
Self-Righteous service requires external rewards. It needs to be seen and appreciated.	True service rests contented in being hidden.
Self-Righteous service is concerned with results. It becomes bitter when the results fall below expectations	True service is free of the need to calculate results. It delights only in the service.
Self-Righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve in order to show off (doing it for the gram)	True service is indiscriminate in its ministry.
Self-Righteous service can serve only when there is a ‘feeling’ to serve.	True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.
Self-Righteous service is temporary.	True service is a life-style.
Self-Righteous service fractures community. It centers on the glorification of the individual.	True service builds community. It draws, binds, heals, builds.

Src, Celebration of Discipline - Richard Foster





WEEK 4 CHALLENGE

Exploring Service:

Daily Scripture Readings

Richard Foster recommends these daily scripture readings as explore service this week:

Monday

The call of service
– *Matthew 20:20–28*

Tuesday:

The sign of service
– *John 13:1–17*

Wednesday

The commitment of service
– *Exodus 21:2, 5–6,*
1 Corinthians 9:19

Thursday

The attitude of service
– *Colossians 3:23–25*

Friday

Service in the Christian fellowship
– *Romans 12:9–13*

Saturday

The ministry of small things
– *Matthew 25:31–19*

Sunday

Service exemplified
– *Luke 10:29-37*

Practicing Service

It's actually easy to allow our service to be outward displays. It's also easy to "do what we've always done" and become comfortable with our status quo. If we work in the church nursery, serve on the media team, and serve at Mission Arlington once a year, we think we're doing good!

We invite you to stretch yourself this week. Here's some faith challenges to practice the discipline of service:

- 1. Do something for someone else that you've never done before*
- 2. Do something for someone else that they won't know about so they can't thank you.*
- 3. Do something for someone who has been unkind to you (overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).*





WEEK 4 CHALLENGE

Review the past few weeks. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, others and God. What does this inventory reveal about your life?

For Me	For Others	For God





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