



Week 3: Serve One Another

1 Peter 4:7-11

GOAL:

Grow in our motivation to serve one another and our understanding of how to do so

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for the meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Connect on all logistics: serving project, schedule, leadership roles, etc.
- Facilitate a Scripture-based conversation on serving.
- Review last week's Practice Activity and give instructions for this week's assignment.
- Lead a time of prayer focused on growing in our practice of serving.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, I praise you as the one who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give your life as a ransom for many. Forgive me for the many times when I'm more focused on how I am being served than how I am serving others. As I fix my eyes on you, the author and the finisher of my faith, please transform me from the inside out and give me a heart that loves to serve. Help me see everything I have as a gift of grace that you have entrusted me to steward for your glory. May our Grow Group be a reflection of your self-giving, God-honoring service. In your loving name I pray, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, AND PRAY (15 minutes)

Relational Connection: *As people enter, spend time connecting relationally. This can be informal, or you can do something a little more structured, like using an icebreaker question or sharing “highs and lows.”*

Coordinate Details: *Go over any logistical plans that your group needs to discuss. This could be related to your Building for the Better serving project, a Super Bowl party or other social event, who will lead in various areas, etc.*

Pray: *Before you begin your discussion of this week’s passage and sermon, open with a short time of prayer, making sure to pray about any needs within the group that are shared during the relational connection time. Note: there will be a longer time of prayer toward the end that involves everyone, so it will likely be best to ask one person to lead this prayer and keep it brief.*

DISCUSS (35-45 minutes)

- What was one thing from the Growth Guide readings and reflection questions this week that challenged you, encouraged you, or made you think?

Leader’s Note: *This is not only a good way to get people talking about their spiritual lives, it’s also a great positive reinforcement of the value of spending regular time in Scripture and prayer. You don’t need to spend a ton of time here, but asking this regularly can give a good opportunity for people to share how the Lord is speaking to them.*

- Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. In verse 8, why do you think Peter says that loving each other deeply is what we should do “above all?” Read Matthew 22:36-40 and Colossians 3:12-14. What primary theme do you think Jesus and Paul are trying to communicate in the last verse of each passage? How do all the specific commandments we’re covering in this series (encourage one another, serve one another, pray for one another, forgive one another) fit together with this command to love each other deeply?

Leader’s Note: *(In this question, we put several smaller questions together – make sure to leave room for conversation between each of the individual questions listed)*

The point of this series of questions is that Peter, Jesus and Paul are all saying the same thing – all of the specific guidance given in Scripture (including the specifics we’re talking about in this series) are really just examples of what it looks like to love God and love each other.

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In Matthew 22:40, when Jesus says, “all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments,” he’s saying that the commandments to love God and others are the framework that provides the structure for everything else in Scripture. In Colossians 3, Paul is saying that love is the heading under which all the other commands he gives (be compassionate, kind, patient, etc.) fit. And in our passage for today, Peter is saying the same thing – loving each other should be “above all!”

This is more than just semantics – this core Scriptural concept changes the motivation for and the power behind all the other actions prescribed in these passages. First, the motivation: Without the overriding theme of love, all the other commands of Scripture, including ones like encourage one another and serve one another, can easily become boxes we check to ensure we’re doing the “right thing.”

If you went to a Baptist church in the ‘70s or ‘80s, you might remember offering envelopes that had a checklist on the front with boxes for “Bible read daily,” “Bible Brought,” “Offering given,” along with several others. Of course, these are great things to do! But it’s easy to view them as a checklist and the goal can subtly change from ‘reading God’s Word in order to encounter Jesus’ to ‘reading God’s Word to feel a sense of accomplishment.’

When you view the commands of Scripture as boxes to be checked, the motivation for obeying them can easily become legalism. But when you are filled with genuine love for God and others, the motivation becomes how we can bless God and our neighbor.

This Scriptural theme of love as the “umbrella” for all the other commands also changes the power behind our obedience. Detached from love, we are left to rely on our own strength to carry out the other commands. And it’s hard to be patient, kind, encouraging, and forgiving to others in our own strength! But when we are filled with the love of Christ, we find new resources of strength to carry out these beautiful but challenging commands to treat each other as Christ has treated us.

- Read 1 Peter 4:9 again. One expression of hospitality is hosting people in your home and sharing meals together. What are some of the reasons people are hesitant to do this? How could inviting people into our less-than-perfect homes help our group “raise the hood” (be more transparent) and promote greater connections in our group?

Leader’s Note: *There’s certainly more to hospitality than inviting people into your home (we’ll cover that in the next question), but there’s also something really powerful about gathering in a home. As I (John) talk to people, a common theme I hear is that people are hesitant to have others in their home because they think their house or apartment isn’t clean enough, the furniture and décor aren’t nice enough, they don’t have enough space, or they aren’t a good enough cook. Because there are some people who are really great at hosting and seem to have homes that are always clean, perfectly decorated, and filled with the smell of freshly baked cookies, (!) we can begin to think that everyone is like that and we’re the only ones who don’t “have it all together.”*

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This is closely related to the situation we talked about last week, where none of us are willing to share what's really going on in our lives because we feel like there's a myth that everyone else already has it all together and if we let people see our emotional/spiritual/relational mess, we'll be judged. But just as being willing to be vulnerable with others actually promotes intimacy, inviting people into your home as it actually is, not as you think they think it should be, also promotes deeper connections!

You might want to spend a few minutes talking about what it might look like for members of your group to spend more time in each other's homes. Some groups in the past have subdivided into smaller groups of 4-8 people to share a meal together in their homes. If you try this, you might even consider making a rule – you're not allowed to clean before the group comes and you have to use paper plates!

- What are some other ways to “offer hospitality to one another” in addition to hosting people in your home? What could it look like to “offer hospitality” to your co-workers? To your neighbors?

***Leader's Note:** The heart of hospitality is generous welcome. And while we most typically think of it in terms of inviting people into our home, there are many other ways we can offer hospitality to one another! Here are a few thoughts to get you started:*

- **Sharing your time with others.** Time is often our most limited resource! And generously welcoming people into your schedule is a key way to extend hospitality.
- **Sharing your financial resources with others.** Buying someone lunch, giving to someone in need, giving a thoughtful gift – all of these are ways to generously welcome people into your life.
- **Sharing your emotional resources with others.** All of us have people in our lives who are emotionally draining. And it's tempting to actively avoid them. But what if we viewed these people as humans created in God's image for whom Jesus died, and in love we decided to welcome them into our lives, even if it's emotionally challenging?
- **Sharing your friend group with others.** What if you invited someone who's typically on the outside of a particular social circle to be a part of the next social gathering, generously welcoming them into your social space?

In all these areas, the idea of generous welcome is the heart behind each individual expression.

One more note – you might want to highlight the “without grumbling” part. That's not easy! This gets back to the earlier discussion about love being the motivation for these specific actions. If we're just trying to “check the box,” we may grumble as we offer hospitality, like Martha grumbled to Jesus about her sister in Luke 10. But if we are motivated by love for God and love for others, we'll see offering hospitality as a blessing, not a burden.

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- Read 1 Peter 4:10. Peter uses a really interesting description of our gifts: “God’s grace in its various forms.” What do you think he’s trying to communicate here? How would it change our thoughts and actions if we viewed our talents and resources not as something we owned, but as something God gave us and will hold us responsible for stewarding?

Leader’s Note: For the first part of this question, there are a couple of things to highlight. First, there’s the reminder that all of our talents, skills, and other resources are gifts from God and expressions of his grace. Both parties in the equation (us as recipients of the gifts and the people whom we serve) are receiving something from God that we don’t deserve.

Secondly, there’s the interesting phrase “in its various forms.” Sometimes we think of God’s grace primarily as the forgiveness we receive in Jesus. And that’s obviously a HUGE and important expression of his grace! But there’s so much more! Everything good in the world is a gift of God’s grace. And one of the cool things about his grace is that there are just so many different expressions of it! It might be interesting to talk about the various people in your group and how God has wired each of you differently, but each person has a unique way of blessing others by God’s grace.

The last part of this question is a hugely significant concept, and one that I find personally convicting! If we were pressed, we would all likely acknowledge that any skills or talents we have are gifts from God, not something we came up with on our own. But even still, most of us subconsciously view our resources, including our talents and skills, as belonging to us. We might give some portion of them away, but we view that as a generous gesture on our part. (“Look how generous I am to give away some of my time/money/skill to help these people!”)

The truth according to Scripture, though, is that none of our gifts actually belong to us! So when we use them to serve others, we aren’t giving away something that’s ours...we’re simply stewarding something that God gave us in the way that it was intended! And when we decide to keep “our” gifts/talents/resources to ourselves, we’re actually withholding God’s grace from other people. (ouch!)

If we’re not careful, this can lead to shame. But remember, “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This isn’t about shame – it’s actually about an invitation to partake in the joyous privilege of being a part of what God is doing in the world. We have the opportunity to be like the disciples as they passed out the loaves and fish to 5,000 people...marveling at the miracle of how God takes our limited resources and uses them for amazing things in his kingdom.

- Read 1 Peter 4:11. What impact does the phrase “with the strength God provides” have on our serving? What does Peter say is the outcome of this kind of serving? How does this differ from some of our more selfish motivations?

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***Leader's Note:** The reminder that the power behind our serving is God's strength rather than ours is a huge relief! If we rely only on our own strength to serve, we will quickly grow weary and discouraged because our resources are limited. But when we rely on God's strength to serve, it takes the pressure off. Like the toddler we talked about last week who has his hands on the lawn mower while his father is doing the pushing, we get to participate, but it doesn't depend on us. And we find that as we wait on the Lord, he will renew our strength. We will mount up on wings like eagles...we will run and not grow weary, walk, and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

This also gives us courage to try new things in serving! If it all depends on us, we'll tend to only try things we're comfortable with and that we're confident we can do successfully. But when we realize that we're relying on God's strength, we become willing to try new things, even if we don't know how it's going to work out, because we trust that God will provide the resources we need.

I find it really interesting that Peter doesn't close this verse with, "so that everyone gets their needs met." Instead, he says the result of this serving is God's glory! Our flesh often desires a different result when we serve. Apart from God's grace, WE want to be glorified! The questions that our sinful nature asks when we serve are, "Will people notice? Will I look good? Will I get thanked? Will I feel good about myself?" But praise God, by his grace, he sets us free from this slavery to self-centeredness and lets us be a part of something that is far, far better than our feeble attempts at self-glorification. He lets us be a part of bringing glory to God! And when we experience that, we can sincerely say with Paul that we consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. (Php 3)

- What are some of the ways that our group has lived out this passage and served one another? What would it look like in our group if we grew in extending hospitality (of all kinds) to each other?

***Leader's Note:** Each week, we're asking a question at the end that encourages us to apply the concept of the week to our specific group. Remember, we're hoping and praying not only that these truths sink in for us as individuals, but that they provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to transform us as a group!*

Help the group be specific about ways you guys are already serving one another faithfully, and then brainstorm specific ways you can grow in the way you offer hospitality to each other.

PRACTICE (10 minutes)

Each week in the One Another series, we're asking each person to participate in a "Practice Activity" where we will experiment with actually doing what we talked about in the weekly discussion. Last week, we experimented with giving and receiving encouragement. Today, we'll review that practice and talk about this week's assignment.

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Review

Spend the first few minutes talking about last week's encouragement practice. Ask the group what it felt like to receive specific encouragement from a group member. You might want to give people an opportunity to share specifically how others encouraged them. Also ask them what it felt like to give intentional thought to how to encourage someone else and what they learned from the process.

This Week:

Read the following assignment (or summarize in your own words):

As part of today's conversation about serving, we talked about hospitality. This week, your assignment is:

1. Early in the week, spend time in prayer asking the Spirit to lead you to someone to whom you can offer hospitality this week.
2. After you've identified someone, make a specific plan to extend hospitality to them and write it down. We'll talk about the ideas at next week's meeting.

Remember that we said hospitality is "generous welcome" and it includes all kinds of welcoming, not just limited to hosting someone in your home. So, this assignment could be inviting someone to meet for lunch, calling someone just to visit (maybe that person who tends to call you a lot more often than you call them!), including someone in your social circle, or any of the other ideas we brainstormed in our conversation about hospitality earlier.

PRAYER (5-10 minutes)

Each week during this series, we're spending time praying specifically that the Holy Spirit would make the things we talked about in our discussion true of us as a Grow Group. This week, we're focusing on serving.

Our suggestion is to focus on two specific prayer topics. A great way to do this would be for you (or someone else you ask to lead this section) to introduce each section briefly, then open it up for a time of "popcorn-style" prayer, then move on to the next section, closing your time together with a spoken prayer at the end.

Here are the prayer topics:

Thank God for the ways this Grow Group has served each other in the past.

Pray that God would help our group serve each other "with the strength God provides."