

4 | Serve



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We've all had experiences with customer service we'd like to forget. But I tend to remember the ones that make me smile rather than frown.

For example, a man booked a last-minute trip on a well-known airline to see his dying grandson one last time. Traffic and long lines at the Los Angeles airport caused him to arrive at the gate twelve minutes after the plane's scheduled departure, but the airline had been informed of this man's tragic situation. Imagine the man's surprise when the pilot himself was standing there waiting for him. The pilot said, "They can't go anywhere without me, and I wasn't going anywhere without you. Now relax. We'll get you there. And again, I'm so sorry."

Good customer service is about doing what's right and helping the other person.

But we're not talking about customers and business; we're talking about relationships. The principle still applies though: We strengthen our relationships when we help and serve the other person. Serving is a tangible way to love others.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: Seize the _____ to _____ .

Freedom is a natural human hunger. We all want to feel free, but sin so easily entangles us (Hebrews 12:1) and holds our feet to the ground. In Galatians 5, however, Paul reminded us that a revolution has come through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, the power of sin has been broken, and we can be free from the downward spiral of sin.

Galatians 5:13-15 ¹³ For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.

Show your _____ by serving the other person.

We're called to be free! In Christ, the Emancipation Proclamation has been issued. We're free ... but free to do what? Let's look first at what this freedom is *not*. Our freedom in Christ isn't a license to go back to our old lifestyles—to live like we did before we were saved. Notice the word *flesh* in verse 13. This refers to our sinful nature, the "old person" that continues to live inside us, even after the moment of salvation. "The flesh" is the self-absorbed side of us that can grow like a cancer when let off its leash. It no longer owns us, but it likes to think it does. Paul knew firsthand about the continual pull of the old sin nature (Romans 7:14-24).

The inward focus of the sin nature not only harms us; it affects our relationships. If I'm focused on myself, and you're focused on yourself, how can we ever have a strong relationship? When we focus inwardly, on ourselves, sins like selfishness, greed, and uncaring attitudes quickly follow and will sour our relationship. As Paul warned: "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another" (v. 15). Paul also knew that we would find the only remedy for the flesh in an ongoing relationship with Christ (v. 25). So as we focus on Christ, we also are to focus on those He has brought into our lives. We should maximize our liberty in Christ by loving people through service.

Galatians 6:1-5 ¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. ² Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Let each person examine his own work, and then he

can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else.⁵ For each person will have to carry his own load.

Serving others means helping to _____ their burdens.

When it comes to relationships, many people place all their “energy” eggs in one basket. That basket of choice is typically the one that brings about the most “warm fuzzies” and public pats on the back. In Galatians 6, Paul gave us a more effective way for using our energy and time: helping others. Paul began by describing a way of helping others that may surprise you: Serve others by confronting them in love. “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit” (v. 1).

Paul drove home the need for tangible forms of service: “Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (v. 2). Strong relationships call for us to help carry loads. It’s a lot easier to move a heavy piece of furniture when someone is there to help you carry it. It’s still my load to carry, but by coming alongside and helping me carry it, you ease my strain. In a sense, my burden becomes your burden as we carry it together.

ENGAGE

LOVE IN ACTION

On a scale of 1 (light) to 10 (heavy), how much weight are the following burdens pressing down on you?

Financial burdens _____	Career burdens _____
Relational burdens _____	Spiritual burdens _____
Health burdens _____	Other: _____

Who might you serve by helping carry their burden? Write his or her name in the space below and ask God for an opportunity to share his or her load.

Galatians 6:10¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.

Seize every opportunity to serve other _____.

In verse 10, Paul mentioned the need to demonstrate love to all, but he stressed the importance of Christians investing in other Christians. Relationships inside the church are held at the highest level. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith” (v. 10).

LIVE IT OUT

Where is God leading you to serve?

- ▶ **Thank someone.** Consider the person who served you, confronted you in love, or helped you carry a burden. Contact him or her and express your appreciation.
- ▶ **Restore someone.** If a friend or family member is in the midst of sinful behavior or has made a bad decision, ask God for wisdom and direction on the best way to lovingly talk with the person. Act on your prayer.
- ▶ **Serve someone.** As a group, identify individuals whom you could walk alongside and help ease their burden. Use this as an opportunity to love and bring them into your group.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Galatians 5:13-15; 6:1-5,10, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Too many people build their relationships around what they can get out of the other person. Such people only contact friends if they need something. They might help the person if they can get something in return. Our relationships would thrive much better if, instead of focusing on how the other person can help us, we focused on how we can help and serve others.

How easily do you share your time and abilities with others?

What do these verses teach us about the responsibility Christians have to each other?

What encourages you to continue serving others when you're tempted to quit?

DAY 1: Refuse to yield to selfishness.

Read Galatians 5:13.

Dale was a driven guy, an achiever, and a self-starter. In his career in pharmaceutical sales, he continually ranked among the top five in his company. When quarterly scores came out, Dale often raised his hands in victory as he saw his name sitting at the top. Unfortunately, as Dale built his reputation in the marketplace, he destroyed his reputation with family and friends. Dale didn't realize how badly he was treating others. Most days, he simply pushed others out of his head as he pursued his path to success.

Dale is now divorced, having left his wife in the dust several years ago, and is supplying his children with a monthly check to ease his guilt. As time went on, damage also reached a critical point in other areas of his life, and Dale knew a day of reckoning would eventually come. May 23, 2014 was that day. He was let go after fifteen years with the company.

We can choose to live each day focusing only on ourselves, our needs, and our goals. But that's no way to live. And the consequences are devastating. In Christ, we're set free from sin and its trappings. But we're not set free to do anything we want. We're set free to serve God and serve others in His Name.

Thank God for the freedom He has given us. In Christ, we find peace that only He can give.

“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.”

GALATIANS 5:13

DAY 2: Demonstrate love by investing in others.

Read Galatians 5:14-15.

In Galatians 5:14-15, Jesus blazed a trail back to the beauty of community. While the ultimate result of Christ's death and resurrection is the forgiveness of sin and a relationship with God, it also alters the way we feel about ourselves (no more guilt) and revolutionizes the way we feel about others. We can now love people, and we express that love through serving them.

Think of the ways you naturally serve yourself. When your body needs food, you make haste to the fridge. When your body calls out for sleep, you go in search of a pillow and blanket. When your body feels the need for exercise, you take the dog for a walk.

This type of "self-service" isn't necessarily bad, but Paul challenged us to serve others just as faithfully as we serve ourselves. We "serve" our needs. Likewise, we can serve others when they have needs. Make everyday investments in others until it becomes a habit—the natural way of doing your life.

*Ask someone you work with or see regularly how you can pray for him or her.
Pray for that person for two weeks, then follow up by asking about this need.*

DAY 3: Work for the good in others' lives.

Read Galatians 6:1-5.

One of the most important roles you play in others' lives is to help them see their blind spots. Anyone who drives a car can grasp this idea. I've been saved at the last second by my loving wife shouting: "HONEY, THERE'S A CAR BESIDE YOU!" In a panic, I yanked the wheel and returned to my lane unscathed. As my heart rate slowly returned to normal, I offered thanks to my wife because her intent really had been to help me and not to throw me into cardiac arrest! Thanks to her, I had dodged a proverbial bullet.

Paul challenged the church to gently, lovingly, and sensitively serve others by helping them see the way they wound themselves or others. This process requires much prayer, but it must be a part of healthy relationships. Paul also exhorted believers to "Carry one another's burdens" (v. 2). Notice it goes both ways. You help carry my burdens, and I help carry yours. This, of course, requires self-disclosure and soul-bearing. After all, people can't help you lift something they don't know about.

Take inventory. Do your share burdens with others? Are you carrying someone else's burden with them? If not, be on the lookout to do both of these this week.

DAY 4: Commit to be engaged in Christian community.

Read Galatians 6:10.

Being with the body of believers is critical to spiritual growth. It should go without saying: One of the prerequisites for healthy relationships is your consistent presence in others' lives. What a challenge it is to serve people with whom you rarely sit and talk, those with whom you hardly ever engage in robust conversation. Indeed, for some, the first step of obedience to Galatians 6:10 is simply to show up more frequently!

Once you insert yourself regularly into a small group environment, Paul would then challenge you to resist the urge to merely sit back and soak it up! Don't wait for the invitation to serve, but search for opportunities to work for the good in others' lives. In one case, God may call you to give money to meet a need. In another situation, He may call you to write a note of encouragement. For yet another, God may require you to take the time to become a frequent phone-caller, checking in regularly to let someone know she isn't alone in her battle. The opportunities to serve are endless.

*Identify one way you can serve someone in your Bible study group or church.
Take steps today to fulfill this act of obedience.*



DAY 5: Use your God-given gifts to meet needs.

Read Romans 12:1-8.

While Christians should stand ready to serve in any way they are needed, the wisest way to serve others is by opening up your unique package of spiritual gifts. In his rich letter to the Romans, Paul made it evident that serving others is a huge part of offering our lives as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-8). Consider how the Holy Spirit has hardwired you for ministry and use those gifts and abilities to serve and meet the needs that lie before you.

No two Christians are exactly the same. Our needs, as well as our gifts and abilities to serve and minister, can vary, but each of us is equally called to “work for the good of all” (Galatians 6:10). All that remains for us to do is to open our hearts and eyes to see the needs and opportunities, and go for it!

What volunteer needs does your church currently have? Pray and make yourself available to serve. Allow God to use your obedience for His kingdom.

“Faith and works are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God trusts God; and he that trusts God obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith.”

CHARLES SPURGEON