


Session 4: Serve



QUESTION 1:
When have you received stellar service?

THE POINT

Seize the opportunity
to 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 airport caused him to arrive at the gate ten 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. I'm so sorry for your loss."

Good customer service is not about making a sale or even keeping a customer. It's 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.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

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.

We are called to be free! In Christ, the Emancipation Proclamation has been issued. We are free ... but free to do what?

QUESTION 2:

What's the connection between freedom in Christ and the command to serve?

Let's look first at what this freedom is *not*. Our freedom in Christ is not 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. "The flesh" is the self-absorbed side of us that can grow like a cancer when let off its leash.

The inward focus of the sin nature not only harms us, it affects our relationships. If I am focused on myself, and you are focused on yourself, how can we ever have a strong relationship? When we focus inwardly, on ourselves, sins like selfishness and greed will

sour our relationships. As Paul warned: "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another."

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.

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, 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" is not necessarily bad, but Paul challenged us to serve others just 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 natural way of doing your life.

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.

Dale was a driven guy, an achiever, and a self-starter. Unfortunately, as Dale built his reputation in the marketplace, he destroyed his reputation with family and friends.

When it comes to relationships, many people operate like Dale, placing all their “energy” eggs in one basket. That basket of choice is typically the one that brings about the most 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.”

QUESTION 3:

How have you seen these verses put into practice recently?

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 drove home the need for tangible forms of service: “Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Strong relationships call for us to help carry loads. 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.

QUESTION 4:

What actions and attitudes enable us to carry one another's burdens?

Notice it goes both ways. You help carry my burdens, and I help carry yours. This, of course, requires appropriate self-disclosure and soul-bearing. After all, people cannot help you lift something they don't know about.

In verses 3-5, Paul put the mirror in my face and called me to take a long, hard look. *Do I have a healthy view of myself, demonstrated through humble confession and openness to correction? Do I realize that one day I will stand before Jesus and answer for the amount of heavy lifting I performed—or didn't perform—in the lives of others? I must carry my load of service.*



“GOD ALONE HAS THE RESOURCES TO MEET HUMAN NEEDS;

ALL WE CAN DO IS RECEIVE HIS RICHES AND

SHARE THEM WITH OTHERS.”

Warren W. Wiersbe

GALATIANS 6:10

¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.

Paul declared in verse 7: “For whatever a person sows he will also reap.” For this reason, Christians are challenged to sow seeds in the forever field of Christian community. 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.”

QUESTION 5:

What opportunities exist for our group to serve others?

This certainly doesn't mean we ignore the needs of those outside the body of Christ. Sowing good seed in the lives of lost people is important as well. But just as a person cares for his immediate family before he takes care of the neighbors (1 Timothy 5:8), believers must be sure to take care of their brothers and sisters in Christ. This serves as a great witness to those outside the church. Jesus said, “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Paul took it for granted that the Galatian Christians were interacting regularly with one another. It should go without saying that 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 hardly ever engage in robust conversation. Indeed, for some, the first step of obedience to Galatians 6:10 is to 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! Do not wait for the invitation to serve, but search for opportunities to work for the good in others' lives.

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.

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.” All that remains for us to do is to open our eyes and hearts to see the needs, and go for it!

SERVICE TENDENCY

To help you recognize your tendency to serve, place an "X" under the service action that correctly identifies your service toward the people in your life.

	<i>Serves me more</i>	<i>I serve them more</i>	<i>We serve the same</i>
Parents			
Spouse			
Friends			
Neighbors			
Coworkers			

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.

Believers should not build relationships on what they can get for themselves. **God has called us to help and serve the other person. Serving is a tangible way to love others.**