

On Spiritual Cultivation

An elderly brother in his seventies had been serving in the church for a period of time. Although he was a board member, he began to grow complacent. He criticized others and did little for the church. The local preacher, who observed this, he felt it was his responsibility to draw this to the brother's attention. So, during a house visit, the pastor courteously reminded the elderly brother of his contributions in the past. He also reminded the brother of certain aspects that he needed to improve upon. The brother thanked the pastor for his reminder but inwardly he was seething with anger. He thought, "I am much older than you and more experienced than you, what right do you have to teach me?" He decided that he would no longer do holy work. Later that evening, the brother was riding on his motorbike at around 70-80 mph, when all of a sudden he saw ahead of him, a huge figure dressed in white, holding a white stick. The elderly brother did not reduce his speed and as he came near the angel, the angel whacked him on the back with the stick. The brother fell to the ground and had to be taken immediately to the hospital. Later that evening, the pastor visited the brother in the hospital. He could not recognize him because he had been so badly injured. On seeing the pastor, the elderly brother wept bitterly and repented for his sins. After this lesson, the brother turned out to be a good worker of God.

Questions to think about:

1. From the testimony, what do you see as some of the dangers that may arise from serving without continuous spiritual cultivation?
2. Reflect upon a time when your service was affected because of a lack of spiritual cultivation.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Most of the apostles were men of lowly status and little education, but God used them to fulfill His purpose. The same holds true today; a man's worldly education and status has little to do with the degree of God's usage of him. God seeks those who possess spiritual qualities and are willing to give their lives to Him to accomplish His will.

Lesson 6

The Gospel of Mark Ways to Serve

Listed Scriptures

Mt 25:31-46; Lk 8:1-3; Lk 12:16-21; 2 Cor 9:1-15; Rom 10:14-15; Js 2:14-17; 1 Jn 3:16-18

Lesson Aim

To enable students to know the reasons and ways that we can serve

Memory Verse

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor 15:58)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Mark 11-16

BIBLE BACKGROUND



Please refer to Lesson 4 for additional information on the Gospel of Mark (Lessons 4, 5 and 6 are Bible studies based on the Gospel of Mark).

WARM UP

It Matters



Along the coast of the vast Atlantic Ocean there lived an old man. Each day when the tide went out, he would make his way along the beach for miles. Another man who lived out far away would occasionally watch as the old man vanished into the distance and would later notice that the old man had returned. The neighbor also noticed that, as the old man walked, he would often stoop down to lift something from the sand and then toss it away into the water.

One day, when the old man went down to the beach, this neighbor followed after him to satisfy his curiosity. Sure enough, as he watched, the old man bent down and gently lifted something from the sand and threw it into the ocean. By the time the old man made his next stop, the neighbor had come near enough to see that he was picking up a starfish that had been stranded by the retreating tide and would, of course, die of dehydration before the tide returned.

As the old man turned to return a starfish to the ocean, the neighbor called out with a degree of mockery in his voice, "Hey, old timer! What are you doing? This beach goes on for hundreds of miles, and thousands of starfish get washed up every day! Surely you don't think that throwing a few back is going to matter?" The old man listened and paused for a moment, then held the starfish in his hand out toward his neighbor. "It matters to this one."

Ask students to share their reflections on the story. Sometimes what we do for God and the people around us may seem as insignificant as throwing a starfish back into the sea. But in the eyes of God, every little act of love does matter and will be remembered. Let us learn, in whatever small way, to give to others.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Reasons to Serve



A. Why Do We Need to Serve?

Once, when the disciples went out to buy food, the Lord preached to a Samaritan woman who had come to draw water from the well. Later, when the disciples returned with the food, the Lord said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know...my food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work" (Jn 4:32, 34).

From the Lord's reply, we may question how working for God is associated with food. Here, Lord Jesus shows how doing the will of the Father, carrying out His desires, and accomplishing His work spiritually gives Him the same satisfaction and enjoyment that food gives to our body. As a Christian, we are nourished through prayer and attending Bible study and services. However, our spirituality advances even further when we strive to obey God's commandments and work for Him. We will also experience an indescribable joy and satisfaction from serving the Lord. Matthew 25:31-46 talks about the parable of the sheep and the goats, which illus-

54 trates the importance of putting our faith in action and serving others.

On the last day, the Lord will divide all humankind into two groups: sheep and goats. The sheep are the ones who have served him faithfully by serving others. Heaven is their reward. The goats on the other hand, are those who have no action. Even though they may not have gone against any of God's commandments, they have not actively sought to please God or man. The kingdom of God is about service, not personal enjoyment and pleasures. A mature Christian is concerned not only with receiving, but with giving and sacrificing oneself for others in order to repay the Lord.



B. How Do We Know When to Serve?

While Jesus Christ was on earth, He served the people whenever there was a need. Lord Jesus' ultimate service was that, while we were still sinners, He came to the world to die for us (Rom 5:6). The Lord saw our deep need and showed love and compassion by coming to save us. In the Bible, there are many examples of people who served when there was a need. When the Lord was about to enter Jerusalem, He needed a donkey. When the owner knew of the Lord's need of it, he allowed the disciples to take it away (Mt 21:1-3). While the Lord was preaching on earth, a group of women followed Him and provided for the Lord and the disciples out of their means (Lk 8:1-3).

Today, opportunities to serve others abound. Serving others can include doing something as small as giving up a seat for others or providing a sympathetic ear.

We need to take note and observe those around us to see if they need our help or service. Through conversations or directly asking others, we will know where help is needed. The following testimony is an example of this.

There was a newly baptized sister who was not involved in a lot of holy work at the time. One night she had a dream, and in her dream, she saw herself sitting down doing nothing. A voice said to her, "Why do you not work?" She replied, "All the work is already taken by others. There is no more work to be done." The Lord then showed her an image of a brother who looked heavy laden and sorrowful. He told her to go ask the brother if he needed help. With that, her dream ended. The sister kept the dream in her heart and the next time she went to church, she asked that brother if there was anything she could do to help. The brother told her that he was overwhelmed with church work and would certainly appreciate her assistance.

Ways to Serve



When asked to serve, we may sometimes hear ourselves say, "What can we do?" or "We are only youths!" Jeremiah and Moses responded in the same way. The following are some ways in which we can offer our services.

A. Offering All We Have

a. Offering what we possess

Once there was a rich man who planned for his future by building greater storehouses, storing up his wealth and enjoying it in the years to come. Little did he know that that very night his soul was to be taken. Jesus concluded, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Our Heavenly Father has given us many wonderful things to enjoy. He has given us talents, capabilities, wisdom, and wealth, among many others. But these are not "treasures" for only us to enjoy. God has given us these "treasures" so that we can be rich toward God. What does this mean? It means that God has not given us these things solely to further our own careers, fatten our own pockets, or benefit ourselves. He wants us to use them to help the brothers and sisters in church as well as those around us. God gives to us so we can give to others. He provides us with resources so we can help others.

However, there are people who feel that if they offer their wealth or time, they won't have enough for themselves. Some people give sparingly because they regard giving as a loss. Some people hesitate to give generously to God because they worry about having enough money to meet their own needs or buy what they want. Some people don't want to spend the time doing church work because they feel that they have too much on their hands already and they can't afford the time. But consider the examples of brothers and sisters who, apart from working a full time job or have a lot of schoolwork, still devote time to church work. Does their school work or job suffer because of time spent doing holy work? Not at all! Those who offer to the Lord will gain more (Prov 11; 24-25).

2 Corinthians 9:1-15 records the effects of giving to others. During this time, the members in Judea were suffering from a severe famine. Other churches were called upon to assist the Judean believers. Here, Paul specifically praises the members in Macedonia for their relief efforts because despite being in extreme poverty themselves, they offered generously and joyfully to the believers. Paul goes on to explain the effects of giving to others. He tells us that those who give will a) receive more

56 gifts and spiritual blessings so that they can perform more good works (v.6-

8), b) bear more fruits of righteousness (v. 10), c) be blessed by those who are benefited from their good works (v.11-12). Blessings upon blessings will be added to them. Furthermore, by giving to others, the needs of the receivers will be satisfied and they will be physically and emotionally comforted (v.12). Their faith will also be inspired by the love of those who serve them, and they in turn will serve others. Ultimately, God's name is glorified (v.13).

b. Offering ourselves

Besides offering our talents, time, and wealth to the Lord, the most beautiful offering is to present ourselves as a living sacrifice. Romans 12:1 says, "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 spiritual worship." This verse tells us that ultimately, what God wants from us is not what we have, but US ourselves—with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul and all our strength. This is the offering that pleases God. Since Christ laid down His life for us, we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and was raised again (2 Cor 5:15). By living for Christ, we lay down our own desires, fully obey His commandment and give ourselves completely to the Lord. No sacrifices please God more than obedience and submission (1 Sam 15; 22). While we diligently serve God and give Him our time or energy, we have to think about what God wants us to do. We need to learn to respect God's will in every choice that we make. Being a living sacrifice involves being what the Lord wants us to be, saying what He wants us to say, going where He wants us to go, and doing what He wants us to do.

B. Saving Souls

The book of Amos prophesied, "'Behold, the days are coming', says the Lord God, 'when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of God'" (Amos 8:11). Today, this famine is the emptiness that exists in the hearts of men. To fill the void within them, people of the world use alcohol, drugs, sex and violence. They try, but they fail. As such, the entire world is sinking deeper and deeper in sin and is in desperate need of the Lord and the saving grace of the gospel.

The world needs God, and we are the ones who can tell people about Him. Lord Jesus once looked at the people around Him and exclaimed, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38). There is an urgent need to go out and harvest souls for the Lord. This is some of the most noble work that everyone can take part in.

C. Serving Our Brothers and Sisters

In the fall, we usually see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in a “V” formation. It is interesting to learn why they fly that way. First of all, by flying in “V” formation, the birds help each other by flapping their wings, which immediately creates a lifting power for the birds. Secondly, when the head goose gets tired, it rotates back in the group, and another goose helps out and flies at the point. Thirdly, the geese encourage those in front to keep up the speed by honking from behind. And finally, when a goose gets sick or is wounded by a gunshot and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies; and only then do they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their group.

Our culture today applauds individualism and looking after our own needs. People are becoming more and more isolated from one another. But from the animals around us, we learn an important lesson about looking out and caring for each other. The Bible tells us, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 3:4) and, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him” (Rom 15:1-2). Therefore as brothers and sisters in Christ, we have the duty of caring and watching over one another’s physical and spiritual needs. Our time and efforts are limited, so we have to use them wisely. Instead of spending our lunchtime during the Sabbath with our regular circle of friends, talk with a brother or a sister who is alienated or lonely. Instead of spending our free day shopping or sleeping in, take time to contact a sister you haven’t seen in a few weeks. Instead of buying something special for yourself, buy or do something that will help others feel the love of Christ. Instead of mindless chatter, take time to share what’s really in our hearts and to remember each other in prayer. By doing this, we can bear each other’s burdens, and help each other grow in faith and service to the Lord.

D. Offering Intercessory Prayers

There was a family that had three brothers. One day, the elder brother got caught for misbehaving and was commanded by his mother to kneel down and be punished. Just when the mother was about to discipline her oldest son with a bamboo stick, she saw, kneeling beside him, her two other sons. They pleaded, “Mom, if you’re going to beat our brother, you had better discipline us also. We too are guilty of misbehaving.” When the mother heard their pleas, she laid down the bamboo stick and walked away with tears in her eyes.

On another occasion, the two younger brothers were caught getting into trouble. In the same manner, the mother ordered them to kneel down and be punished. As they were kneeling, the oldest brother knelt beside them and said to the mother, “Mom, if you’re going to beat my brothers you may as well beat me, because I was not a good example to them.” Again, the mother was too touched to beat them.

This true story is an illustration of the power of intercessory prayers. Praying for others is something that everyone can do. If we have one simple quality – love – we can become a person of prayer. We can contribute greatly to the works and the growth of the church simply through our sincere prayers for others. In the tabernacle, out of all the utensils used to serve God, the altar of incense is one of the most important. It is the item that is placed just before the veil (Ex 30:6). Each morning and evening, the priest had to offer fragrant incense for endless generations. The incense represents the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3-4; 5:8). This shows us that one of the most important ways that we can serve is by offering unceasing prayers for those in need.

In the Bible, there are great men who prayed for others. Moses stood in the breach before God and prayed for the Israelites even though God told him to no longer pray for them (Ps 106:23). If Moses had not prayed for them, they would have been annihilated. When King Saul was rejected by God, the prophet Samuel said, “Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way” (1 Sam 12:23). Jeremiah was a prophet who prayed with tears for the people of God even though they were proud, disobedient and rebellious towards God. From the experience of Jeremiah we understand that earnest prayers for others are not in vain. Sometimes our prayers have quick answers. Some are answered eventually – Jeremiah’s prayers were answered only after seven years. Because of his prayers, God promised to bring the Israelites back to the promised land after their exile.

We can see that praying for others is very important, as it brings about victory and salvation. We should spend more time each day in ardent prayers before the Lord for the weak brother and sisters, for the faith of our families, and for the gospel to be preached throughout the world.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1

What are some of the reasons why you serve God?

2

Can you identify the things that you can offer to the Lord?

- 3 What are the benefits of offering?
- 4 What percentage of your prayers consist of praying for your own needs and praying for the needs of brothers and sisters?
- 5 Can you share a time when you prayed for someone and what happened as a result?
- 6 Have you done anything to save souls?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Reaching Out to a Stranger

Frank Daily stared down at the frozen ground. He kicked chunks of snow, blackened with car exhaust, to the side. He only pretended to listen to the chatter of his friends, Norm and Ed, as they all clambered aboard the number 10 bus after school. He spouted out automatic answers to their questions: "Yeah, I aced the Milton test.... No I can't tonight. I've got to hit the books."

Frank and his friends flopped down in the back of the Milwaukee City bus along with several other high school boys, some from other schools. The bus belched a gray cloud out the back and headed west on Blue Mound Road.

Frank slouched into his seat. His hands hung from his two thumbs stuffed in the center of his belt. It had been another cold, gray day just a month ago in November when his world had come crashing down around him. He knew that his basketball skills were as good as the other boys. His mother used to call him "the athlete of the season." When he was smaller, she had nicknamed him "Search and Destroy." He smiled at the memory.

The bus lurched away from the curb, and Frank instinctively braced his Nikes against the floor. It must have been my size, he thought. That had to be it. Five-feet-four. "Since I'm new at Marquette High and only a freshman, the coach must have taken one look at me and decided I was too small to make the basketball team."

It wasn't easy going to a new school, especially an all boys Catholic school. The older boys tended to be a bit clannish. It was especially hard for Frank because he had been a star athlete in all the sports in his elementary school. Now, it seemed

Not only had he excelled in athletics before arriving at Marquette; he had also excelled at politics and history in the fifth and sixth grades. He recalled the advice his teacher, Don Anderson, had given him, "Look, Frank, if you'd put as much time into books as you do into basketball, you could do great in both."

Well, Frank thought, Anderson was right about the books at least. My grades have been A's and B's ever since. Basketball is another story.

A loud horn and a screech of brakes somewhere behind the bus startled Frank. He looked at Norm and Ed. Norm was leaning his head against the window with half-shut eyes, his warm breath creating a circle of fog on the glass. Frank rubbed his own eyes. He still remembered how his stomach had chilled into a frozen knot as he approached the locker room last month. He had read the team list posted on the locker room door, hoping, searching frantically for his name. It hadn't been there. It was missing. No name. He had felt suddenly as if he had ceased to exist. Become invisible.

The bus jerked to a stop at the County Institutions grounds. The bus driver called to some noisy boys at the back to settle down. Frank glanced up at the driver, who had been dubbed "Kojak" because of his bald head. A very pregnant woman hung onto the silver handrail and slowly pulled herself onto the bus. As she fell backward into the seat behind the bus driver, her feet kicked up, and Frank saw only stockings were covering her feet.

As Kojak steered the bus back into traffic, he yelled over his shoulder, "Where are your shoes, lady? It ain't more than 10 degrees out there."

"I can't afford shoes," the woman answered. She pulled her fraying coat collar around her neck. Some of the boys at the back exchanged glances and smirked. "I got on the bus just to get my feet warm," the woman continued. "If you don't mind, I'll just ride around with you for a bit."

Kojak scratched his bald head and shouted, "Now just tell me how come you can't afford shoes?"

"I got eight kids. They all got shoes. There's not enough left for me. But it's okay, the Lord will take care of me."

Frank looked down at his new Nike basketball shoes. His feet were warm and snug. Always had been. And then he looked back at the woman. Her socks were ripped. Her coat, missing buttons, hung open around her stomach, as swollen as a

basketball and covered by a smudgy dress. Frank didn't hear anything around him after that. He wasn't aware of Norm or Ed. He just felt a warm thawing in his gut. The word "invisible" popped into his mind again. An invisible person, marginal, forgotten by society, but for a different reason, he thought. He would probably always be able to afford shoes. She probably never would. Under his seat, he pried the toe of one shoe into the heel of the other and slipped it off. Then the other shoe. He looked around. Nobody had noticed. He would have to walk three blocks in the snow. But the cold had never bothered him much. When the bus stopped at the end of the line, Frank waited until everyone else had emptied off. Then he reached under his seat and picked up his basketball shoes.

He walked quickly up to the woman and handed them to her. Looking down, he said, "Here lady, you need these more than I do."

And then Frank hurried to the door and stepped down. He managed to land in a puddle. It didn't matter. He wasn't cold at all.

He heard the woman exclaim, "Look, they fit me just perfect!"

Then he heard Kojak call, "Hey, come back here, kid! What's your name?"

Frank turned round to face Kojak. At the same time, Norm and Ed asked where his shoes were. Frank's cheeks burned in confusion at Kojak, his friends and the woman.

"Frank Daily," he said quietly. "My name is Frank Daily."

"Well, Frank," Kojak said, "I've never seen anything like that in the 20 years I've been driving this bus."

The woman was crying. "Thank you, young man," she said. She turned to Kojak, "See, I told you the Lord would take care of me."

Frank mumbled, "You're welcome." He smiled at the woman, "It's no big deal."

He hurried off after Norm and Ed. It seemed to him that the grayness had lifted. On the way home, he hardly felt the cold beneath his feet at all.

(Barbara A Lewis)

Questions to think about:

1. *We are at our best when we are giving. In fact, we are most like God when we are giving and serving. Looking back over the past week, what have you done to serve God and others?*
2. *What change took place in Frank during the course of the bus ride?*
3. *In the end, Frank experienced the joy and delight that comes with loving and serving others. Have you ever had a similar experience? How do you feel when you are called to serve others?*
4. *Frank simply gave what he had at the time. What are the most prominent gifts or abilities that God has given you? In looking at your gifts, do you feel you are using them?*
5. *Everyone on the bus heard the woman telling the driver of her plight, but only Frank came to her aid. Have you ever seen an opportunity to serve or help others, but failed to do anything about it? Looking around, is there anyone or any area in the church that needs our help now? What can we learn from Frank's actions?*
6. *If we are most like God in our giving and serving, think of how we can be "like God" this week. Whom can you bless with your service? How will you serve? What will you do that will make the moment extra special for God or that person? Plan your service and then carry it out before the end of this week.*

REFLECTION & PRAYER



The Lord Jesus once said, "For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward" (Mk 9:41). What we offer to the Lord may be as small as a cup of water or two small mites. Or we may be like the young Samuel, who was in charge of doing something as seemingly insignificant as "opening the doors of the house of the Lord" (1 Sam 3:15). Nevertheless, we have to realize that God remembers even the smallest thing. Let us therefore, offer to God whatever He has placed in our hands for His ultimate purpose and use.