

LET THE SPIRIT BREATHE . . .



“SERVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY, AS IF YOU WERE SERVING THE LORD, NOT PEOPLE” . . . EPHESIANS 6:7

Compassionate God, train me in my moments of solitude with you to see others as you do, extending your mercy without judgment and serving them without thought to myself. Amen

This month . . . Reflections on

✧ *The Spiritual Discipline of Service* ✧

Secret Service

“Service, as a spiritual discipline, is doing good for others with no thought of ourselves. Although we are commanded to serve others, service also acts as a spiritual discipline as it trains us to be selfless, to get our spirituality beyond our heads and into our hands, to connect with God in everything we do.” Jan Johnson

“The Christian who is truly intimate with Jesus will never draw attention to himself but will only show the evidence of a life where Jesus is in complete control.” Oswald Chambers

Spiritual disciplines facilitate our connection with God. The spiritual discipline of service is directly related to all other disciplines such as Bible study, prayer and meditation, etc. These various disciplines help us get our “heart” right if our “hands” are to be Christ centered in service. We transform ourselves through staying connected to God, shaping ourselves to respond authentically in service. Service can take on many forms but the bottom line is the service of “our hands and our feet” flows out of the “heart of Jesus”. We see our neighbors need as important as our own. We see through the eyes of Christ, setting aside prejudices, hurts, judgments. We serve out of compassion instilled by the movement of the Spirit within our life and in response to God’s radical love. Our service reaches into the lives of any person in need, bringing the touch of Christ into their present situation.

We must be aware that a loss of direction can interfere with our serving if we become wrapped up in our own efforts or service for the sake of service. At this point we lose the God-connectedness of the discipline. “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing . . .” Matthew 6:3. When we stay God centered our service remains focused and purposeful.

Secrecy is a discipline. Secrecy helps us keep in check our true motivation for service. Do we do it for the acknowledgement of others, to feel important or do we do it to make a point? Through the act of ‘secret service’ we stay connected to God, keeping alert to the seemingly insignificant needs of others and responding in spontaneous and creative ways. Service then begins to grow into an intrinsic lifestyle.

Secret Service Exercise: For the next month do one small act of service each day for someone, keeping it unknown to all but God. Make note of your experiences and feelings. How did this experience change your understanding of service?

“Our relationships with others are not only the testing grounds of our spiritual life but also the places where our growth toward wholeness in Christ happens.” Robert Mulholland

“For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3

Spiritual Reflections
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IN THE GARDEN . . .

The symbolism associated with “trees” is service. (Notice the trunk of the tree.)

“SAMARITAN-ISM”

We do it all the time, you know. Without even thinking we make judgments about people who are strangers to us, oh, and even those we know. We see their need . . . and then we quickly assess the person’s value by social or personal standards determining if they deserve our attention, our help. It is so automatic we have to catch and remind ourselves that all are God’s children and worthy of our attention. Why do we err on the side of caution? Perhaps we have learned ‘judgment’ before we learned the ‘worth of all persons’.

In the story of the Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37, Jesus draws a visual picture of a man who responds so naturally to the need of another that he doesn’t even hesitate as to whether or not he is making a wise choice. The Samaritan saw a need and immediately took action. This parable is loaded with layers of prejudices of the times surrounding the characters of the story, yet for a Samaritan, ‘the least of these’ in this society, none of these issues were a consideration.

A Contemporary Samaritan: Several years ago while running errands we found ourselves traveling down a two lane, one-way street in Ogden. The driver in front of us had slowed, pulling his car into the middle of the road so no one could pass him. Then he stopped his car. His wife got out of the car and walked ahead. It was then that we saw a drunk and dirty man stumbling and weaving his way across both lanes of the traffic-filled road. This woman simply took his arm, gave him her support and gently guided him out of harms way. Their response to this man’s need and safety was automatic.

To turn a phrase, it is time to learn how to let our “left hand” respond to the needs of others before our “right hand” can signal judgments.

Reflection moment . . .

What are your prejudices? Think of someone who would be the last person you would want to stop and help. Ask yourself why it would be so difficult to bring ministry to this person. What insights have you discovered about yourself?



The Cleaning Lady

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions until I read the last one:

‘What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?’

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50’s, but how would I know her name?

I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

‘Absolutely,’ said the professor. ‘In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say ‘hello.’

I’ve never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy. <http://www.Spiritual-Short-Stories.com>

Scripture focus:

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:10-11

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing . . .

Matthew 6:3

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” John 12:26

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” Galatians 5:13

In perspective . . .

“The grace of humility is worked into our lives through the discipline of service.” Richard Foster