

The Service Practice

Welcome

The modern West is consumed with self-interest.

In a culture dominated by consumerism and individualism, the message — not just being told to us, but forming us — is that we must “look out for number one.” We are taught, both implicitly and often explicitly, not to **“value others above ourselves,”*** as the Apostle Paul once wrote, but to do the opposite. Even when our lives are disrupted by the needs around us, we can feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of issues we see, paralyzed and uncertain of where to give our attention. Many of us carry a quiet guilt or shame for not doing enough, and yet we still don’t know the path forward. In this time of self-focus and overwhelming need, the practice of service, as taught and modeled by Jesus, is vital. Jesus, **“the Son of Man [who] came not to be served, but to serve,”**** invites us to follow him in radical service that moves us beyond ourselves and into love.

Service that follows compassion, surrendering plans, and expectations.

Service that goes unseen in hidden places.

Service that befriends those we perhaps thought we were above.

Service that, in love, embraces a great cost to ourselves.

In this Practice, we will explore what it looks like to make serving others our way of being in the world — uncovering the why, how, where, and who in Jesus’ vision of service. This kind of service will certainly not just happen in our “me-centered,” self-gratifying world. It will require practice. But if we say yes to Jesus’ invitation to attune and attend to the needs around us, it has the potential to do a deep work — not just through us, but in us.

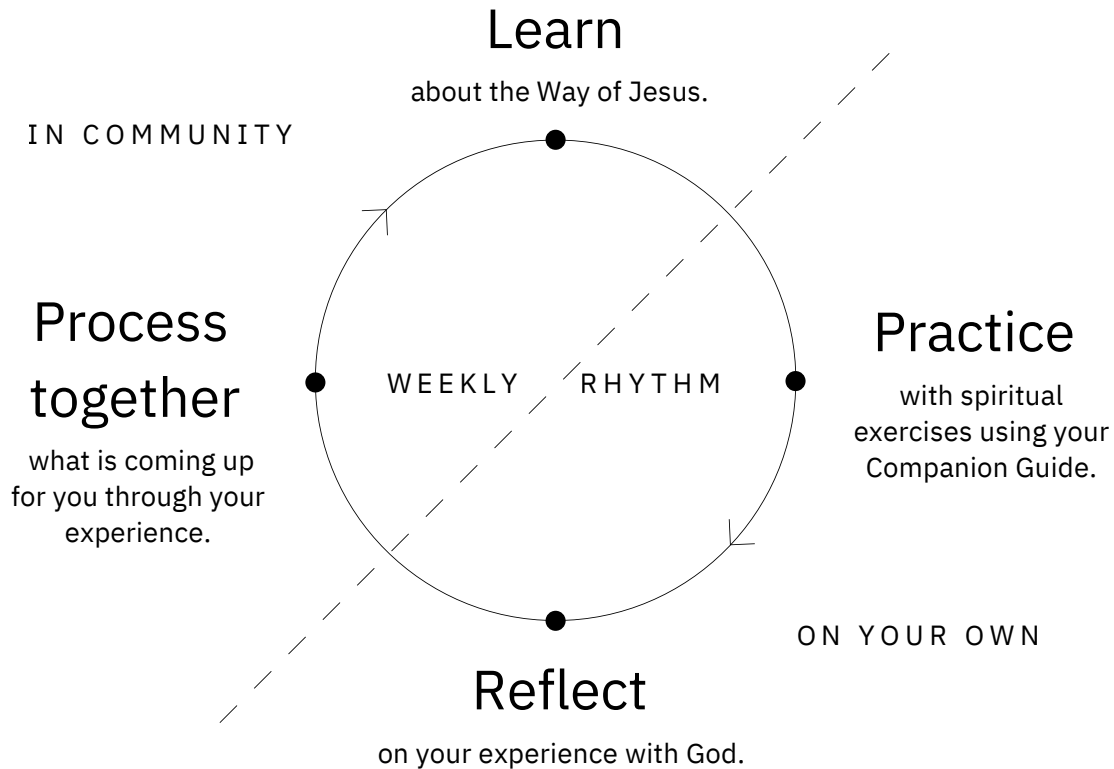
Welcome to the Practice of Service.

* Philippians 2v3

** Matthew 20v28

The Weekly Rhythm

The four sessions of this Practice are designed to follow a four-part rhythm that is based on our model of spiritual formation.



01 Learn

Gather together as a community for an interactive experience of learning about the Way of Jesus through teaching, storytelling, and discussion. Bring your Guide to the session and follow along.

02 Practice

On your own, before the next session, go and **“put it into practice,”** as Jesus himself said.* We will provide weekly spiritual exercises to integrate this practice into your everyday life, as well as recommended resources to go deeper.

03 Reflect

Reflection is key to spiritual formation. After your practice and before the next session, set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on your experience. Reflection questions are included in this Guide at the end of each session.

04 Process together

When you come back together, watch the introduction and then start by sharing your reflections with your group. This moment is crucial, because we need each other to process our life before God and make sense of our stories. If you are meeting in a larger group, you will need to break into smaller sub-groups for this conversation so everyone has a chance to share.

WEEK 01

Love

Overview

Service has always been a defining characteristic of those who apprentice under Jesus.

In the first century, this obscure group, who called themselves “followers of the Way,” took their Rabbi Jesus’ teachings and example seriously. They called the marginalized “brother” and “sister,” cared for the sick at the cost of their own health and reputation, and willingly lived with less so that the needs of others could be met.

In a time when humble service was seen not as a virtue but rather as a duty of the powerless, ordinary people following Jesus chose a wholly different way of relating to those around them.

This kind of life is the result of true spiritual formation — that we would be transformed into people of self-giving love. Maturity, according to Jesus, is not *primarily* measured by our current emotional state, the consistency of our spiritual practices, or even the quality of our moral decisions, but by a life given in loving service to the world around us.

This makes service not just a practice for those of us *in* Jesus’ Kingdom, but a gauge of how much his Kingdom is truly in us.

Opening Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What brought you to the Service Practice? What are you hoping to see God do in your life through it?
- 02 What is one question you would like to explore in this Practice?
- 03 What's your primary feeling around living more deeply into Jesus' vision of service? Excitement? Overwhelmed? Inadequacy?
- 04 Share about a time when someone loved you by meeting one of your practical needs, whether big or small. What made that experience memorable for you?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: [**@journeysherwood**](#)

- 01 What stood out to you from today's teaching?
What feelings came up for you throughout it?

- 02 Consider the implications of Jesus' words about Himself: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." In what ways do these words inspire or challenge you?

- 03 How have you typically measured your spiritual "temperature" or health? How is this the same or different from Jesus' metric of "love expressed through service"?

- 04 Reflect on where you are currently when it comes to practicing service. What could it look like for you to "start where you are"?

Exercise

One act of service

For this exercise, start by serving someone in your family or relational circle, not a stranger. This act could be as small as:

- Cleaning the dishes when you don't need to.
- Getting a cup of coffee for a coworker.
- Running an errand for a neighbor.

You don't need to announce or draw attention to what you're doing – it's okay if it goes unnoticed. Just quietly love this person by meeting a practical need of theirs. And as you serve, let the love of God come through your heart, allowing him to love others through you.

Reach Exercise

Find a place to serve

Begin serving in the context of your local church.

Find out where there is a need in your community, and make yourself available to meet that need. Consider looking for opportunities that are far from the stage: working in children's ministry, setting up early, caring for the facility, greeting or hospitality, or cleaning up after the gathering.

Read

The Active Life by Parker Palmer (Chapters 01-02)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 01)

Practice Reflection

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139 v23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

The South African writer Trevor Hudson has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”*

If you want to get the most out of this practice, you need to do it and then reflect on it.

* Trevor Hudson, *A Mile in My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2005), 57.

Before your next time together with the group for Session 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel joy?

03 Where did I most experience God’s nearness?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

Week 02

Hiddenness

Overview

Where does your imagination go when you consider where you can serve? Perhaps it leads you to your local church, the care home nearby, or the low-income neighborhood in your city.

For some of us, these very well could be the places Jesus is leading us to give more of ourselves — more on that in the sessions to come. But if we consider Jesus' life, and specifically the environments where he chose to serve, we see a recurring theme: Jesus often served in very ordinary spaces — in homes and marketplaces, at water wells and dinner tables, even in what we could call his “daily commute.”

What if our greatest opportunities to practice loving service are not in places we have yet to enter, but where we already are? Familiar places like our offices, homes, and neighborhoods — among people who know us and whom we know in return.

For most of us, serving in these environments is much more challenging than picking up a ladle at a soup kitchen or mowing a stranger's lawn. But when we choose to serve in them anyway, these environments become places of deep formation where we can be transformed into people of love.

Reflection Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 Share about this week's exercise of one act of service: what did you do and what was your experience like?
- 02 What reflections do you have on God's love being expressed through ordinary acts like these?
- 03 What internal motivations do you notice typically driving you to acts like these?
- 04 How did the person you served respond, if at all, and how did their response, or lack of response, impact you?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: @journeysherwood

- 01 What invitations or confrontations did you experience through today's teaching?
- 02 What ordinary, everyday people or places came to your mind as opportunities for service?
- 03 Why do you think we often associate service with more distant contexts rather than with our closest relationships and immediate surroundings? Do you see this tendency in your own life, and why might that be?
- 04 In what ways have you personally experienced the tension between serving for recognition versus serving out of genuine love?

Exercise

This week, we invite you to do one hidden act of service.

It's the same as last week, to find a person in your ordinary life to serve in just one small way, but this time, to try and keep it hidden, or at least, really, really quiet. This might look like:

- Anonymously buying flowers for someone.
- Dropping off a meal for someone in need and not telling anyone about it.
- Volunteering for a local charity, but not telling any of your friends.

As you serve, pay attention to your heart's desire to be seen. Talk to God about it. Let God free your heart from the approval or disapproval of others.

Reach Exercise

For this week's reach exercise, we have a guided listening prayer.

The idea of this exercise is to set aside time to listen to God for where he is leading you to serve.

There are far more needs in the world than any of us could possibly meet. To avoid things like burnout and compassion fatigue, it's very important that we learn to discern where God is leading us to serve to play our small part in his kingdom.

There are five simple steps to this exercise:

- 01 Pick an ordinary environment you're already part of — your home, your neighborhood, your workplace, your church community. The goal is not to find a new cause or place to serve, but to pay attention to where your life already intersects with others.

Circle the environment you want to focus on in your time of prayer:

My home

My workplace

My neighborhood

My church community

ON YOUR OWN — PRACTICE

- 02 Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you — inviting you to discern who He may be drawing your attention to, and how you might serve them in that space.
- 03 Wait. Sit quietly for a few minutes before God with an open heart and a listening posture. Set a timer for yourself if that is helpful.
- 04 Write down anything that comes to mind — whether a person, a need, a specific way to serve, or even just a nudge to be more present somewhere.

- 05 Finally, act on one of those ideas this coming week. Don't wait too long — just respond to the Spirit's promptings.

If possible, write below when and how you plan to act on what the Spirit has led you towards.

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 03, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 What emotions did I feel throughout this exercise?

02 Where did I experience resistance?

03 What invitation(s) from God do I sense here?

Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.



Read

The Active Life by Parker Palmer (Chapters 03-04)



Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 02)

WEEK 03

Availability

Overview

Jesus lived a remarkably interruptible life. More than 30 stories in the Gospel of Mark alone hinge on Jesus' ability to see an interruption as an invitation. And these are just the stories that were recorded from his life. We can never know just how many people received Jesus' loving attention and service in these unplanned moments.

This way of being in the world is about more than our personality — whether we consider ourselves more planned or spontaneous. It's about practicing radical availability — to consider that seemingly annoying distractions in life may actually be holy disruptions.

Some of the most beautiful opportunities for service pass us by unknowingly in the ordinary movements of our days, while our attention is fixed on our plans rather than the people God loves right in front of us. The invitation, by God's grace, is for us to become the kinds of people who increasingly see the needs around us and stop to serve them.

That, like the Good Samaritan in Jesus' famous parable, we might be those who choose not to walk by on the other side but to cross over in compassion.

Reflection Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 Without sharing what you did for this week's exercise, describe your experience. What emotions came up for you before or during it?
- 02 In what ways did you experience personal resistance or confrontation during the exercise?
- 03 What was the same or different for you in your experience of this week's exercise compared to the previous week? Why do you think that is?
- 04 What invitation do you sense from God for how you are to view hiddenness or incorporate it going forward from this Practice?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: [**@journeysherwood**](#)

- 01 Which people or issues do you notice cause you to experience “from-the-gut compassion”?
- 02 On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not interruptible and 10 being very interruptible, where would you place yourself today? What reflections do you have on the number you gave?
- 03 What might be some reasons you find yourself “passing by on the other side” of certain needs around you?
- 04 The invitation here is not to try to meet every need around us. With that in mind, what need(s) do you feel compelled to begin “crossing to the other side” to meet?

Exercise

One unplanned act of service

This week, we invite you to do one unplanned act of service. To embrace an interruption and respond with service instead of impatience or annoyance.

You might consider beginning each day by inviting the Spirit's holy interruptions into your day, or pray the Examen each evening, reviewing the day with God and asking the Spirit to highlight the holy interruptions you engaged or missed.

This at least means going a bit slower through your week, and keeping your eyes open for interruptions that may just be God-initiated. And if no noticeable interruption comes, then just go wherever you see a need, and meet that need.

Reach Exercise

Do an audit of your schedule and cut at least one thing out

For most of us, becoming more interruptible begins with creating more room to be interrupted in the first place.

Look over your weekly schedule, make a list of all your commitments, and ask yourself if you have enough margin in your life to be available for both intentionality and interruptibility. If the answer is no (and it's highly likely it will be), then find at least one thing to step away from to create space to respond to holy interruptions.

- 01 Take a moment to write down all your commitments in a given week. This should include things like household responsibilities, social engagements, leisure activities, and daily habits.

IN COMMUNITY — **LEARN**

- 02 Looking at your commitments, ask yourself: Do I have enough time and space to be intentionally present and interruptible for needs that come up?
- 03 Choose at least one commitment or activity that you intend to remove this week by crossing it out in the above box. This may be something you intend to remove from your weekly rhythm going forward, or just for this week as an offering of space to God.
- 04 Take some time to reflect. When and how will you make this change? How much time does removing this commitment give back to you? How do you feel about making this adjustment?

- 05 Finish your time in prayer. Invite God to fill this time with opportunities to love and serve people in both planned and spontaneous ways.

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 04, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 What emotions did I experience when paying attention to the needs around me?

02 What resistance did I encounter to being interrupted this week?

03 What might God be speaking to me through these interruptions?

Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.

Read

The Active Life by Parker Palmer (Chapters 05-06)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 03)

WEEK 04

Kinship

Overview

We would have to ignore large portions of Scripture to avoid God's concern for the poor and his desire for his people to care for them. In the first century, the poor or "the needy" would have included widows, orphans, or those in prison.

Today, this could be children in the foster care system, a single parent, the sick, the elderly on a fixed income, or refugees.

While our societal order often overlooks these individuals and keeps them on the margins, Jesus' order — or the Kingdom of Heaven — moves them toward equal ground at the center. Jesus so identifies with and cares for the poor that, to follow him, means we must also brush shoulders with the needy. And more than that, we must see *in them* a brother and a sister.

This is what distinguishes service in the way of Jesus: we are invited beyond charity from afar into love up close; to leave ourselves open to the reality that service may not only turn strangers into neighbors but into family.

This is the dignifying destination that true service leads us toward — kinship.

Reflection Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What did you end up doing for this week's exercise of an unplanned act of service?
- 02 How did you notice this exercise impact the way you went about your week, and what you were paying attention to?
- 03 What resistance did you experience to being interrupted?
- 04 How has this exercise impacted the way you see interruptions?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: [**@journeysherwood**](#)

- 01 What stood out to you from the teaching on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?
- 02 How does Jesus' vision for service, not as distant charity but as kinship, inspire or confront you?
- 03 In what ways have you noticed yourself avoiding the kinds of environments or people that Jesus sought out? What might be holding you back from developing relationships in those contexts?
- 04 In what ways can you develop a deeper, more relational approach to serving those who are typically seen as "other" in your life?

Exercise

One act of service to someone in need

In the book of Acts, a synonym for “the poor” is the phrase “those who had need” or “the needy.” In the first century, this would have been: widows, orphans, or those in prison.

In our time, this could be: kids in the foster care system, the elderly living on a fixed income, a single parent, the sick, those dying in hospice, those in prison, or refugees. The reality is all around, often hiding in plain sight, are people who are in need. This week, go serve them.

You can do this through one of two avenues:

- 01 Either through volunteering at a local nonprofit.
- 02 Or go directly to someone you have a relational connection to.

Keep in mind that kinship is often cultivated slowly through regularly serving the same need, among common people – so consider making a commitment to weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly service as you’re able.

Reach Exercise

Take time to listen and learn a person’s story

As you are serving those in need, find a person you feel a leading to, and go listen and learn. Ask them questions about their story. Listen attentively.

One of the most powerful ways we can love others is by listening deeply to their story. The purpose of this exercise is to open your heart to kinship – to see them not as an object of your pity, but as a brother or sister.

Practice Reflection

As you come to the end of this Practice, take 5-10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 What fears or hesitations did I experience?

02 What emotions or thoughts was I surprised by?

03 How did I encounter Jesus through the poor?

Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.

Read

The Active Life by Parker Palmer (Chapters 07-08)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 04)

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he
looks with compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he
walks to do good,

Yours are the hands, with which he
blesses all the world.

So may you, like Christ, go now not to
be served but to serve.