

# The Spiritual Habits of Jesus Series

## Jesus' Habit of Serving Others

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By  
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### At A Glance:

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Jesus' Habit of Serving Others

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Caring for Others While Recovering from Cancer<sup>1</sup>

1. In 2016, while spending nine days in the hospital following the removal of a cancerous tumor, J.P. Moreland tried to serve those who were serving him. While flat on his back, a new nurse came into Dr. Moreland's room to take his vitals. He and the nurse exchanged small talk through polite introductions.
2. As this conversation played out, J.P tried to serve this young woman's spiritual interest by pointing out and attempting to correct a spiritual barrier that was having a harmful effect on this woman's life.
3. How does Dr. Moreland have the character, strength, and focus to be concerned with others at a time when he is personally dealing with something so serious? This is not a natural human response to such a situation—it is a supernatural one. I know enough about J.P. from his writings, listening to his teachings, and hearing from those who know him best, to know that he will be the first person to give credit to Jesus for changing him to be the person he is. The reason he was able to care for this nurse during a very difficult time in his life is because the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, has worked in his soul to create the character needed to respond the way he did.

B. In our self-focused culture, individuals who genuinely care about others and take actions to serve them stand out as a light in the darkness. While plenty of people are willing to serve others in small ways that are convenient for those they like, the number of people gets much smaller for those who are willing to regularly serve those they don't like, even when it is difficult and costly. This way of serving requires the power of God.

C. The ninth spiritual habit observed in the life of Jesus is the pattern of serving others. While Jesus affirms the Bible's command for God's people to serve God and others, He both explains and demonstrates how to live it out in a new and marvelous way. Becoming familiar with the life of Jesus and the extent to which He went to serve others will leave us amazed and humbled. Let's look at what Jesus had to say about serving others through both His words and His actions.

## II. Command to Serve Others

A. For the next spiritual habit discovered in the life of Jesus, we are going to return to the same statement of Jesus as the habit of worshipping with others because Jesus closely connected these two habits:

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; <sup>9</sup> and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Mt. 4:8-10)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Moreland *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 25-26

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 4:5-8

- B. The second element of this command recorded in the Ten Commandments involves service, “and serve Him only” (v. 10). According to Jesus, God requires His people to serve Him. When properly understood, this command is not a heavy-handed demand from an unreasonable superior. Rather, the command to serve God is the natural and proper course of action considering what God has previously done for humanity. The service being offered is a response to God’s previous beneficial actions that His people get to enjoy. God always initiates and acts first, then invites people to respond to what He’s done.
- C. Here is how the apostle Paul frames this command: “<sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (Rm. 12:1). Why is spiritual service being offered to God? Because of everything God has already done for them—the salvation and its benefits that were explained in the preceding chapters communicated through the word, “Therefore”. The disciples also get to receive and live in all the advantages of, “the mercies of God”. Service is an appropriate response to what God has already accomplished. This follows a wider Biblical pattern of the same principle as the people of God serve Him faithfully after they “consider what great things He has done for you” (1 Sam. 12:24). God required the nation of Israel to serve and worship Him AFTER He brought them out of slavery, provided for their needs, and protected them against their enemies. God’s interaction with the nation of Israel on a physical level is a picture of the spiritual realities that God also does with the church. God never expects people to serve Him without first receiving and experiencing the benefits and advantages He provides. Service is always a response to God.
- D. The type of service that pleases God will always be grounded in a knowledge of what God has done on our behalf. Without this foundation for our service to God, our service will be done incorrectly. When people serve God without the proper foundation, it usually results in service being done out of guilt and duty—feeling like they are forced to do it. Until a person understands the depth of what God has done for them, at His initiative, they will be incapable of serving God with a good heart. Proper service of God can’t be faked, it must flow from the inside out. There will be little to no desire to serve God in the heart of a person who fails to understand the work God has done on their behalf. If people think God hasn’t done anything for them, they will also not have a desire to serve Him. Even if they do go through the motions of serving God, they will usually do so with negativity, regret, resentment, and bitterness.<sup>3</sup> Frequently, this kind of service does not last very long.
- E. God honoring service is motivated by a desire to love, please, and obey God.<sup>4</sup> Any other motivation for serving God will be insufficient to carry the load that comes with serving God.<sup>5</sup> Without proper attitudes toward God, service will be done for the wrong reasons. Remember Jesus’ message to the Pharisee about the sinful woman (Lk. 7:36-50)? The type of service God is

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<sup>3</sup> Think of the poor example of Martha (Lk. 10:38-42).

<sup>4</sup> For more on this see chapter seven of Donald S. Whitney, [\*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Serving God is work (Eph. 4:12) that requires sacrifices, time, effort, money, resources, courage, hurt from others, criticism, accusations of wrongdoing, false charges, discouragement, perseverance, persecution, tiredness, etc. Jesus accurately described what serving Him would involve (Mt. 10:16-39).

looking for flows from love for Him. Without a love for God, a person’s willingness to serve Him will be minimal. But for those who love God, serving Him will become a natural ongoing habit of their lives in which they delight.

- F. God honoring service, then, is first and foremost given primarily to God, and secondarily to other people, especially the people of God. On Jesus’ view of service, serving His disciples is a way to serve Him (Mt. 25:34-40, Jn. 21:15-17, Ac. 9:1-4). There is no separation between serving God and serving other people. Rather, serving other people is a way of serving God. As disciples serve other people, even those who don’t deserve it, they reflect the character of God (Lk. 6:35).
- G. God must change a person’s heart so they can serve Him the way He desires (“we serve in newness of the Spirit” Rm. 7:6). Apart from using our own effort to meet the standards of God, God’s Spirit changes our hearts and character so that we can serve Him the way He requires—with a good attitude.<sup>6</sup> (for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure” Phil. 2:13). God must put in us the desire and capacity to serve Him the way He instructs in His Word. Human effort alone can’t create this. Without the work of God in a person’s heart, it will be impossible for them to serve with the right perspective and attitude.<sup>7</sup> Disciples need God to transform their character so they can serve Him from the right perspective and attitude. Our effort comes in to play after God transforms us.
- H. One of the spiritual dangers when it comes to serving God is to do so out of selfishness and self-interest. What might serving selfishly look like? When we serve others, we want to get credit and we care deeply about people noticing what we’ve done. Some people even get upset when they are not properly acknowledged for the things they do or receive positive feedback. Self-focused serving may do the right actions, but with the wrong attitude. Serving others will become very difficult for them when they don’t get something they value in return for their effort. If their serving doesn’t at least make them feel good, they won’t continue. If serving doesn’t bring “success,” they will quit.
- I. Another danger regarding service is that it can be done for the purpose of self-promotion. Frequently, those who serve in this way will only serve those from whom they can benefit from later. They will serve those from whom they can get something they want in return. In this case, the person serving is usually very selective with whom they serve. If the other person can’t repay or help them in any way, the opportunity for service will be passed by. However, those whom the person serving can benefit from (such as a boss or important decision maker) will be served with energy and a good attitude. Jesus, however, suggests we serve those who can’t repay us (Lk. 14:13-14).

### III. Jesus’ Habit of Serving Others

- A. Jesus made two remarkable statements about Himself. As Jesus described Himself to others, He repeatedly drew attention to being a servant of others. In fact, He said this was part of His mission in life (“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” Mt. 20:28).<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, 5:9

<sup>7</sup> For the specific qualities involved with such an attitude, see the Questions For Further Thought below; question D.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 10:45

notion of serving others is not some abstract notion for Jesus as He also says, “I am among you as the one who serves.” (Lk. 22:27). To “serve” is to attend to the wants and needs of others.<sup>9</sup> Jesus claimed His life was focused on helping and caring for others.

- B. As the life of Jesus is carefully observed, you will see a person who served those around Him in a way that no other human being has been capable of reproducing. Jesus stands alone in the manner He served those He encountered. Jesus consistently lived for the well-being, growth, and benefit of others. To get a picture of how involved Jesus was in serving others, a snapshot can be seen by reading Matthew chapters eight and nine. Jesus’ days were filled with service to others as He navigated from one person to another, doing good for them. Every time Jesus turned around, someone else was asking for His help with their personal needs and He served them.
- C. Jesus taught His disciples to serve others by “going the extra mile,” even when the person they are serving wants to mistreat them (Mt. 5:38-42). Jesus demonstrated how to live out this principle of service many times. As we examine the life of Jesus and pay attention to the extent to which He went to serve those around Him, we see Jesus fulfilling this extremely difficult principle in the harshest of conditions. Jesus served others not only when it was easy, but also when it was most challenging. Jesus not only served those He loved, but we also observe Him serving His enemies the same way He served those He loved. Jesus served out of His character, not based on who He was helping. Time will not permit an in depth look at the situations in which Jesus served, but the following list is helpful.
- D. Jesus served others when He was tired, hungry, and thirsty (Jn. 4:3-8). After a physically exhausting half day of travel, Jesus decided to take a rest by a well, hoping for some water to drink, as the disciples went to the nearest town to get some food. Jesus was depleted in all His physical needs. Yet, when the opportunity arose, He served without reservation. It is also significant to note who Jesus served: 1) a morally questionable woman and 2) religious compromisers who corrupted the message of God. This event provides a good introduction to Jesus’ habit of service.
- E. While Jesus was tired and in need of rest, as He attempted to get away from the crowds, people found Him and put Him to work. Even when Jesus rightly tried to care for His own needs, He joyfully served others (Mt. 15:21-28).
- F. Jesus served when He was emotionally disturbed and going through a challenging circumstance (Mt. 14:13-14). Jesus had just received some very difficult news, so Jesus withdrew by Himself for some time alone. However, a large crowd followed Him and didn’t allow Him to process His personal tragedy. Jesus still felt compassion for them and served their needs (while neglecting His own) during a time of bereavement.
- G. Jesus entered the lives of others. He cared for them spiritually by helping them understand God, how He works in the world, and what He wants from their lives. While doing this, the disciples made Jesus’ life more difficult by tempting Him to disobey God (Mt. 16:22-23). Jesus served when it made His personal life more challenging.

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<sup>9</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Bible Word Study on Mt. 20:28 “serve”

- H. Similarly, Jesus served to such an extent that it disrupted His life (Mk. 3:20). Jesus' schedule was thrown into chaos as a direct result of His willingness to serve those around Him. It didn't take long for people to start interrupting Jesus' normal activities to make requests for His help. While Jesus did set up appropriate boundaries, He still served, knowing it would create greater demands on His time and schedule.
- I. Studying Jesus' habit of service leads to the observation that Jesus did not just serve the people He liked and got along with; He also served the people who bothered Him (Mt. 17:14-18). Individuals who were a drain on Jesus, took energy from Him, and were emotionally burdensome had their needs met by Jesus.
- J. Repeatedly, Jesus served people whom others dismissed (Mt. 19:13-15, 20:29-34, Lk. 15:1-7, Jn. 4:39-41). While others didn't think certain individuals or groups were worth their time or service, Jesus took a different path and served those who others ignored and neglected. Jesus was humble enough to serve the lowly and marginalized.
- K. Jesus served others even when it caused physical pain, discomfort, and cost Him his life (Mt. 20:17-19, Lk. 22:50-51, Jn. 10:11).<sup>10</sup> Jesus' death brought about spiritual good to humanity, including those who mistreated Him (Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 2:2). Provisionally, Jesus provided the opportunity for every person to experience a pardon from God for their spiritual good, not excluding those who put Him to death. Specifically, Jesus physically healed one of the people who were participating in arresting Him.
- L. Jesus served those who abandoned and disappointed Him (Mt. 26:33-35). Jesus cared for and did a lot of good for the disciples for around three years. After everything Jesus did for them, the disciples let Him down. Yet, Jesus continued to serve them.
- M. Jesus served those who wouldn't return the favor (Mt. 26:36-42). Jesus served the disciples far more than the disciples ever served Him. Their relationship was greatly unbalanced. Jesus had supported the disciples through their personal problems, but they did not return the favor. At the end, when Jesus needed them the most, they didn't support Him in prayer for only one hour.
- N. The list of ways Jesus served those He interacted with continues. Jesus served others to the extent that His own physical needs were neglected (Mk. 6:31). Jesus served to the extent that He sacrificed significant amounts of time (Mk. 1:33-37). Jesus served those who didn't listen to Him (Mk. 1:40-45). Jesus served people He had minimal contact with—strangers (Mk. 5:15-19). Jesus served people even when others were against it (Lk. 14:1-4). Jesus served individuals who were ungrateful (Lk. 17:11-18). Jesus served people even when they didn't know it (Lk. 22:31-32). Jesus cared for others while in extreme physical agony (Lk. 23:26-31). Jesus worked for the spiritual good of those who were causing Him physical harm (Lk. 23:33-34). Jesus served a person who had previously hurt Him (Lk. 23:39-43→Mt. 27:44). Jesus served others, even when their request was illegitimate (Jn. 2:1-7). Jesus served people when He knew their hearts

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<sup>10</sup> If Luke 23:34 is authentic, there is some doubt about this, Jesus asking the Father to forgive those who were overseeing His crucifixion because they didn't understand what they were doing (likely referring to who they were killing and the gravity of their actions). Some think that this verse, even if not originally in Luke, records a historically accurate event in the life of Jesus. Richard C. Blight, [An Exegetical Summary of Luke 12–24](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 507.

weren't right (Jn. 4:47-50). Jesus served those who were trying to kill Him (Jn. 5:18-25). While dying, Jesus served the interests of others (Jn. 19:26-27). Jesus served those who used Him for their own personal benefit—the spiritually uninterested (Jn. 6:2-5, 26-27). Jesus served others at personal risk (Jn. 7:30-31). Jesus served those He loved (Jn. 11:14-15, 33-36, 41-44, 13:1-12)—and the person who betrayed Him. Jesus attempted to serve the individual who decided to abuse and kill Him (Jn. 18:33-38). The weight of this list is overwhelming.

- O. After becoming familiar with Jesus' habit of service, the natural response is amazement, admiration, and an acknowledgment that He is better than anyone else in His character and actions. Jesus' self-description of being a servant is trustworthy and accurate. While Jesus' example can lead to embarrassment, shame, and guilt, the purpose of this list for disciples is twofold. First, this list is intended to put the magnificence of Jesus on display to increase our love for and devotion to Him. Second, it reminds us of who we really are (we aren't as good as we think we are) and to show us how much farther we must go spiritually to be like Jesus. Jesus' example is our spiritual mirror—it accurately reflects who we are. Hopefully Jesus' example motivates us to keep growing spiritually because we all have a long way to go.
- P. Jesus served His enemies, those who caused Him excruciating physical pain and unjustly killed Him, better than I serve the people I love most in this world. How can I respond to Jesus with anything other than worship and a confession of His superiority?
- Q. When I pay attention to my own heart, I realize I have a worse attitude serving my family, even when it might only take a few minutes to a few hours, than Jesus had serving those who harmed and mistreated Him; He made a much more significant sacrifice. Jesus puts me to shame in the way He served those He encountered. After many years of following Jesus, I still need God to do a lot more work in my heart, soul, and character so I can be the person I desire to be.
- R. Jesus said those who look at Him see God (Jn. 14:9). Jesus is the clearest, most accurate expression of the heart and character of God. Since Jesus went to such a great and sacrificial extent to serve the best interests of others consistently, this should be the lens through which we interpret the events of our lives. For disciples, God uses every situation to bring about our ultimate good—becoming like Jesus. Considering Jesus' example, how can we question God's motives on our behalf? We can see how good Jesus is. Why do we so easily doubt and question God's integrity and intentions? How will Jesus' example change your understanding of who God is?

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Here is some encouragement for those of you who have been serving God faithfully even in the midst of discouragement, lack of visible results, difficult circumstances, or anything else that may decrease your energy or willingness to serve Jesus: <sup>10</sup>For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. <sup>11</sup>And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6:10-12).

B. Every act of service to God will be rewarded (Mk. 9:41). Your work for God is not meaningless (1 Cor. 15:58). Don't lose heart! The results are coming, and they are guaranteed (Gal. 6:9-10). Remember to look to Jesus as our example. He was glorified and rewarded for His faithfulness after His earthly life was over (Heb. 12:3). Serving in the kingdom of God is difficult and costly work, but it is greatly rewarded and is worth any sacrifice.

**V. Questions for Further Thought**

- A. What are some of the most meaningful actions someone else has done for you?
- B. Select another example from the life of Jesus to examine:
  - 1. What situation is Jesus currently in?
  - 2. How might Jesus be feeling and what could His state of mind be?
  - 3. In what ways does Jesus serve?
  - 4. With what attitude does Jesus serve?
- C. Why did the unfaithful servant act the way he did (Mt. 25:14-30)? How might this relate to people's lack of serving God?
- D. What are the characteristics and qualities that make the type of service that pleases God possible (Ac. 26:7, Rev. 7:15, 22:3, Rm. 12:11, Gal. 5:13, Eph. 6:7, Col. 3:22, Heb. 12:28, Dt. 10:12-13, Ps. 100:2)?
- E. How might God want you to serve Him with what He's given you in this present season of life?