

Offering Service.

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[0 : 00] I'm learning the unforced rhythms of grace, just to let you know that I've not been very well this week, so I might be a little bit more emotional than I normally am. Watch out for the river of tears.

Yeah, let's read this, let's read the first scripture. It's from Mark 10, 35-45. I'm reading from the NIV if you've got a Bible and you're getting confused about what's happening.

Let's just have a quick read. Oh, I am so sorry. You know, every time I do the font, can everybody see that? No, neither can I. Should be interesting then, shouldn't it? You'll have to look it up in your Bibles if you can't see it.

Sorry about that. So the heading is the request of James and John. If you look at it in Matthew, it's the request of James and John through their mother, which is really weak, I think.

The sons of thunder, really. But there you go. The request of James and John. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

[1 : 17] How many times have we been to God like that? Just do what I want you to do, God, will you? Stop messing about. What do you want me to do for you, he asked.

They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with?

Oh, we can, they answered. If only they'd have known, eh? Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.

But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they've been prepared. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John, not surprisingly really.

Jesus called them together and said, You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

[2 : 28] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all.

For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

May God bless his word to us, eh? So, we're on slide four now, I think. So, I'm speaking on the last of the nine practices or spiritual disciplines that we've been looking at in church.

It's quite strange when I look through these glasses. I can't recognize anybody. Yeah, that's better. So, we've been looking at these nine sort of spiritual practices or disciplines, if you want to call them that.

Discipline is not a word we like, is it really, very much. Not one of my favorite words. But we've been looking at it as a church to do our part as individuals, to do what we've been saying as a church we want to do, which is to spend time with Jesus, become more like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

[3 : 41] And by his Holy Spirit, do what he wants us to do today. Just to remind you what the nine practices have been, if you want to look back at the sermons, which I believe are all on the Tinterweb, as Peter K would call it.

There's Sabbath, the practice of Sabbath, of solitude, prayer, fasting, scripture, community, generosity, not sure about that one, witness, and finally, today, service.

And we look at those, and we sometimes cherry-pick them out, don't we, as being, oh, I can do that, I can do that, I'm not keen on that fasting, not keen on that one. Solitude, sometimes maybe, but most of the time I like to be in community.

But the fact is that these are all there as a trigger for us to do what we've been saying, to get closer to Jesus, to become more like Jesus, and to do what Jesus did.

And it's also worth remembering that they're not formulaic, it's not like putting coins into a vending machine, you know, you put these nine coins in and out comes your hot chocolate, or out comes spirituality, ready, topped off with a nice, you know, bit of whipped cream and a flake stuck in it.

[5 : 02] It's not like that. It's not formulaic. It's worth remembering that these practices that we do should be an expression, a response of our love and gratitude to God in forgiving us our sins.

Alan's been talking about that this morning. I like it when Alan leads, by the way, because there's a good chance I'll not be the first person to cry in church that day. But it's a response of our love and our gratitude to God in forgiving our sins and pouring His grace, His undeserved favour, into and onto our lives.

But remember, it's the Holy Spirit that does the lifting, the heavy lifting, isn't it? Transforming our hearts and minds and attitudes to enable us to do all this.

You can't do the Christian life on your own, guys. Don't try doing it in your own strength. You can't do it. We'll stick a pin in that bit and come back to it. Let's think about service then.

Okay, slide five then. Firstly, what are we talking about when we're talking about service? Well, service can be anything you do to meet the needs of another. And so, for example, my grandma was in service up at the big house near Grimston, near Melton Mowbray when she was young.

[6 : 27] And there's a picture of her up there, as you can see. My grandfather there, Mr. Carson. Mr. Barrow. Ooh. Yes, he was up there.

No, they're not really, Matt, as you can tell. Downton fans. By the way, September, new movie coming out, just to let you know. Big Downton fan. What a wuss, eh? There you go. But service can be anything, really, that you do for other people or for another person or for a group of people. So the National Health Service aims to provide for the medical needs of the country. We've got the services, the armed forces, police, fire, ambulance, etc. But it's important to remember that in reality, it can be pretty much anything service.

So don't decry the small things. A kind word. A helping hand. A prayer for someone at just the right time. Making someone a cup of tea.

Thanks, tea team, by the way, on a Sunday morning. A smile. A getting the Hoover out to try and clear up what I thought on Wednesday when we came for the prayer meeting looked like a scene out of June.

[7 : 40] It was covered in dust. This place was covered in dust. So well done to those people who managed to get out and put their back into cleaning it up. Great act of service. Let's not decry it.

It can be just emphasising or listening to someone. Having compassion or feeling for someone. Let's not diminish what we call the small things. And they can be really powerful in winning people to Jesus.

Of showing the compassion of Jesus. service. Okay. But in serving like Jesus there's an extra dimension that we should take into account or one or two dimensions really as we serve. In serving like Jesus true service it's not natural. It's supernatural.

And that's why it's so important we do it alongside God's Holy Spirit that we understand that actually we can't do it alone. It's a supernatural thing. So what on earth do I mean by that?

[8 : 52] Well you see my instinct I don't know about you is to want things and people to serve me. To serve my purposes.

To suit me. To be done at my convenience. To make me feel good. Naturally I would want the order reversed. I would like to be served. Thank you very much.

Yes please get me one of those. Thank you very much. Thank you. You may go and ask others. You know I like that idea. It appeals to me. But right back in Genesis 3 verse 4 when Eve is being tempted into taking fruit off the tree of the tree of knowledge and good and evil the line from the serpent is you won't certainly die.

You'll be like God. God told them that we'd die if they actually took that. But actually no. Satan says no. That's not true. And in a sense in our lives you know Satan comes to us and says that doesn't really matter.

You've got this to do. You don't need to serve in that way because actually it's inconvenient for you. It's not right to do that. You know step back a bit.

[10:07] Step back a bit. You know look after yourself. And the line from the serpent about you'll be like God is something that really appeals to us.

says the fruit of the tree was good for food. It will satisfy me. It was pleasing to the eye. It will look good.

My position will look good. And also desirable for gaining wisdom. Hmm. Sounds like I can be my own boss. Sounds like I can be independent of God here.

I can make my own judgments. Since that point that's the base level of the human condition. Make no moans about it. It exists in all of us. This independence, this desire to make our own decisions, to do our own thing.

And if you look at the world in its current state, you see the results of it. Next slide. John Mark Comer writes in his book, which has been sort of our, well it's been sort of our base level hasn't it really, that we've been looking at really in terms of practicing the way of doing these things that we've been talking about.

[11:26] Puts it this way, he says, think of the raging epidemic of injustice in modern society. The racism, the bigotry, the political polarization, or the growing chasm, that's an interesting word, we've already heard that, haven't we?

The growing chasm of inequality between the rich and poor and the haves and have nots.

Sociologists tell us our society is more divided than it's been since the Civil War.

That's sober and stuff really, isn't it? Sober and stuff. So, again, let's stick a pin in that because we need to come back to that.

Because we need to be the answer to that. Sobering. We need to be the answer to that, not part of that, but the answer to it.

I can't count the number of times I've got into political arguments with people. Well, you know, it'd be better if we had the other side in. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no.

[12:37] Look at what they've done the last 14 years, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's fine, it's okay, as long as it goes no further than that, but it shouldn't be a source of division amongst us. Shouldn't be a source of division.

We shouldn't become polarised, we should be able to see the wood for the trees. And God helps us to do that when we get close to him. And what we put over to other people, just remember, I can't remember what the exact scripture was about putting the coat on, yeah, putting on a nature, putting on the nature of God.

And so often we put on a spiky nature which is actually political activist or, you know, somebody who disapproves of something. And what people come up against is they come up against that rather than this coat of acceptance and love and warmth.

Let's be careful about how we, what we actually show to people, of what of our nature we actually show to people. Second point I'd like to say, Jesus' purpose in service was to do the will of his father.

And what was that purpose? Well, John 3, 16 sums it up, doesn't it? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. He gave something that he didn't have another one of.

[14:05] Weird to think of that in terms of God, isn't it? But to give up part of his own nature, to give up one facet of the triune God, it's weird, very, very deep, I guess.

I've not got a mind for that kind of stuff, but God gave up something he had nothing else he could give or hold on to. he gave up Jesus.

So that all who believe in him will not perish, but have eternal life. I don't know about you, but following Jesus' example like that is a real challenge.

challenge. I don't fancy dying to follow Jesus. I don't fancy even giving up my life and my rights if I'm being honest, so that people who are lost and perishing might have eternal life.

my natural instinct is to say, what's in it for me? That would be my natural response. But when Jesus said, take up your cross and follow me, he wasn't joking.

[15:22] We all like to think ourselves as being Christians, following the way Jesus lived. We don't like to think about following Jesus in his death and in his suffering.

He wasn't joking. He wasn't joking. To go to the cross means denying what you would want and doing what God would want.

And Jesus demonstrated that beautifully in Gethsemane. You think he wants to go to the cross? Did he really want to go to the cross at that point? He certainly didn't. I think that's pretty clear, isn't it?

Father, if it's possible, let's do this another way.

Let's do this another way. But that's real service, isn't it? That's real service. What else can we learn from Jesus' example of serving then on slide nine?

The attitude of a servant is to be content in performing the lowest task. This makes me chuckle and weep in equal parts, really. I'm just going to read it out.

[16:31] I'm not sure whether I've got it on the screen or not, but Jesus washes the disciples' feet in John 13. It was just before the Passover festival and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave the world and go to the Father.

I do apologise by the way, some of these scriptures have cropped up in different things as we've gone through. I know that, but I think it's important. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

Okay? Having loved his home who were in the world, he loved them to the end. So he'd done everything he needed to do, right, off you go, see you later, I'm off boys. No. The evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. He knew that this was a voluntary decision he was making. I think that's important. And that he'd come from God and was returning to God.

And so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. This is Jesus. After that, he poured water into a basin.

[17:42] This is Jesus. And began to wash the disciples' feet. This is Jesus. Drying them with a towel that was wrapped around them.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you don't realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand.

No, no. You're never going to wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Back off, Simon, in a funny sort of way.

I'm doing something here that's special, that's going to set an example. Back off. You need to let me do this. Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, not one to give up, Simon Peter.

Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. Everybody else can have their feet washed, that's fine, but I am so holy, I'm so special, that I need you to wash all of me.

[18:49] We need to be very careful actually in church, particularly if we've got a position of authority, leadership, or service, that it doesn't become about us.

I am the person that, and that can be at any level. You need to be careful, because we're all called to serve one another.

Jesus said, he must have been despairing at this point. Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet, their whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you, for he knew he was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

When he'd finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I've done for you? He asked. You call me teacher and Lord and rightly so, for that is what I am.

I'm denying that. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. If it's good enough for me, it's good enough for you.

[20:06] I've set you an example that you should do as I have done. Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Just analyze that a little bit. Why was the meal in progress before they'd even had a wash?

I've thought about that. Do you think it's because everybody was waiting around to be served? I think it might have been, you know, they've all settled down there. Well, may as well start then.

Nobody's coming around and washed feet, are they? But Jesus did. Jesus recognized that. So there's this mistake number one from the disciples. The second thing then is Peter being so defiant and resisting to be served.

He wants to mark himself out as being more important, more respectful to Jesus. He wants to be different, but he doesn't understand that leading the way Jesus leads means an attitude of service to each other.

[21:16] It's not like the boardroom of the apprentice. Yes, Lord sugar. Yes, Lord sugar. Yes, Lord sugar. No, Lord sugar. Three bags full, Lord sugar. Three bags full of sugar. Didn't you realize that

was going to happen?

Or the Lord of the manor. Peter was right in recognizing Jesus as Lord and teacher, but wrong in that he didn't recognize that all the disciples at that point and Jesus himself were servants of God. Even Jesus at that point was a servant of God at that point, including Jesus at that time. And all had been sent by God.

Had to happen. If Jesus identified with that servanthood, then everyone else should have done that. I'm going off a little bit of a tangent here, but I felt as I was reading through the book again and prepping this, and we needed to say this.

For us, as people who want to serve in this church, want to be part of this going forward. It's transformation, not confirmation. Slide 10.

[22 : 27] To truly serve in the way, as I've said before, that Jesus served is supernatural. Romans 12 verse 1 to 2 says, I've got something wrong there, but there we are.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. Sorry, Lord, can't do it, but I can do it through your Holy Spirit. holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world.

Don't be like Alan Sugar. Don't be like, much as I like the guy, I'm not going to do anything against Alan Sugar, I want you to think that, but don't take on those value systems when you're in church. Let's put those to one side. That sense of worth, that what we do represents our worth to God, that's not true. That's not true. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

[23 : 39] Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Such a special scripture to me, this moment in time. I don't know about you, but I see more and more sometimes, you know, the further you go on, the more and more you see your own weaknesses, don't you?

I think God has a way of doing that in your life. And I see just how much I conform to that idea of position, authority, how much I ride that horse, if you like.

Then it goes on in verse 3, Paul says, by the grace given me, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Don't despair, but realize that your nature ain't great. It's not good. It's full of flaws. And you need God to help you.

Then the passage goes on to respect the fact that we're not all the same. Individuals have various gifting. So what Paul's saying is get on and use your gifts.

[24 : 59] Get on and serve. Use your gifts. That's what he's saying. But do it. The underlying factor here is a service in love.

Do it in love. Love one another. Be devoted to one another. Be devoted in service to one another. Honor one another above yourselves.

Verse 10. Keep your spiritual further serving the Lord. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Live in harmony with one another.

Don't be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. And that also translates as or be willing to do the menial work to take up that position of servanthood.

In Philippians 2 it says, therefore if you have any encouragement, anybody got any encouragement from being united with Christ this morning? Would you like to raise your hand?

[26 : 04] Yeah? Encouraged by being part of great stuff. Any comfort from his love? Do we get comfort from God's love this morning? I forget to put my own hand up. If any common sharing in the spirit, do we share in the spirit?

Any tenderness and compassion? Oh, I've got none of that me, I'm a really hard guy. And Paul says, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love.

What love? Being one in spirit and of one mind. The love of Jesus. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Nothing. Don't do anything out of that.

Rather in humility, value others above yourselves. That's not natural. Not looking to our own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

In your relationships, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. who, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be

used to his own advantage.

[27 : 19] Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Did not consider something, equality with God, something to be grasped, to be kept on.

He didn't consider it. He had every right to stay where he was. Just like sometimes we have every right not to serve.

but rather he made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, as a man who he helped to create.

That wasn't enough though. He took the lowest position. he humbled himself further, and became obedient to death at the hands of his own creation.

You took all my guilt and shame when you died, and rose again. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God.

[29 : 03] Next slide, please, Josh. Let's just think just a little bit more about motives and service then. Some things are just required, a required response to a simple situation, and we almost instinctively quite often know what the right thing to do is, from a compassionate heart response to a situation.

But serving should never become about attention, or recognition, or just simple expectation of others. We don't serve for the purposes that the world serves for.

people. Now, I'm not decrying some excellent work that non-Christian organisations do. I'm not decrying that, because if I'm being dead honest, I believe it's the deposit of God in humankind.

That's what I believe. They might not understand why they do it sometimes, but that compassion comes from God, I believe. But we don't want to simply conform.

in our survey. Going back to Romans 12, 2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed. Both verbs are in the present passive imperative. Oh, yeah.

[30 : 26] I know about this. Impressive, that, isn't it, eh? John Winter, eat your heart out. That's all from John Mark Cobra. It's nothing to me.

But what it basically means is, we're either being conformed or we have to be transformed. We have to work at that idea of transformation.

It's worth noting that actually, John Mark Cormier suggests that actually, when Paul's actually writing this letter, he's writing to the Romans, yeah?

And the Roman culture was to make everything that they conquered, all the people in that region, Roman. In every way, shape, or form. They wanted to impose a way of living that was Roman.

But Paul wanted to make the Romans into Christians. Yeah? It's worth noting that our default setting as inhabitants of this world is if we are not active to just be conformed.

[31 : 35] That's us. This world will cause us to be that. So we need to work at being transformed. It says, if we don't take our discipleship of Jesus seriously, the odds are very high that we will become less like Jesus over time and more like the world.

I think it's really important to remember this in the wider context of our service and our time, if you like, our devotion to God.

We need to work hard at it. It used to be a dirty word in Christian circles, working hard. It was all by grace. I don't need to do anything. And to some extent, I've been affected with that idea over the years.

But I do know God wants to spend time with me. And if I don't make time to be with God, that seems a bit counterproductive. So what happens next?

Let's think back about our service. It's important to note that the command to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit is not a command to do nothing.

[32 : 54] Okay? We could easily say, ah, do nothing out of vain, ambition or well, I'm pretty conceited really. I've got a lot of selfish ambition. I don't think I'll do anything. That's not really what he's trying to say.

Don't hide your motives in service. Bring them to God. Bring them to God. Don't use it as an excuse to stay away from God.

Let's be honest before God. Lord, you know, and I accept that fall down in this area. I'm proud.

Forgive me for looking down on that person, even if I feel justified at times because they screw up so often.

Help me to think of them as being better than me. Help me to keep working on serving them. You know, the devil hates it when we're honest with God, don't you? And he'll try to get you to keep your motives in the dark.

locked up inside. Because he's the accuser of the brethren, the father of lies. But if you do confess your sins, God's word says he's faithful and just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

[34 : 13] to make your motives right before him so you can serve. Hebrews 12 says, therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off.

Let's throw off these attitudes. Let's throw off this independence of God. Let's throw off this sense of being better than other people. Everything that hinders and entangles us.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and I like this bit, the perfecter of our faith, who makes our weak faith sometimes special, makes it good in his sight.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

If Jesus suffered that way, don't be surprised that you're going to suffer a little bit, but be encouraged that you can go through it with his help. Final thought, sorry if I've gone on a little bit more.

[35 : 24] Healing and blessing, whatever we do, wherever we are, whatever role we have, or choose to play, we have the opportunity to serve as Jesus served, to follow his example, as we walk closely with him, confessing our weaknesses, asking for his help, by his indwelling Holy Spirit, God will inevitably use you to bring healing to others, but also the blessing is, he will bring healing to you.

He'll challenge, and he'll change you. you'll find a new freedom as you seek to make others your priority.

You'll quickly realize you are the one being helped, being set free from your own agenda, as God gives you his, from your own self-love, as God gives you a sense of his love for you, your own sense of ego, self-entitlement, self-obsession, because you've come to recognize who you are, but know that God loves you just the same.

back to John Mark Comer again, he's featured quite heavily, you'll notice. When you serve in the way of Jesus, in the way of Jesus, lines blur between servant and served, giver and recipient, both give, both receive, dignity is restored in one, freedom is one in the other.

It's only right to give the last word to Jesus really, though, isn't it? What do you think? John 13, 12, 17. Do you understand what I've done for you?

[37 : 35] You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, as Alan was saying earlier on, washed your sins away, forgiven you, put you on a new path, poured grace into your life.

I've set you an example that you should do as I have done. Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Thank you Lord. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

I came up with three questions for myself, which I'm just going to share with you, and you can choose to mull them over before God if you want. First one is, am I being transformed more or less like Jesus?

Am I becoming more or less like Jesus in the area of my service? Is God challenging me on my motives for service?

[39 : 04] Do I need to ask him to consecrate my service to him? Do I need to invite him into the areas that I serve and say, change my heart, Lord? Change my heart.

Is God challenging me to move into an area of service for him, perhaps for the first time, some new area of service? That's for you and God to mull over together.

Let's pray.