

Session Three



Serve One Another

As believers in Christ, we have the freedom to “do good” unto others—and the research is clear that as we do, it does a lot of good to ourselves. It is actually in our best interests to look out for the interests of others. Happiness happens not when we seek to bring joy to ourselves but as we embody this simple principle from Paul: “Brethren . . . do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13 NKJV).

MAX LUCADO

Opening Reflection

Jesus' teachings were full of paradoxes—ideas that were countercultural to the way things had always been done:

“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39).

“If anyone wants to sue you and takes your shirt, hand over your coat as well” (5:40).

“The last will be first, and the first will be last” (20:16).

In today's study, you will explore a similar paradox given by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “With humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3 *NASB*). In the same vein, Paul also instructs his readers not to use their newfound liberty in Christ in a selfish way, “but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13 *NKJV*).

In a world where the conversation is all about self-care, it is easy to overlook the value of serving others and viewing them as more important than ourselves. The message from our culture is if you're feeling unhappy, you should focus more on your own happiness. Take a vacation, get a massage, eat an ice cream cone.

While taking care of ourselves and enjoying simple pleasures isn't wrong, we can take self-care to the extreme of self-focus. And too much self-focus does not bring happiness but rather self-destruction. When we examine our lives under a microscope, we are sure to see everything that is wrong with our situation. On the other hand, when we focus on serving others, we can zoom out of our own lives and see others' lives more clearly. The question changes from "*What do I need?*" to "*What do they need?*"

As we practice the act of serving others, we realize making someone else smile brings a smile to our own faces. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (58:10). Doing good truly does the doer good.

Seeking joy by serving others is a little counterintuitive, a little upside down, a little paradoxical. Yet this is often the way of Christ—who, by the way, once said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Talk About It

Begin your group time by inviting anyone to share his or her insights from last week's personal study. Next, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What are some of the most memorable things that others have done as acts of service for you?

—or—

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

- What are some of the most memorable ways that you have served others?

Hearing the Word

Invite someone to read aloud Matthew 20:26–28. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

²⁶ Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

In what ways did that represent a new insight?

Who is someone you consider to be great? Who is someone you consider to be a servant?

Video Teaching Notes

Play the video segment for session three. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

It is in your best interest to look out for the interests of others! The way to make yourself smile is to first make someone else smile.

The Bible has its share of saints spurred by a gut-level conviction that God had called them to a specific task. As a result, their work wasn't affected by moods, cloudy days, or rocky trails.

Anyone who appreciates Paul's epistles owes a debt of gratitude to Peter. And anyone who has benefited from the faith of Peter owes a debt to the servant spirit of Andrew.

To describe Epaphroditus, Paul used words like *brother*, *co-worker*, *fellow soldier*, and *messenger*. These are compliments earned over years and tears.

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

Let all unassuming people of the world be reminded: God can *use* you. And let all proud people be cautioned: God will *correct* you.

We are valuable to God, but not indispensable. We do nothing apart from the hand of God. It's a principle Jesus had to teach to two of his own disciples: James and John.

After the resurrection, we read how Jesus, the unrivaled Commander of the Universe, invited his friends to sit down and have a bite to eat. What's more, he does the same for us today.

What would happen if everyone truly decided to take on the role of a servant by turning the focus off themselves and putting it on others?

Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. When you are feeling low, sad, or depressed, what do you typically do to try to make yourself feel better? Does it work? Why or why not?

Serve One Another

Getting closer to the wedding, it felt like a cloud was hanging over my fiancé and me. Slowly things were unraveling. And with each setback, I tried to fix it myself. But at one point, God revealed to me, "You know what? This is not the right person." So I had to cancel the flowers, the cake . . . everything. And it just came to me that, "Well, I can't use these things, but somebody else can. So why waste all of it?" It impacted me a lot to give these things from my wedding away—to serve my community in any way that I can. It brought me so much joy, even in a day that unraveled before my eyes, that I was able to provide help in different ways. It helped me restore my happiness. Slowly, I've regained my joy and my sense of peace.

JOANNA, FROM THE VIDEO

2. When you think about the heroes in the Bible, who comes to mind? In what ways did those individuals exhibit humility and service to others?
3. What characteristics do people in our culture tend to value today? Why do you think our society places such an emphasis on possessing those characteristics?

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

4. Before today's video segment, what did you know about Andrew and Epaphroditus in the New Testament? By today's standards and culture, how would people treat or view someone like Andrew or Epaphroditus?
5. Read Galatians 5:13. *Freedom* is typically considered the opposite of *servicing*, but here Paul says that freedom in Christ frees us to serve. How can the freedom we have in Christ lead us to serve others? In what ways have you experienced this in your life?
6. Read Philippians 2:3. How did Jesus follow this principle in the Gospels?
7. Read Matthew 6:1. Why is it important to examine our *motives* when we serve others? What is the problem with serving in order to bring attention to ourselves?

8. Joanna was able to turn something difficult into an opportunity to serve. What is a practical way you could serve others the next time you are feeling down?

Closing Activity

To apply today's study, complete the Scripture exercise below:

- *Fill in the blank with the name of someone who could benefit from your gifts and talents:* "Use whatever gift you have received to serve _____, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).
- *Fill in the blank with the name of someone who needs encouragement and support today:* "Dear children, let us not love _____ with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).
- *Fill in the blank with the name of a person you know who is in need today:* "Look after _____ in their distress" (James 1:27).

Take this to the next level by brainstorming some ways your group could actively serve your community. Some ideas include serving at a local food bank, serving in the nursery or children's department in your church, or even helping

neighbors clean up their lawns. Coordinate an evening or weekend with your group when the members could participate in this service project.

Closing Prayer

Close your time by spending time with your heavenly Father. Have someone lead your group in prayer, asking God to provide you with greater opportunities to serve others. Or have someone in the group read the following prayer aloud:

God, we confess that we often regard ourselves as more important than others. We do not serve when we should because we are focused on our own needs. Help us see the needs of others. Help us to regard others as more important than ourselves. Give us opportunities throughout the week to notice the needs of others and work to meet them. Thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus, as the ultimate example of a servant. May we see others as he saw them, may we act toward others as he acted toward them, and may we love them as he loved them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.