

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 19

The Spiritual Disciplines of Service

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The Spiritual Disciplines of Service

SESSION OVERVIEW

Formative Teaching

Disciplines of Service

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- build awareness and develop an evaluative level of understanding that Christian service is a spiritual discipline as basic as prayer or Bible study
- make acceptance of service as a spiritual discipline a second nature owned and internalized
- engage in Christian service with renewed vigor and with insight that builds spiritual muscle as well as offering service to Christ and helping people

The Spiritual Disciplines of Service

INTRODUCTION



“Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced . . . that those who live [in Christ] should no longer live for themselves” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

True to the Wesleyan heritage, service is as much a spiritual discipline as prayer or Bible study. In fact, a spirituality that does not lead to service is a deadly preoccupation with self. The result of this preoccupation is thwarted growth in the inner spirit. Lack of service has immeasurable ramification in the loss of light and salt in the world.

When we ignore the agonies of the world and our responsibility to the community of faith, we have failed to fulfill God’s dream for our lives. In this session, we will face the challenge of seeing service as a spiritual discipline, a natural response to our personal spiritual formation.

FORMATIVE TEACHING



NOTES

The Bible says that nothing we ever do is more important than teaching. The Bible gives us the last words of Jesus on earth: “Go and make disciples . . . teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Bible says pastors are to be skillful teachers (2 Tim. 2:24). In the same chapter the Bible says pastors are to teach what they have learned to faithful people “who will be able to teach others also” (v. 2, RSV). We must teach so well that our students will become good teachers.

The Bible says parents should be such good teachers their children will never forget what they were taught. In Deuteronomy, parents are told to never stop teaching, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Duet. 6:6-9).

Whatever the details of our life’s work we are all involved in some form of teaching. The Bible says on the Day of Judgment those who have been wise teachers shall shine like the stars of heaven forever and ever (cf. Dan. 12:3, NIV). The Bible reveals that when God wanted to save the world He sent His only Son not as a soldier, not as a ruler, but as a teacher. Is that enough for us to take the service of Christian teaching seriously?

JESUS’ FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

From Reginald Cross. Used by permission of the author.

On Jesus’ fifth birthday Mary got the little boy up early, before dawn. After a bath, she dressed Him in a simple scholar’s robe with blue fringes. Today would be the first day of school for the blessed boy.

While it was still dark, Joseph led the boy to school. It was a two-mile walk. We think we know where the synagogue school that the young Jesus attended was on the outskirts of Nazareth.

In those days, you did not wait until school began in September. When your fifth birthday came, you started to school. The ritual for the first day is well known. And we suppose Jesus had the same experiences that every other Jewish boy did. The first stop on Jesus’ first day of school was the reading desk.

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We know what they read for the Bible lesson of the day because it was always the same when a new student enrolled. The scroll was opened to Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. And the Torah came first—ahead of study, ahead of recess, ahead of greeting your playmates or even the teacher. So as Jesus followed along, the Ten Commandments were read with great reverence. At age five Jesus could already read. Doubtless, He could recite the Ten Commandments because Mary and Joseph had instructed Him in the scriptures since before He was three.

After the reading of the heart of the Law, the Torah, young Jesus was taken to the house of the teacher. Meeting the teacher was a big moment. The teacher greeted Jesus just like he greeted every new student. He knelt on one knee, lowering himself to the little boy's level. Then he "welcomed his new student by enfolding him in his arms." Did you get that? The first duty of the teacher was to bend down to the child's level and hug the new student the first time he met him.

If only that teacher had known who it was he hugged that day! Teachers, you never know. I hope that teacher was not saying to himself, "Just what I need, another five-year-old to take care of. And the carpenter's kid at that. I wish we could get a higher class of student in this district."

EATING THE BOOK

Later in the morning, the teacher presented Jesus with a slate tablet. On it, in abbreviated form, were written the Ten Commandments in chalk. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet were also written on it. At the bottom, there was one sentence: "The Law shall be my calling."

It was the same for every new student. When he grew up his vocation might be farmer, shoemaker, baker, priest, chariot mechanic, or camel driver—but whatever his vocation, his calling was the Law, the Scriptures! "The Law will be my calling," the slate said.

The teacher helped Jesus read the commandments, and then had Him repeat, "The Law will be my calling." All the school boys watched. They knew what was coming next. They knew the new student would have to "eat the book." They had all done it.

Sure enough, the teacher brings out an earthenware jar. It is filled with honey. Carefully the teacher pours the honey on Jesus' chalk-written slate. Carefully he spreads the honey over all the commandments and the sentence written on the slate: "The Law shall be my calling." Then, he hands the slate to the five-year-old Jesus and says, "Now, my son, eat the book."


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Jesus knows what to do. Joseph has told him all about this ceremony at home many times. Jesus is ready. All eyes are upon Him. Carefully the boy begins to lick the honey off the slate. The honey, along with the chalk written words, comes off the slate on His tongue. No one snickers. No one laughs. This is serious business.

As Jesus licks the slate clean, the teacher solemnly says to Him, “May the Law of the Lord be sweet as honey to you as long as you live.” You remember, both Ezekiel and John the Revelator wrote something like, “And I ate the book, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.”

They were both recalling the experience of their first day of school, and, of course, every Jewish reader of their words knew exactly what they were talking about.

SWEET CAKES AND PRAYER

Still later in the day, probably about noon, just before the school day was over—it was so hot there that school ran from dawn until noon—another special event awaited the young Jesus. It was the ceremony of the sweet cakes.

The teacher brought out an expensive dessert made of nuts, raisins, figs or dates, and honey. A rare treat and only the first-day student received it. The sweet cake was prepared in a special way. Sometimes the teacher would make it in the shape of a “T” that stood for “Torah” or “Law.” Sometimes he decorated it with frosting or icing writing letters that symbolized the Law or Torah. The teacher explains the shape and symbols on the sweet cake. Once again, Jesus repeats after the teacher. “The Law shall be my calling.”

Once again, the teacher tells Jesus to eat the sweet cake. As He eats and the other kids watch, the teacher says, “May the Holy Law always be to you as sweet as the finest dessert. And as this food gives strength to your body, may your strength come from the Law of God all the days of your life.”

When the young Jesus finishes the sweet cake, it is time for prayer. The teacher puts his hand on Jesus’ curly little head and he prays the prayer of “Two Petitions.” First, he prays and asks that the angels of God will open Jesus’ heart. Second, he prays that God will strengthen the boy’s mind and His memory so He will never forget the day when He promised, “The Law shall be my calling.” And with the prayer of Two Petitions the first day of school was over for yet another Jewish boy.

Did this type of education work? From that first day of school in which Jesus “ate the book” as sweet as honey, and when He ate the sweet cakes and promised, “The Law shall be my calling,” let’s move ahead some 28 years. Would Jesus, a quarter of a century or more later, still think the Law was His calling? Come with me. Jesus is preaching on the Mount of Beatitudes.

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Listen carefully. He speaks. “Make no mistake,” He says. “Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law . . . I did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. Truly, I tell you that not one punctuation point of the Law shall pass away till heaven and earth pass away. And whoever breaks the least of these commandments and teaches men to do so shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven, but anyone who keeps the Law and teaches others to keep it, that one will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (author’s paraphrase of Matt. 5:17-20).

I ask you, did it work? That first day of school was an educational experience that Jesus never got over.

It is not enough to spend time memorizing certain commandments or the story of the people of God. The laws are not negotiable rules. The law is for the purpose of a restored relationship to God and whole relationships in the community of God. As we study the Sermon on the Mount, we begin to see the whole of our calling for inner and outer transformation. The basis for gracious giving and living is based in right relations with God and each other.

DISCIPLINES OF SERVICE



NOTES

EVANGELISM AND MISSION

In a sermon, Dr. Fred Craddock told about attending a joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Some 3,000 of the world's greatest scholars and teachers had gathered in Los Angeles to dig into papers, lectures, and panel discussions of the most scholarly sort.

Finding it took a lot of energy even to listen to the reading of the deep papers; Dr. Craddock took a coffee break. In the lobby of the hotel, a woman stopped him just outside the coffee shop.

"Are you attending the meeting here of Bible people?" she asked.

"Yes," Craddock replied.

"Can anyone come?"

"Well, to some of the sessions, yes," he hesitantly responded.

"Well, I want to come," she said.

"Why?" Craddock asked.

She told him that since she was 16 she had walked the streets selling her body. "The other night," she said, "I caught my teenage daughter beginning to do the same thing. I want to become a Christian. I've got to do something."

She held an old Bible with a zipper. "I couldn't think of a session I could send her to," said Craddock. Instead, they went into the coffee shop. Dr. Craddock opened her Bible and read her some passages to her. They talked. He explained the gospel. They prayed.

Then Craddock made a phone call to a church in the neighborhood. A pastor from that church came, and the pastor and the new believer drove away together. By this time, Craddock had completely missed the lecture on "A Postmodern Critique of the Bultmannian Hermeneutic."

Scholarship is important. Without it, the Church would sink in prejudice and sentimentality. Craddock explained why he missed the session. "Somebody had to answer the woman's questions."


NOTES
MERCY AND COMPASSION

The French are great cyclists and the Tour de France the greatest bicycle race of all. If you watch the French team, you will see the *domestique* (translated “servant”). He will not win the race. It is not intended that he win the race. Yet mile after weary mile he pedals on. His job is to shield the top cyclist who will win the race.

The *domestique* shields him from the wind and creates a draft in which the star cyclist will ride throughout the race. The *domestique* gets no trophy, no wild cheers from adoring fans. The one he has enabled to win the race is crowned—and that is enough for him. Holy service is all about becoming a *domestique* for Christ and our fellow travelers.

PITY IS NOT ENOUGH

It is not enough to feel occasional pity for those in need. We must, if we are to be truly Christian, step into identity and solidarity with those in any kind of need. Consider these thoughts on this topic.

“It is a fact that every time a man feels a noble impulse without taking action, he becomes less likely ever to take action. In a sense it is true to say that a man has no right to feel sympathy unless he at least tries to put that sympathy into action” (William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, James and Peter, 76).

“Anyone can salve his conscience by an occasional foray into knitting for the spastic home. Did you ever take a real trip down inside the broken heart of a friend? To feel the sob of the soul—the raw, red crucible of emotional agony. . . This is the beginning of compassion” (Jess Moody, *Quote—Unquote* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1977], 66).

Christlike compassion “is not knowing about the suffering and pain of others. It is in some way knowing that pain, entering in to it, sharing it and tasting it” (Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion* [Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1971], 21).

“The church will not wax radiant until we learn how to receive love . . . There is a certain superiority when we give love to others, and a certain helplessness when others offer love to us. When we give love we are in control. We pick the person or persons we will honor with our love, how much we will dole out at a time, and if and when we will give it. When we are on the receiving end of love and assistance we are no longer in control. The other person decides how, when, and how much. We are almost helpless as receivers, but we must learn to receive love from each other or settle for being a proudly grim bunch of believers” (*Reflecting God*, 157).

 NOTES

“There should be less talk; a preaching point is not a meeting point. What do you do then? Take a broom and clean someone’s house. That says enough” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta, as quoted by Janine Tartaglia, et al., *The Upward Call*, 235).

Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as: “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.” *Invitation to a Journey*, 12.

This ending phrase is important, “for the sake of others”. Our redemption, transformation, sanctification is not so we can have a better life. That is just simply not enough. It is that we along with all the other Christ followers may shine like stars in the universe. We through our acts of love and mercy are to be lights in the darkness.

The word on the street should not be that Christians are harsh, judgmental, hypocrites. Instead, the word should be we are the ones who love, who give, who heal. We so easily lose practices of service when life gets busy. Life gets busy for all of us.

Steve Sjogren developed the idea of church planting with servant evangelism. He emphasized the necessity of getting out and doing small things with great love. It can be a shift in our thinking to stop sitting inside our churches praying that someone will come in through the doors and going outside those doors to interact with the people on their turf. Yet when we move out and begin to serve others whether it is giving out water on a hot day or offering to rake the leaves of our neighbors these acts of love speak far louder than our words. These actions also add weight to our words of love when spoken.

Sunday School began as a tool for teaching illiterate children how to read. There are schools and hospitals all over the world whose roots can be found in the community of faith. Churches have founded food pantries, clothing closets, after school programs, and other compassionate responses to need for the purposes of living out their holy calling. When we fail to engage with the needs of our community corporately and individually, we become stagnant smelly waters.

When we do not move out to our communities, we miss the blessings of God. Through out scripture there are repeated calls to care for the widows and orphans, provide for the hungry, and reach out to the prisoners. Obedience to the direct call of God should compel. Christ’s love should compel us. As thankful recipients of grace, we should be overflowing with love.

 **NOTES**

Acts of service provide each of us a place of grace. That does not mean it is always beautiful. It can be dirty, smelly, discouraging, confusing and just plain hard. Nevertheless, as we go forth in the name of Christ to serve others we are transforming into his likeness. The most beautiful Christians I have ever met were in the basement of churches where so many of these ministries occur.

This involvement in the lives of others can be dangerous. This engagement in the community needs can become our life's mission. We might be called to lead in community response to systems of oppression. We may have our eyes opened to an epidemic that leaves us sleepless at night. We may be called to pour out more from our bank accounts than we ever imagined. We will also begin to know the wonder of a river of life that flows through us. A life that is vibrantly alive as love is received and poured out.

We might actually become people who love the Lord our God with all our being and love others as we love ourselves. Wesley's direction for Christian Conference included a collection for the poor in every meeting. Could it be he felt we needed regular reminders and accountability to fulfill our call to love God and others?

There have been recent increases in celebrities participating in acts of global compassion. They should be bumping into Christians every time they turn around. The problem is I am not sure they are.

CLOSING THOUGHT

If they had Oscars and Emmys for Christian witness and service, my vote would go to Angelina. I do not know the real name of this Puerto Rican woman, so let me name her according to her angel-like character.

Angelina lives in Hell's Kitchen—that section of New York where flying bullets and cruising thugs put the life expectancy graph into a sharp nosedive. However, Angelina was saved at Pastor Bill Wilson's church. You know how it is—you get saved and you want to give and serve.

With the help of an interpreter, she asked her pastor for a job in the church. Not being able to speak a word of English, what in the world could she do? Pastor Wilson told her to ride the Sunday School buses and love the kids. She did.

Soon she came back and said she wanted to ride a particular bus. You see, on that route was a special little boy who came to the Saturday kid's ministry and to Sunday School every week. He was a sad little guy with haunted eyes who never uttered a sound, not one word, ever. Every week Angelina held the child on her lap on the bus and loved him the best she could.

 **NOTES**

She even learned one sentence in English to pass on to the boy, “I love you and Jesus loves you.” She told him this over and over, week after week. One day to her astonishment the little guy looked up into her face and stammered, “I—I love you too.” Finally! Finally he had responded to love!

That was 2:30 on a Saturday afternoon. At 6:30 that evening, when most Christians were settling down to watch “Wheel of Fortune” or ESPN, they found boy’s body in a garbage bag under the fire escape. Someone said the little fellow had knocked over the last bottle of beer in the house. His mother beat him to death and threw him in the garbage.

Although it may appear to most that Angelina had little to give, but when God needed someone to be the light of the world to a neglected and rejected boy who had never known love, Angelina was ready. *From Reflecting God, 153-54.*

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. After reading the Reginald Cross, Jesus' First Day at School entry, consider the following questions and write down your response. Be prepared to share your reflections with your mentor.
 - Formative Christian teaching leads to transformation. How did the experience Jesus had on His first day of school transform His life?
 - The Law shall be my calling. What is the importance of this phrase?

2. After reading the entry about Dr. Fred Craddock, consider the following questions and write down your response the. Be prepared to share your reflections with your mentor.
 - What does this true story tell you about establishing priorities?
 - What does it tell you about the readiness of people to hear the gospel?
 - What does this story say about the place of the Bible in personal evangelism?
 - What does this story say about the role of the local church in nurturing converts?
 - Share a time when you were in tune to the faith seeking questions of another person or a time when you realized you missed an opportunity to share your faith.

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

1. Record your thoughts on the following statements or questions.
 - Being transformed for the sake of others has been evidenced in my life by . . .
 - How does the word "servant" make me feel?
 - A compassionate ministry I could imagine myself doing is . . .

NOTES

2. It is easy when studying Christian service to get quite glum about the things we have not done. In your journal, record and thank God for the things He has helped you to accomplish. Be open to the Lord's leading about what He wants you to do next in the way of serving those for whom Jesus suffered and rose again so they could find salvation.

SUGGESTED READING

- Lyle Pointer, Jim Dorsey, *Evangelism in Everyday Life* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 9-84.
- Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993)
- Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1993)
- Janine Tartaglia, et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 201-44.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 155-70.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Workbook*, 105-11.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*, 41-43.
- Wesley Tracy, *New Testament Evangelism Today* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1973), 27-74.
- John Wesley, "The Use of Money" and "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *Works*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, reprint, 1978), 6:124-36; 8:248-68.

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. Christlike compassion “is not knowing about the suffering and pain of others. It is in some way knowing that pain, entering in to it, sharing it and tasting it” (Fox).
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Our redemption, transformation, and sanctification are so we can have a better life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. Formative Christian teaching leads to transformation.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. When we fail to engage with the needs of our community corporately and individually, we become like stagnant smelly waters.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Whatever the details of our life’s work we are all involved in some form of teaching.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Service is not as much a spiritual discipline as prayer or Bible study.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. The law is for the purpose of a restored relationship to God and whole relationships in the community of God.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. It is enough for a Christian to feel occasional pity for those in need.
 - A. True
 - B. False

**NOTES**

9. The main message of the story by Fred Craddock is _____.
- A. be careful who you talk to
 - B. study hard
 - C. scholarship is not important
 - D. always be ready to share the gospel
10. Engagement in the needs of our community can become our life's mission.
- A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Share the reflections you recorded concerning Reginald Cross', "Jesus' First Day at School."
2. Share the reflections you recorded after you read Dr. Fred Craddock's entry.
3. Discuss a compassionate ministry you could imagine yourself doing with your mentor.