

Service

Bible Study: Serving Others

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

³⁷ ‘Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?”

⁴⁰ ‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:35-40

I am privileged to work as a police officer, a job often thought of as chasing burglars, locking up the baddies and helping people across the road, but it is and should be so much more than that. This passage challenges, inspires and teaches us that service is about being alongside people. Jesus teaches that to serve is to offer food, drink, hospitality, clothing, care, and presence. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of others.” True service also has a cost, whether that be in your giving, the views of others or other sacrifices to which discipleship leads.

My memories are often punctuated by what seem trivial happenings, but they are significant in my walk as a Christian. I recall a lady living alone whose home was broken into. She had chased the burglar away (hitting them with her walking stick!), but was still very shaken when we arrived. Making her a cup of tea and calling her family led to a thank you that made me realise how it is the ‘small things’ that often make the biggest difference. True service, no matter what your role, is in being present where we are placed. There is no bigger way to engage our communities other than through the model of Jesus, hope that the love and light of Christ can be glimpsed even in the most challenging of times.

My husband, also a police officer, collects the tokens from McDonalds when he buys a coffee. Once he has collected six, he hands the card to one of the many homeless people he meets. This means that they can have a free cup of coffee and an hour indoors.

I am often challenged by the attitude of fellow officers to other people; I think of the man who has murdered his ex-wife, leaving their children without a mother. Treating him with compassion was a real challenge, but Jesus calls us to true service. As you think upon this passage consider the following:

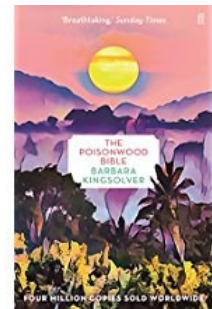
1. How have others served you in times of need?
2. How are your values challenged in your work or life? How do you respond to that?
3. What opportunities do you have to demonstrate God’s love and tell of your faith?

In serving others, we are not only responding to the needs of others in a challenging and often dark world, but we are also glorifying and serving God.

Ruth Tissington 2015

Fiction Book

- **The Poisonwood Bible**



Barbara Kingsolver

A great book which tells the story of a preacher and his family who go to the Belgian Congo, and how their lives unravel and are put back together.

DVD

- **Heavens Above**



Peter Sellers stars in this British film about a vicar who shakes up the life of his parish by his practice of Christian discipleship.



Ideas for Action

This is quite a long list of ideas! But may be one of them really jumps out to you, or you feel one that particularly suits your skills and gifts. You could also work with others to bring an idea to life!

1. Conduct a listening campaign in your church and community. Ask members of your congregation to have one-to-one conversations with (say) 3 other people - either from within their church or the wider community - and have a deeper conversation than usual with them to share what's concerning or inspiring them both at the moment. Arrange a feedback session for church members to share what these concerns are (it can be done in an anonymous way). Think about how your church can best respond to these issues.
2. Public Services are under tremendous pressure at the moment. Think about how your church can best support organizations and members of your community who work or volunteer in the public and voluntary sectors.
3. Organise a community celebration, e.g. bring together church and community groups who use your building and encourage them to showcase their work. Think about organising a meal for single parents or lone carers, along with a crèche or respite care.
4. Who are we and what do we do? Take some photos of people with their permission from your church and wider community and display them with some information about what they do (in their job or their voluntary work).
5. Find out about the different forms of 'service' in other religious traditions. Invite someone from another faith (or no faith) to tell you about this. Is there any way you can work together in the future? Consider whether your church could become a Place of Welcome, along with other faith community centres. For more details: www.placesofwelcome.org
6. Forge better links with your local schools by becoming a governor, organising educational visits to your church, or by offering chaplaincy support to staff and families. Some materials about supporting children and their families at transition points in their education: www.scriptureunion.org.uk/ItsYourMove/112817.id
7. Consider opportunities to volunteer as chaplains to local workplaces.
8. Explore volunteering opportunities with organisations which support people on the margins of our communities.
9. Create a twitter account for your church and follow other individuals/groups in your local area and other Methodist related groups or charities. Tweet and re-tweet what you're all doing to serve others.
10. Create a short video clip which highlights the "service" of your church. Show it in your services, post it on your website, share on social media and send it to the Communications Officer for the Circuit.

Reflections from Andrew Robert

How connected is your church within the wider community of which you are part? Is there a neglected or needy part of your community that you might be being called to serve?

If your local Christian community is active in serving the wider community take a little time to reflect on "the Christ part" of this. How is the service you offer distinctively Christian? How is the presence of Christ revealed in what you do?

