

# GOING THE EXTRA MILE

LEARNING TO SERVE  
LIKE JESUS



**J.R. Hudberg**



## *introduction*

# Going the Extra Mile

## Learning to Serve Like Jesus

**L**ook around. What do you see? Whom do you see? As Jesus walked the earth, he saw people for who they were and met them at their greatest point of need. From physical and emotional issues to their deepest pressing spiritual concerns, Jesus served the needs of others. Jesus said that serving others was why he came.

Opportunities to serve like Jesus are all around us and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by

the amount of need that surrounds us and guilty that we are not doing more. But service isn't about obligation. Serving others is about seeing and valuing them. Where do we start? Jesus himself and the parable of the Good Samaritan help us ask the right questions so that we can serve where we can, how we can, and with what we have.

*J.R. Hudberg*

## *contents*

### *one*

#### **Why Should We Help? .....5**

### *two*

#### **What Do We Have to Give? .....15**

### *three*

#### **To Whom Are We Giving? .....21**

### *four*

#### **One Last Question.....29**

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one

## Why Should We Help?

**T**he smell of the roasted chicken on the seat beside me filled the cab of my truck. My mouth was watering. I couldn't wait to get home and slice into the juicy meat. My whole family loves a roasted chicken from Costco. A quick stop on my way home from work (Costco isn't even out of the way) and one of our favorite dinners was quick and easy.

He was standing at the stoplight, sign in hand. Three simple words: Hungry. Please Help.

I sat there willing the light to turn green. Eyes staring straight forward. The thought of giving him the chicken did cross my mind, or any of the other groceries that were on the seat or the floor of my truck. It would have been simple to roll down the window and hand it to him. I could have even spent another ten minutes back in Costco to get another one.

The light turned green, and I drove away.

That, unfortunately, is a true story. I'm more than a little embarrassed to write it. But I do in the hope that you read the rest of this knowing how I struggle with serving others. It's never as easy as I wish it was. But I'm learning. That day a stark lesson came home with me. I have the ability to help. Never have I been confronted with such an obvious situation where there was a need and I had the exact thing to meet that need. But I still chose not to.

I've thought about that day a lot. The Holy Spirit has used those few moments in two ways: encouragement and conviction. The work of the Spirit is vital when considering the topic of serving. It can be easy to simply feel guilty (and a certain amount of guilt may be appropriate), but mere guilt—or too much guilt—isn't the best motivation for giving and serving. Relying on the work

and movement of the Spirit will help us to both respond appropriately and to see our service in the proper way.

## THE ROAD OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

In Jesus's famous parable of the Good Samaritan (SEE LUKE 10:25–37), he explains our responsibilities in meeting the needs of those around us. But there is an interesting twist to what Jesus says.

The story starts with a lawyer asking Jesus who is his neighbor. The lawyer wants to define the limits of his responsibility to “love his neighbor as himself.” We get the sense that the lawyer certainly doesn't want to do any more than is required of him. To his credit, he probably doesn't want to do any less than what is required either, but he certainly does not seem to want to do any more. So Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question “who is my neighbor?”

We would expect that the one who is in need is the neighbor we should love. We should provide for those needs that we see as we have the ability and the opportunity. But Jesus says something intriguing. Rather than identifying the neighbor in need, he asks the lawyer to identify the one who acted like a neighbor (SEE LUKE 10:36).

It seems that rather than defining the outermost edges of our responsibility, Jesus wanted to suggest that it is the kind of person we are that matters. Are we acting like neighbors to those we encounter? In the parable, the hero is unexpected while the expected heroes turn out indifferent if not villainous. The point is not that we find people to be objects of our generosity, but that we become the kind of people who are always generous.

By making a Samaritan the “hero” (from a group of people strongly disliked by the Jews), Jesus was forcing the lawyer to see himself not as the person loving the neighbor but as the one in need. The challenge struck home, because no self-respecting Jew would be able to relate to a Samaritan—he couldn’t even say “Samaritan” in his response, just “the one who had mercy on him.” Jesus was telling a story of both how we meet needs and also of how we see people. There are no boundaries to who is a neighbor. Instead, we are to act like neighbors.

## **THE BIBLE ON SERVING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS**

Many places in Scripture directly prescribe our responsibilities in meeting the needs of others. Consider these few passages:





**The point is not that we find people to be objects of our generosity, but that we become the kind of people who are always generous.**

Deuteronomy 15:7–8 says, “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be” (ESV). And continuing in verse 11, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

And Jesus in Luke 14:12–14 says, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (ESV).

James writes to everyone that pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their distress (1:27) and uses meeting physical needs as an analogy of the value and reality of faith: “If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (2:16-17).

This is to say nothing of the whole life and ministry of Jesus, where he met the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of nearly everyone he encountered—the woman at the well (JOHN 4), the healed blind man (JOHN 9), raising Jairus’s daughter (MARK 5:21-43), the feeding of the 5,000 (MATTHEW 14:13-21), and the salvation of Zacchaeus (LUKE 19:1-10) to name just a few instances.

Meeting the needs of others is a noble end in itself. But when we talk of purpose, we not only mean the end result, we are also talking about motivation. What motivates us to care for the needs of others?

## **JESUS AND THE WHY OF SERVING**

In Philippians we read about what Jesus gave up simply to walk among us: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something

to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”

(PHILIPPIANS 2:6–7).

The exploration about what Jesus gave up in order to become a human takes more time and space than we have here. But what we can conclude without argument from these verses is that Jesus was willing to take what was rightfully his and give it up for the good and sake of others. Jesus had the willingness to give up everything for humanity in desperate need. And it is significant that this is not simply a detached theological statement from Paul about Jesus becoming a human. Paul is presenting Jesus as an example of what it means to consider the needs of others. Paul points to the incarnation<sup>1</sup> as a model of how to give up something for the sake of another.

1 The **incarnation** is simply defined as the eternal God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ.

When we look at Jesus and his becoming human and living a life of service, we are given a clear picture of what serving others looks like. We know that the reason he did it was to “ransom many” and to “save the lost.” The passage from

Philippians gives us perhaps a larger view of Christ's motivation.

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at 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 the Father.*

(PHILIPPIANS 2:8–11)

Tucked into these rich verses we read how Jesus accomplished what he did—through his death on the cross. We are also told the outcome of that death—every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. But in the final phrase of these verses, we get a glimpse of the ultimate reason. The reason for Jesus giving up what he did, the reason that the salvation of humanity was worth that sacrifice, and the “so what” of people declaring Jesus is Lord. The glory of God the Father.

Jesus's motivation in serving humanity was to bring glory to God. This can also be our motivation for serving others and meeting the needs of those around us. This might sound like people are

unimportant, or at least less important than the glory of God. Let's explore this idea. It's good to ask how this might bring glory to God.

From this passage in Philippians, we can see that it is not simply the act of service that is significant. The logic of the passage suggests that the entire process—service and result—brings glory to God.

Of course God is glorified by acts of service! When we meet the needs of others in an act of love, we are acting toward one another in a way that honors their dignity and value in the eyes of their Creator. But when we meet the needs of others so that they too are in a position to flourish, to live according to the designs and desires of God our Creator and Savior, this glorifies God too.

It is when we live the way God intended us to live and help others to do the same that God is most glorified. When we live in the God-intended pattern of community and justice, honoring the creative intentions of our Maker for ourselves and others, we are proclaiming that God's plan is best, that his desires for us are for our good.

We live in a world broken by sin. That sinful world is at the root of the needs that we encounter daily. Sin is the root and the cause of our own lack and the lacking of others. Sin is what creates the opportunity

for us to serve others. Jesus, in the ultimate act of service, gave up and endured much to create a solution to the root cause of needs. The effects of sin provide us with the opportunity to serve others, to bring them back into the wholeness that God intends for his creation to experience. Relationships that function how they were intended to function bring God great glory.



*two*

# What Do We Have to Give?

## TAKING INVENTORY

**f Jesus was willing** to give up his position as an equal to God, what do we have that we can give? This is not a rhetorical question. An actual list can go a long way to helping us serve well. Knowing what we have and what we can part with can help us both develop a healthy view of our possessions, and also help us identify specific ways that we can help

others. Take some time and look around your life. Make a list of the things you have. Then find a way to identify those things on the list that you are able and willing to part with. This may be an eye-opening experiment. Seeing the list of things you have and comparing it to the things you are willing to part with will allow you to wrestle with differences. Why are you unable or unwilling to part with certain things? With the example of Jesus in view, there probably isn't much that shouldn't be marked as available for use to serve others.

This list shouldn't be kept to possessions. It should also include an examination of our calendar to see where our time might be available (or can be made available). An honest look at our budget can be an opportunity to rearrange our finances. What skills do you have that can be used to serve someone else?

Pray as you make these lists. Ask the Spirit to help you see these things as both the blessings they are



**Allow the Spirit  
to move you  
and try to be  
sensitive to  
where he may  
be leading  
you.**



from God and the potential blessing they may be to others. Allow the Spirit to move you and try to be sensitive to where he may be leading you.

None of this is new. We've all been challenged to look at our resources in such a way that we can part with them to serve the needs of others, to think broadly about what we can give, or give up. We have been encouraged to stretch ourselves to "give until it hurts," following the model of the woman in the temple who gave "all she had to live on" (MARK 12:41-44). Or to emulate the believers in the church in Macedonia<sup>1</sup> who pleaded for the opportunity to give even though they themselves were poor (2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-7). We all know that we should look at our resources, beyond just our money, as things that can be used to serve or given to others.

➤ *It's intriguing that Paul did not command the believers at the church in Corinth to give. Rather, he pointed to the example of the much poorer **Macedonians** as a Christ-honoring example of how to give.*

But our tendency to revert to looking to our own needs makes reminders like these necessary and helpful.

List in hand, we can explore opportunities to give and serve. Let's be honest, the needs seem endless and

there are opportunities near and far to be involved. From helping to provide clean water, to rescuing people in modern slavery, to providing education, clothing, shelter, meals, teaching a class in your church, visiting the lonely/shut-in...we cannot list all the ways we can use our resources to serve others. Our list allows us to plan for how we can use the things God has blessed us with to bless others. But what happens when we are confronted with an unplanned need?

## **MEETING THE NEEDS IN THE MOMENT**

Let's go back to Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the story, a Samaritan man comes across another man who has been attacked, beaten, and left for dead. In the Samaritan's actions we see all four categories of resources used at a moment's notice—time, possessions, skills, and money.

The Samaritan sets aside his own agenda to tend to the needs of the injured man. "But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him..."

(LUKE 10:33–34A). The Samaritan was traveling that road for a reason. He was on his way to somewhere. Whatever his destination and whatever his reason for travel, that could wait. He gave his time to serve someone in need.

Taking his own possessions and skills, the Samaritan cared for the man's wounds: "...and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him" (v. 34B). Why the Samaritan was carrying oil and wine and where he got the cloth to bandage the man's wounds are fun questions to ponder (although this is a parable and shouldn't be pushed for too many details). But the point Jesus was making in the details he does give should not be missed. The Samaritan willingly used his own possessions to care for the man. Surely the Samaritan had planned to use the oil and wine for another purpose. Perhaps he himself was riding the donkey. And while it may not have been a sterile or doctor approved treatment, the Samaritan used the knowledge and skill he had to aid the man. In the end we learn that the actions saved his life.

But bandaging his immediate wounds was not the end of the Samaritan's generosity. He also provided for his ongoing care. "The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'" (v. 35). Out of his own pocket the Samaritan provided for what was needed not just for the moment, but to ensure

that the future of the man was more secure as well. Imagine the Samaritan was a merchant, and the oil, wine, and cloth were his wares. The cost of this act of kindness grows exponentially as not only does he use his money to care for the man, but he also loses whatever income selling those items would have generated. It's not necessary to think of him as a merchant; either way, the Samaritan would have to replace the supplies he used in caring for the injured man. This act of compassion cost him a great deal.

Whether we are planning to serve or are confronted with an unexpected need in the moment, asking ourselves what we have that we can give helps us serve the needs of others well.



*three*

## To Whom Are We Giving?

**“D**addy, all you need to survive is food, water, and shelter, right?” From the backseat the question was unprompted and made me smile. “Yes, that’s technically all you need. But I’m glad we have some of the other things we have. Aren’t you?” We had just returned from visiting family in Mexico. During that visit, we had opportunity to do some sightseeing and swam in some cenotes. ▀

➤ **Cenotes** are sinkholes or caves that have filled up with clear, fresh water. In Mexico, they are typically a beautiful blue color, and suitable for drinking or swimming.

The drive to these beautiful deep-water wells often wound through Mayan towns. As we drove through, we saw some beautiful architecture and some that would perhaps barely qualify as shelter. It was the discussion of some of the homes in these towns that prompted the initial claim of the necessities of survival. Homes built of materials procured or scavenged from wherever they could be found dotted the roadside. No electricity, running water, no glass or even screens in the windows. Driving past in an air-conditioned van in the 104-degree heat forced me to imagine how hard life must be for those who called those places home. It was a shock to my sons that people lived in such ways.

That drive continues to introduce great conversations with my sons. We've been able to talk about not thinking that something is bad just because it is different, that people in different places live, speak, and act in different ways. That doesn't make them less than us, or bad or pitiable, or dangerous, just different. And that to them, we would be different too.

But we've also gotten to talk about the fact that there may be some people who do need help, and that we don't really need to travel to distant places to find people who may not have all they need to survive. We've talked about what, if any, might be our relationship with other people who may not have as much as we do, or have enough.

## SEEING THE NEEDS

Not all situations are quite as obvious as the man lying “half-dead” in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan had it easy in one way. There was only one need, and it was obvious.

Jesus didn't just give up his equality with God for no reason. His sacrifice was for the good of all humanity. On several occasions Jesus explicitly mentions why he came. Particularly poignant for this conversation is Matthew 20:26b–28, “...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—*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*” (emphasis added). Jesus says that he came (became a human—released his right to be equal with God) to serve humanity and to give his life for their sake. Jesus says this same thing in another place.

When discussing how he could eat with a tax collector named Zacchaeus, tax collectors being considered among the worst of sinners, Jesus responded with a declaration of the object of his mission: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (LUKE 19:10).

There are many worthy causes and organizations where you can donate and with whom you can partner and serve. The problem isn’t need; it’s deciding where you should help.

This isn’t intended to tell you exactly what you should give and to whom. But hopefully it will help you think through the options available to you so that you can make informed and wise choices about where your time, skills, resources, and money go.

### ***Local and Global Needs.***

One of the discussions we are having in our house is about the myth that those in need are mostly in other places. There is a subtle and dangerous belief that there isn’t any real need in the United States, “the land of opportunity.” This perception of both the United States and of other places can lead to some unhealthy views of the “other.” When we think that *other* places are needy, this can lead us to think that other places are worse than the U.S. and that if you are needy in the U.S. you simply haven’t tried



hard enough. And if you haven't tried (or if you've made some bad choices), then you don't deserve help.

The truth is that there are needy people everywhere. Need is not restricted geographically or industrially. There are opportunities all around us to help. Some of those opportunities are created by the choices made by the person in need, and some needs are through no fault of their own. Our job is not to decide whether the cause of the need is worthy, but to help meet the need itself, wherever and with whomever it is found. The blessing of being able to partner with organizations is that we can help those who are far and near.

### ***Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Needs.***

A question to consider is what breaks your heart? It's not too much of a stretch to think that any place of legitimate need breaks God's heart. God didn't design us for want and didn't intend for us to live in want. But in our sin-broken world, needs can be found in a wide variety of life.

Approach this prayerfully. As you allow the Spirit to soften your heart and see the needs of the world around you, some of them may become more prominent in your mind and heart.

We can work with International Justice Mission to help free those in modern day slavery. We can

partner with Wycliffe to help translate Bibles or with Gideon's International to distribute them around the world. We can work with Habitat for Humanity to build affordable homes for those who do not have them. Our family is working with Compassion International to sponsor children. We can go to a local nursing home and spend time with the elderly who may not receive many visitors. Or work with the local homeless shelter serving meals. Perhaps you feel a burden for the youth in your area, so you volunteer to coach a sports team, or you help lead a small group of young people in your church in a weekly Bible study.

Your own church may be a good place to start exploring ways that you can serve. There are undoubtedly opportunities to give your time and talents within your church. Ask where help is needed. From internal needs to outreach programs in the community, the list of places to serve and needs waiting to be met is likely a long one.

There are places where some of the work has been done for us. The needs and the processes for meeting those needs have already been identified and set in place. The organizations that work in these areas simply need support in people and resources to accomplish their missions. But

sometimes there are needs that require a little more work on our part to identify.

## **SEEING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD**

Looking around our own lives and places, what opportunities for service can we identify? For example, I have many books from my time in seminary. The thought of giving them away hurts my heart. But I remember the hardship of buying them while attending seminary, those occasions where something else had to be given up to get the books I needed for class or for research and reference. Those books, though still valuable to me, may be more valuable to someone else. The option of not having to buy a book may free up finances for something else. Now that I am in a different life situation, it is time to consider how I might be able to bless someone with the books I found so helpful. To be honest, I haven't given them away yet. I'm still struggling with the thought of parting with books. But the idea is in my head now, and I'm reasonably certain that it won't leave until I follow through with it.

Finding places to serve and give is not difficult. There are daily opportunities all around us. Sometimes it is an obvious need that shows up in the moment as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Other times we can identify the particular area where we want to be involved and make a plan for how to meet those needs, like Jesus carrying out the plan of salvation by giving up his place with God, serving, seeking the lost, and giving his life. It is okay to ask yourself what you are most passionate about. Different things will pull at different heart strings. There are plenty of needs to be met. We don't have to feel guilty if we are not meeting all of them. Find the need and the opportunity that both breaks your heart and gives you the most joy to be involved with.



*four*

## One Last Question

**T**here is one last question to be asked. And it's really a question that comes before any of the others. To truly serve like Jesus, we have to ask ourselves, "Do I care?" If Jesus is to be our model for helping people, he must also be our model for how to see people.

This question points to the part of the parable of the Good Samaritan that should give us the most discomfort—the priest and the Levite. These two

men not only represented the people to God in the Temple and sacrificial system, more importantly for this story, they represented God to the people. As difficult as it may be to swallow the idea that anyone passed by such explicit and obvious need, when the priest and Levite walked by, it had the weight of God himself simply bypassing the needy. An unimaginable image, one meant to be shocking.

We all know that they passed by the injured man on the other side of the road. We could talk about how they were trying to stay ritually pure for the sake of their positions. Perhaps they were afraid of a similar fate for themselves should they spend too much time in an obviously dangerous place. Or perhaps they thought the man was already dead and nothing could be done for him.

Whatever their reason for avoiding someone clearly in need, there is one thing behind each



**When the priest and Levite walked by, it had the weight of God himself simply bypassing the needy. An unimaginable image.**

surface reason. They simply did not care enough. They didn't see sufficient value in the person lying on the road to come to his aid. He wasn't worth their time. He wasn't worth their effort or their possessions.

This part of the story is important because it's easy to be shocked and even offended by the actions of these religious leaders. We're tempted to say, "Of course I care! I would absolutely help someone who is in need." But Jesus includes these two characters to show that it is not only possible not to care, it's perhaps even *likely* that we will not care. Two of the three passed by the man in need. And we'll offer many of the same excuses that have been suggested for why the priest and the Levite did not stop.

To help people as Jesus did, we need to begin seeing them as Jesus saw them. Jesus saw and acted on the inherent value of people as being created in the image of God. It was not their particular choices or specific life circumstances that dictated how Jesus responded to people—at least not in a negative way. Jesus saw people in their moments of need, even if those needs were created by their own choices, and he had compassion on them.

We are surrounded by needs of many kinds. Are we willing to see the needy around us the way God

sees them? Are we willing to follow Jesus's lead, his actions and his teachings, to meet people with love and compassion no matter where they are or how they got there? Will we go the extra mile?





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