

Healthy Habits – Service | Psalm 95

We have started this New Year looking at healthy habits for our spiritual lives as found in Psalm 95. We have focused so far on Reading Scripture, Worship and Prayer. Today we look at one more important habit for spiritual growth and strength, and that is service.

Before we go any further, we need to stop and define what we mean by service. When we are at a restaurant and the waiter is attentive to us, gets the order correct and is friendly we say she gave us good service. But we also say that our worship time is called a service. What are we referring to when we think of service?

When I went to Webster's dictionary it defined service this way, "act of help or assistance." My definition is similar: "being available to help others." That's pretty broad, isn't it?

Now take a look again at Psalm 95. When we get to verse 10 we read:

"I said, "they are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."

These words come out of the wilderness experience where the children of Israel were delivered from bondage as slaves to Egypt and given a fresh new start in life – as free people, free to serve and worship the Lord. God destroyed the enemies of his people and led them step by step through the wilderness to a promised land – a place where they would experience rest from the labours of slavery and instead they could build a new nation under the leadership of God Himself.

Sadly, the children of Israel were not satisfied with the way God did things in the wilderness. God let them get hungry sometimes, and thirsty and they figured that if God is all powerful and all loving they should always have whatever they wanted. They missed the point of the whole exercise which was to learn to trust God and do things His way, not their way.

So in verse 8 of this Psalm we read of the rebellion at Meribah and Massah when the people hardened their hearts against God. They were thirsty so they DEMANDED that God give them water.

Can you see the problem with this picture? The people thought God was there to serve them instead of them being available to serve God. As the old adage goes – they spelled service – SERVE US.

So God took the children of Israel on a 40 year journey to teach them what service means. They were to be God's people doing things God's way as a testimony to the whole world that there is a God in heaven and he makes Himself known to man.

So we read again in verse 10:

For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.”

What are God’s ways?

Our first thought may be to say God’s ways means to follow the 10 Commandments. This would not be wrong, but it is not enough. But before we move away from this topic, let’s pause and think about why the 10 Commandments were so important for God’s people.

Do you remember the 10 Commandments?

1. You shall have no other gods before me
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol
3. You shall not use God’s name in vain
4. You shall keep the Sabbath holy.

These four are all about your relationship with God. If you truly love God and want to serve Him, then you will gladly do as God commands.

5. Honor your father and mother
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not give false witness.
10. Do not covet.

These last six commandments are all about loving your neighbour, learning to live in community. If we love our neighbour we do not want any harm to come to him or her. Keeping these commandments is about serving your neighbour because you are a child of God.

No wonder Jesus would say that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself. Do these and you have fulfilled all the law, Jesus said.

What are God’s ways?

To serve the Lord by showing His love to others....

Of course that is far easier said than done. But service starts by learning to love others as God has loved you.

“But Pastor”, you say, “I am easy to love. Some people are not so ... loveable!”

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” scripture tells us. So I am sorry to say, there are times even you are not as loveable as you think you are! So service is about grace – doing good to others whether they deserve it or not. Being kind, generous and compassionate in your attitudes, actions and words.

Where is a good starting place to incorporate service into our lives as one of our healthy habits?

Maybe start here: Romans 12:1-2:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service....”

Fully committing ourselves to God – have no other God before him, no idols – is our reasonable service. As we commit ourselves fully to God we invite Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Now our lives will be guided and empowered by God as we listen to what He wants us to do.

What does He say? Serve others.

Hear what God says to us in Galatians 5:13-14:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.””

So what does it look like to serve one another? Am I supposed to bring you each a coffee – or a tea for those who prefer that?

That might be an okay place to start but service is so much more. It is living with our eyes open to the needs of others and doing what we can to help.

From opening the doors for someone, to shoveling your neighbours walk clear of snow.

From taking soup to that person who is sick, to walking your friends dog when they have to work overtime.

From helping someone move, to babysitting so that young mom gets a break.

Service is being aware of the people around you and looking for ways to make their load just a little lighter, their day just a little more cheery, their pain just a little easier to bear.

Service starts with something as simple as a smile and a friendly “hello” to the person you pass on the street or the cashier at the grocery store. You may never know how much that means to them.

Service requires us to get our eyes off of our own desires and needs so that we can see the people around us. I truly believe that this is one of the things “growing up” means. I am delighted when I see a teenager jump up to help put the chairs away after a meeting, or clear the dishes away, or even wash the dishes after a meal. The sooner we learn to serve, the

sooner we will grow in our walk with the Lord. The longer we live self absorbed, the slower it is to grow in Christ likeness.

Then we read in 1 Peter 4:10:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Did you catch that? Each one of us has been given a gift by God that we can use to serve others.

What has God given to you that you can share with others?

Do you cook? Do you write? Do you play an instrument? Can you tell a story? Can you teach? Can you organize people? Can you listen well? Can you build? Can you clean? Can you show hospitality?

Whatever God has given you the ability to do, use that to serve others.

Each week our worship team serves God, and us, by offering their talents to lead worship. Some even fly all the way from Calgary to help us out!

I know that there are those in the congregation that can lead a small group, and to be able to serve in this manner will bring a blessing to that person and the people they lead. This is why we want to do Home Groups so that people will have the opportunity to serve this way. Some will serve as hosts, others as those who will invite neighbours and friends to join them.

We can serve in the church – there are always things you can do through the ministry of the church, and you can serve in the community. Both are important and both are blessed by God.

Serving is not a way to earn God's favour: God has lavished his grace upon us before we did a thing. Service is a way of humbly helping others. Life can be so hard at times, and yes, even people sitting in church who look like they do not have a care in the world can be experiencing pain, heartache, grief, temptation, despair. The one with a servant's heart not only says, "What can I do to help you?" but actually finds something to do and does it.

Christians need to have a servant's heart if we truly want to know God's ways. Service flows out of humility, gratitude and love.

How will you serve God this week? How will you serve others?

Also think about this: What have you learned when you were engaged in service as a Christian? What have you received when you served someone else?

The Church of the Nazarene traces its history through Methodism, whose founder was a man named John Wesley. Each New Year he would hold a Covenant service where Christians could recommit themselves to following God – which, by the way, is what the Psalmist is calling us to do in Psalm 95. Here is the prayer they would pray in that service:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

(John Wesley from the Covenant Service)

May it never be said that we do not know God's ways. May it never be said that we did not follow God's ways. May we learn to serve God by serving those in need around us.

What will that look like for you this week? I cannot say; only Jesus knows. The question is, are you ready to serve?