

SERVING OTHERS

book twenty-nine in the series:
THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

- Day One: God's Call to Serve
- Day Two: Serve throughout the Day
- Day Three: Serve with Wisdom
- Day Four: Take Care of Yourself
- Day Five: Review and Test

Serving Others: Book twenty-nine in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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ISBN: 978-1-930153-78-3

Version: TOM2920191106A

Published by LifeTree Books, Sacramento, CA • Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com



The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on "Knowing God"

Twelve books on "Developing a Godly Character"

Twelve books on "Enjoying Healthy Relationships"

Twelve books on "Overcoming Personal Problems"

For

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in “The Owner's Manual to the New You” series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: God's Call to Serve

In many cultures, the position of a servant is a lowly, undesirable position. Many people would be insulted to be considered a servant. They would rather be a leader or have another position of honor.

But God looks at things very differently. Whether or not you have a position of "importance," if you have a servant's heart, you are of high value in God's eyes.

What is a servant?

A servant is someone who is concerned for other people's welfare, someone who serves others. A servant asks, "What would be best for the other person?" Or, "Where are there needs in my church or neighborhood, and how can I help?"

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

There is strength in serving when you do it with the right attitude. When you serve in love and in the power of the Holy Spirit, you are God's instrument to bless other people. The Lord will bless you.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)

Discussion questions

1. Is being a servant highly prized or valued in our culture? Why or why not?
2. Do you look for ways to serve others, or do you resist being a servant? Explain your answer.

Learn from Jesus

Throughout the Bible, we are called to serve others, but our human nature resists this. We think "serve me," not "how can I serve you?" It's good to remind ourselves of what Jesus said:

The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:11-12)

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Discussion questions

3. How do you think Jesus' followers felt when they heard him say you "must be a slave of all"?



4. How do you think you would have felt if you had been there and heard Jesus say that?

Paul's letter to the Philippians contains one of the most inspiring passages in the Bible about serving others. It says our "attitude should be the same as that of Christ," the attitude of a servant. As you read the following verses, ask God to speak to your heart:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:1-7)

Notice some of Paul's key points:

- The Philippians would make Paul's joy complete if they were like-minded, had the same love, and were one in spirit and purpose.
- They should do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
- In humility, they should consider others better than themselves.
- They should look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- Their attitude should be the same as that of Jesus, the attitude of being a servant.

Discussion question

5. What points stand out to you in Philippians 2:1-7? Explain your answer.

More examples of people with a servant's heart

The Bible is full of people who caught God's vision about being a servant. For a few examples, read about Paul (1 Thessalonians 2:7-9), Dorcas (Acts 9:36), and Timothy (Philippians 2:19-21).

Ask God to help you have a servant's heart

You will be a much better servant if you:

Pray to love others deeply.

Ask God to give you a genuine concern and deep love for everyone.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

Pray to catch God's vision of being a servant.

God created us to do good works (Ephesians 2:10) and to serve others. In God's eyes, serving is noble and wonderful. Ask him to help you catch his vision.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Pray to serve in God's strength, not your own.

No one has the power in his or her own strength to fulfill God's purposes. Ask God to help you walk in his strength, not your own.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. (Ephesians 3:20)

Discussion question

6. Would you like to pray the previous three prayers? Why or why not?

Serve cheerfully

Ask God for a positive, cheerful attitude as you serve. If you serve reluctantly, other people will notice your attitude.

As the following verses illustrate, when you serve others, you really are honoring and serving Christ. Thinking about this can help you maintain a good outlook. It's easier to cheerfully serve God than people who are sometimes unappreciative.

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. (Ephesians 6:7-8)

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24)

If you catch yourself feeling resentful about serving, or you feel like a martyr ("look how hard I'm working, no one appreciates me"), ask God to change your attitude.

Also ask yourself if you are trying to do too much. (You will read more about this in Day 3.)

Discussion question

7. Do you need to serve with a more cheerful attitude? Explain your answer.

Serve without expecting anything in return

Watch your motives. Remember that it is God whom you are serving. Don't try to buy friends or win others' praise. Do not do anything with the goal of being recognized.

Find joy by serving

True joy comes from the Holy Spirit using us to help others. Whether you encourage a lonely person, volunteer at church, or lead a Bible study, you can experience the joy that comes from serving. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

When you serve:

- You have the joy of pleasing God.
- You have the joy of knowing you helped someone.
- You share the joy of the people you helped.
- You feel a sense of purpose.
- You are less likely to be depressed.
- You make friends.
- You experience life positively, not as a “victim.”

Paul wrote about the joy he felt when he learned that people he had helped were growing in their faith:

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

Discussion questions

8. Why do you think we can feel joyful when we help others?
9. Have you ever experienced joy when you helped someone? If so, describe one time this happened.

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

5. Serving can take time and energy. How could you serve cheerfully? Explain your answer:

6. Today's lesson says you can find joy in serving. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer:

7. Review the verses in today's lesson. Write one that speaks to you personally, then explain why you chose it:

8. Write a prayer asking God to help you have the heart of a servant wherever you go:

Day Two: Serve throughout the Day

Wherever you go, whatever you do, you have opportunities to serve, to make a difference in people's lives. What you do matters. As Paul wrote, you were created to "do good works."

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Serve as a way of life

You may think of "serving" as something you do once or twice a week, perhaps teaching a Sunday school class or helping a neighbor clean his or her car.

Either of those would be wonderful ways to serve others. But I'd like to expand the definition of "serving."

"Serving" should be a lifestyle, something we do throughout each day.



Discussion questions

1. Do you agree that you should serve as a way of life? Why or why not?
2. What steps could you take to make serving a way of life? Explain your answer.

Jesus showed us how to serve in small ways, as well as big ways.

Jesus served us in major ways. He preached, healed, performed miracles, and took our sins upon himself when he died and rose from the dead.

But Jesus also served in many smaller ways. For example, he washed his disciples' feet, held children on his knees, hung out with publicans and sinners, and cooked a fish dinner.

He taught us that doing "small" works of service are important.

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward. (Matthew 10:42)

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:5)

Discussion question

3. What can you learn from Jesus'? Explain your answer.

Look for ways to serve throughout the day

As you go through life, every person you come into contact with has needs, and you can help meet some of those needs.

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. (Philippians 2:20)

Discussion question

4. Reread Philippians 2:20. Describe the type of person Timothy was.
5. Would you like to be like Timothy? Why or why not?

Every time you talk with someone, look for a chance to say something helpful.

Whenever you talk with people—at home, on the job, at church—say words that build them up, not tear them down. Think before you talk.

Every time you speak, you have an opportunity to serve others. For example:

Encourage others.

We all need encouragement. The Bible says that everything we say should build others up.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Listen attentively.

Listening to someone can be one of the greatest gifts you could give him or her.

Offer to pray.

When someone shares a problem, be ready to ask if he or she would like you to pray. If it doesn't seem that would be appropriate at the time, pray silently.

Tell others about Jesus.

Look for opportunities to have good conversations about Jesus. One of the best ways to share your faith is to tell your personal story.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Discussion question

6. What does "Every time you talk with someone, look for a chance to say something helpful" mean? Do you think this is a realistic idea? Why or why not?

Look for "little" things you could do to serve others.

There are countless ways you can serve others. For example:

- Offer to babysit someone's child.
- Take a meal to someone who is elderly or sick.
- Visit a retirement home or nursing facility.
- Offer someone a class of water.

- Encourage someone who seems discouraged.
- Look for lonely people, and spend time with them.
- Wash the dishes when it's not your turn.
- Offer to help a neighbor do yardwork.
- Invite people home for a meal.
- Write a thank-you note to someone.
- Pray for others' needs.

Discussion question

7. What are three ways you could serve others? Explain your answer.

Whom should you serve?

If you aren't sure whom you should serve, the short answer is "everybody."

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)

Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:24)

I realize that when I say you should serve everybody, that's not a practical answer. After all, there are billions of people in the world.

Here are some general guidelines:

Serve your family.

Some Christians make the mistake of passionately serving other people, but ignoring their family. The Bible says family comes first.

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

Serving your family means different things in different circumstances. It usually includes giving family members honor, respect, and face-to-face time. There could be exceptions. For example, if your father were in prison for raping you, you would not interact with him in the same way you would interact with a loving father at home.

Serve the needy.

Throughout the Bible, we see that God has a special concern for people with needs.

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Romans 12:13)

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14)

Serve people with whom you come in contact.

You represent Jesus wherever you go. Always be sensitive to how you could help or encourage others.

Serve people God put in your heart.

People often have a special concern for certain groups of people. If you have a passion to help marriages, children, special-needs children, teenagers, veterans, men, women, homeless people, or others, look for opportunities to serve them.

Along similar lines, identify your talents, skills, and spiritual gifts, then look for opportunities to use them.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

Serve your church or community organizations.

There are many ways you could serve in your church. For example, you could help set up chairs, sweep the floors, teach in Sunday School, sing in the choir, do office work, work in the men's ministry or women's ministry, help direct traffic in the parking lot, or paint office walls.

Likewise, there are many ways you could serve in the community. You could get involved in a racial reconciliation ministry, join a child abuse council, volunteer at a homeless shelter, or help a ministry that feeds the hungry.

If you are having trouble identifying where you could serve, call your church or a community organization and ask what their needs are.

Discussion question

8. Who are some key people you could serve? How could you serve them?

Identify real needs and seek to meet them

Don't try to do everything for everyone. Ask God to help you decide what you will do—and what you won't do. Be willing to gently say "no."

It's possible to put a lot of effort into serving others in ways that aren't important to them. Sometimes it's helpful to ask the person you want to serve what matters most to him or her. You could do this with your boss, child, neighbor, or pastor.

If you want to serve in a community ministry or a secular organization, but you don't know which one to choose, ask a mature Christian who knows you for advice.

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

Discussion question

9. How could you choose where you will serve? Explain your answer.

Memory verse

Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:24)

Homework – Day Two

1. What does “serve as a way of life” mean? Explain your answer:
2. Do you want to make serving your way of life? Why or why not?
3. Jesus was God in the flesh. Why do you think he made himself a servant? Explain your answer:
4. Today's lesson says that every time you speak, you have an opportunity to serve others. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Day Three: Serve with Wisdom

It's possible to serve too much, or to serve in an unhealthy way. The Christian life should be one of balance. Although God wants us to develop the attitude of a servant, there are pitfalls to avoid.

Choose what you will do

One of the biggest mistakes many Christians make is saying “yes” every time there is an opportunity to serve. In general, it's good to say “yes,” but there are many times when “no” is appropriate.



Discussion question

1. Do you get worn out trying to serve people or your church? If this describes you, explain your answer.

Pray for knowledge and insight.

Some people think that if you love people, you will always say “yes.” That's not true. Your love should be guided by knowledge and depth of insight.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. (Philippians 1:9-10)

Discussion question

2. Will Philippians 1:9-10 help you make better decisions about when to help someone? Why or why not?

Be willing to say “no” if you don't have enough time.

There are many needs in the world. If you aren't careful, you can feel overwhelmed trying to do too much. Don't try to do everything for everyone. Ask God to help you decide what you will do—and what you won't do. Be a wise steward of the time and abilities God has given you.

Discussion question

3. What does it mean to be a wise steward of the time and abilities God has given you?

Be willing to say “no” if people try to pressure you.

If you have parents, children, friends, or others who try to pressure you to do something, gently say, “I'll pray about it.” Then pray privately, but don't give in to guilt.

Jesus did not always say “yes” when people asked for help, even if they pressured him. For example, after he performed many miracles and cast out demons in Capernaum, some people tried to get him to stay, but he said “no.” He explained that he needed to preach in the nearby villages.

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:42-43)

Discussion question

4. Have you ever felt pressured to help someone? If so, describe one situation. Would you like to be able to say "no" without feeling guilty? Explain your answer.

Be willing to say "no" if someone's request might harm him or her.

Sometimes it's wisest to say "no" to people's requests if doing what they want would be bad for them. For example, if your four-year old child asked for ice cream for breakfast, you would say "no" and provide something healthy instead. If your child then said, "You don't love me," you would say, "I'm saying 'no' because I love you."

Another example of a time you would say "no" would be if someone asked you to help him or her cheat on a test.

Discussion question

5. What is something someone might ask you to do that would harm him or her? Do you think you would be able to say "no"?

Be willing to say "no" if someone is unreasonable.

If someone has unreasonable expectations, say you want to be a good friend, but you can't do everything he or she wants. Ask for help in identifying his or her priorities.

Never do anything that would go against the Bible or violate your conscience.

Don't feel guilty if you need to say "no" to someone who is very demanding. Gently explain that you want to help, but you can only do so much.

Discussion question

6. Imagine that someone just unreasonably asked you to do ten things for him or her. What would you say?

Realize your limits in responsibility

Serve others, but don't take responsibility to solve their problems or to make them happy.

Likewise, realize you can't please everyone. If you try to help people, some may not like what you do. Or they may say you aren't helping enough. If that happens, remember that even Jesus was rejected by many people after he served them.

Practice the Do, Love, Leave principle:

- **Do** what you think you should do.
- **Love** the other person.
- **Leave** the other person in God's hands.

Discussion question

7. Do you tend to take too much responsibility for others or get overinvolved? If so, will the previous points help? Why or why not?

Bring up your own desires

As long as your main goal is to serve others, feel free to tell friends, family members, and others your own ideas and desires.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4)

Notice the words “not only” and “but also.” They indicate that it’s okay to pay some attention to your own interests. However, read the complete chapter to see Paul’s full message: Your primary task is to be a servant.

Discussion question

8. Is it okay to bring up your own desires? How can you know if you are bringing them up too often? Explain your answer.

Expect to be taken advantage of sometimes

Don’t stop helping others if someone takes advantage of you. That will probably happen. If it does, ask God to help you forgive the person and also to help you grow in wisdom.

Discussion question

9. If someone takes advantage of your willingness to help him or her, does that mean you should stop trying to help people? Why or why not?

Evaluate your serving

It’s easy to make mistakes when you serve others. For example, you could try to serve, yet do things that aren’t important to the other person.

Ask God how you did.

Before going to bed at night, pray, “Lord, please show me how well I served today. Help me learn any lessons that I need to learn.”

Ask people you served for feedback.

From time to time, ask people you served if you were helpful. For example, if someone asks me for advice, after I share some ideas I often ask, “Was that what you were looking for? Was it helpful?”

Memory verse

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight ... (Philippians 1:9)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

Guard Your Heart with Helping Others

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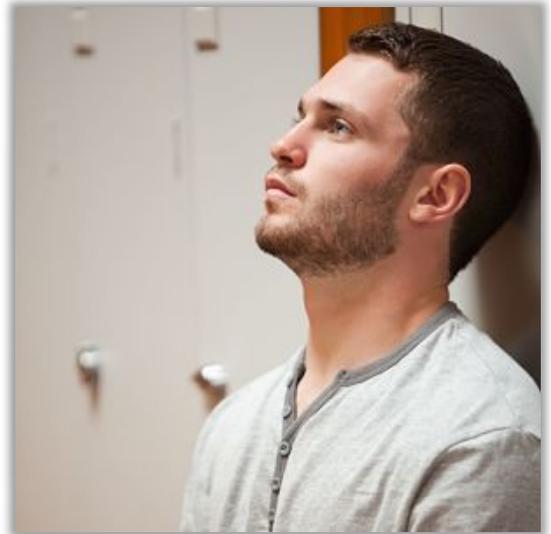
Day Four: Take Care of Yourself

The Bible says we are called to love and serve others. However, as you read in Day 3, some people take this too far, thinking they must devote themselves one hundred percent to serving others. They think that doing anything less would be selfish or wrong.

Just the opposite is true. If you are worn out, or if you feel desperate for time by yourself, with God, or with your friends, you won't be able to serve well. When you feel refreshed, you are more alert and can serve others with more enthusiasm and energy.

Discussion question

1. Do you think you take enough "personal time" for yourself? Explain your answer.



Spend time with God

Do you ever feel you are too busy to spend quiet time with God—praying, reading the Bible, and worshipping? Most people would probably say “yes.”

If that's your answer, let me encourage you to review your priorities. We all need the refreshment that comes from spending time in prayer and the Word.

When you connect with God:

- You enjoy his love and grace.
- You experience his peace and joy.
- You can entrust people to his care and not carry their problems.
- You can reorient your priorities.

Learn from Jesus' example.

Although Jesus devoted himself to serving others, he often withdrew from everyone to spend time alone praying to his Father.

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:16)

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. (Luke 4:42)

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6:12)

Discussion questions

2. Do you spend time alone with God every day? Explain your answer:

3. Do you need to spend more time alone with God every day? If your answer is “yes,” what do you think you should do?
4. Take a few minutes to pray, asking God to help you make and follow plans to spend more time with him daily.

Take time to relax

In Day 3, you read a verse in Paul’s letter to the Philippians for which I am very thankful. In the letter, he emphasized the importance of serving. However, he also let us know there is a balance:

*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:4)*

The words “not only” and “but also” let us know it’s okay to pay attention to our own interests as long as we remember that our primary task is to love God and others.

If you constantly serve others and find yourself getting worn out, add some “personal time” to your life. You will feel refreshed, and you will be better prepared to serve others without burning out.

Enjoy hobbies or other activities.

Spend time reading, gardening, knitting, programming the computer, or learning new skills.

Go for a walk, join a gym, or play a sport.

Exercise can be great for you emotionally as well as physically.

Spend time with friends.

Look for friends who will encourage your walk with God.

Learn a language, take a class, or join a Bible study.

Stretch yourself spiritually and intellectually. Study something new. Join a Bible study. Take a class at a local college, adult education program, or your church.

Take a bubble bath.

Sit in a hot tub, take a long hot bubble bath, or just stare at the beauty of nature. Find something you enjoy and do it.

Sleep more.

God wants us to get a good night’s sleep. Yet many of us (including me) often don’t get the sleep we need.

In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. (Psalm 127:2)

Take naps.

Some people find that taking short naps can be invigorating, especially after lunch.

Discussion questions

5. Why is it important to take some personal time for yourself?

6. How many minutes or hours do you spend on personal interests, recreation, or entertainment every day? What do you do at these times?
7. What are some things you would enjoy doing for personal time?

Make time for yourself

You may think, “I wish I could have some time for myself, but there just isn’t enough time.” If this describes you, you aren’t alone. Many people think they are too busy to take some personal time.

Yet when I counsel busy people, we always discover some ways they can create personal time—even if just for a few minutes a day.

Consider keeping the house a little less tidy. Your home doesn’t need to look perfect. Your walk with God and emotional health are more important.

Also evaluate whether or not you put in too many hours at work. Although some people must work long hours or take on several jobs to pay their bills, others don’t really need to. If you work at two jobs so you can buy a better home, but you don’t have any personal time, reevaluate whether or not the results are worth it.

If you can’t think of a way to make more time, ask a friend. Many people feel trapped by their circumstances when their friends can see more clearly.

Discussion question

8. Do you need to take more personal time? If your answer is “yes,” choose one task you will not do (or not do as well) to make more time for yourself. Then choose one thing you will do during your new personal time.

Make time for yourself in the midst of challenging circumstances

Do you have family members whose life circumstances seem to demand all your time or attention? Perhaps a parent, child, or spouse needs constant medical supervision. Or maybe you are distressed because one of your children is in trouble with the law (or is in prison). Or you are desperately worried about an adult child who is taking drugs or living on the street.

Regardless of your situation—and no matter how hard it is to find the time—you need to take some personal time to be refreshed and strengthened. Don’t feel guilty, thinking you are abandoning the other person to make time for yourself. I have known many people who felt trapped by their circumstances and didn’t make time to refresh themselves. They often ended up having major emotional and physical breakdowns.

“I have children at home who need my attention.”

If you have children, have them read or play quietly for a period of time each day so you can have some personal time. This is good for them as well as good for you. It’s not healthy for children to think their parents are full-time entertainers, activity directors, homework helpers, or chauffeurs.

“I have a special needs child.”

If you have a special needs child, it’s important to find ways to refresh yourself personally, but it can be difficult. Many churches provide supportive services for parents and their special needs

children. Plus, a few government programs offer help with respite services. Look for whatever support you can find. Don't feel guilty about taking advantage of it.

“My child is in trouble with the law.”

If one of your children is in trouble with the law, abuses drugs, or engages in other types of destructive behavior, your life can become consumed by his or her problems. No matter how worried you are over his or her future, you need to take some time to care for yourself.

“My adult children are draining me.”

It can be a great joy to help adult children as they embark on their life away from home. But it can be draining if your children pressure you to give them money. Be wise about how, when, and if you help.

Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to cut off the funds and let your children deal with their own problems. If you constantly bail them out, they will not become responsible. Let them know you love them and believe they can work out their problems. Be ready to stand firm.

If an adult child blames you for all of his or her problems, ask forgiveness for anything you did wrong, but don't allow yourself to be controlled by guilt. You were not a perfect parent (no one is), but that doesn't mean you should take full responsibility for your adult child's welfare or happiness.

“My elderly parents need my help.”

Pray for wisdom. Ask God to help you love with “knowledge and depth of insight” (Philippians 1:9). If a parent becomes too demanding or plays on your guilt, there may be times when it is appropriate to say “no” (and not feel guilty).

Discussion questions

9. Do you face challenging circumstances that seem to trap you? If so, describe them.
10. Do you feel guilty if you don't provide as much support for your children, parents, or others as you would like to give? If so, will today's lesson help you overcome your guilt and deal with your situation? Why or why not?

Memory verse

*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:4)*

Homework – Day Four

1. Do you think you take too much personal time, too little personal time, or about the right amount of personal time? Explain your answer:

2. Why is it important to pray and read the Bible daily? Explain your answer:

3. How often do you read the Bible?

How many days per week?

Approximately how many minutes per day?

4. How many hours a day do you relax or have fun?

What do you do to relax or have fun?

5. How much sleep do you average every night?

How much sleep do you think you need every night?

Have you ever been able to discipline yourself to get enough sleep? If so, explain what you did:

6. What could do you do to make more time for yourself? Explain your answer:

7. Do you face any of the challenging situations described in today's lesson? If so, did you learn anything that will help you make time for yourself? Explain your answer:

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. If you get worn out serving, it probably means you are not a Christian.
- F 2. God has not called you to be a servant.
- T 3. It's possible to find joy in serving.
- F 4. Christians should only serve in churches, not secular organizations.
- T 5. Cleaning someone's house could be an act of service.
- F 6. If you love people, you will do whatever they want.
- T 7. It's okay to say "no" if someone makes unreasonable demands.
- T 8. It's okay to bring up your own desires as long as your main goal is to serve others.
- F 9. It's a sin to take a nap.
- F 10. If you have young children, you should not take personal time.

Memory verses

- 1. 1 Corinthians 10:24
Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

- 2. Philippians 2:4
Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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First Things First
Living by Grace

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Conquering Depression
Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
Six Keys to Personal Growth
Six Keys to Successful Relationships
Strengthening Your Marriage
Victory over Grumpiness, Irritation, & Anger
Who Do You Think You Are?

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Making Christ the Cornerstone
Encouraging Your Spouse
Extending Grace to Your Mate
Talking with Respect and Love
Improving Your Teamwork
Putting Money in its Place
Celebrating Intimacy and Romance

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