

1 Peter 4:8-11 Supplied for Service

Do you want to make a difference? I'm guessing your answer is, "Yes! I want to make a difference!" Everyone craves this! We want to make a difference in our community, in our families, at our jobs, in our church. We want to bring something valuable to the table we can share with others. I think deep down everyone wants to be useful in some way. We all want to serve. Maybe some of us have bigger dreams than others. Some of the children here today might want to serve the *whole world* by growing up to be an astronaut. Those of us who are older maybe have more realistic goals like serving locally in our community, stocking a food pantry for those in need, cleaning up a park, or simply providing snacks at church. We want to be needed and valued by others. But maybe this ideal picture you have in your head for how you're going to serve others, the community, and the world isn't the reality. It's hard finding ways to serve sometimes. Sometimes the way we serve doesn't seem "good enough" or leave enough of an impact. Or maybe you don't have that big of a drive to get out and serve.

No matter how much, or how little, you serve, the key is to understand the mindset behind serving. We also need to realize that serving means sharing. Whether its cultivating a serving *mindset* or finding how you can best *share* your service, we start by looking at how God supplies us for service. In 1 Peter 4 we read how God supplies us with both a serving mindset and the capacity to share our service with others. Today you're going to see how you are SUPPLIED FOR SERVICE.

In verse 8 Peter tells us all about the serving mindset that we need to have before even setting out to serve. The most important quality of the serving mindset is love! "**Above all keep your love for one another fervent, because love covers a multitude of sins.**" The Bible makes this point, again and again – love is superior! And if there's one Greek word worth knowing it's the word *agape*. That's the word for love used here. Agape love is the highest form of love. This is love that acts, not love that simply says or promises. This is love that follows through and loves without needing a reason to show love. Sometimes it's the opposite. Agape love will love even when love is *not* deserved. And as if agape love wasn't strong enough, Peter says to have *fervent* agape love for each other! Fervent! That means to love others intensely and sincerely. This isn't a shallow or self-serving love. This is love that chomps at the bit! When this loving mindset motivates your service then you'll be ready and willing to serve people even if they've wronged you. Love covers a multitude of sins. This doesn't mean love ignores sin but it forgives it and serves regardless. With agape love as your mindset you'll be able to serve *anyone*!

Peter has explained the serving mindset has to be love. Now he steers us to see exactly what it means to serve. Everything he says next can be summarized as: serving means sharing! Serving means sharing with others. Serving means sharing gifts. Serving means sharing what God supplies. Serving means sharing glory.

That's a lot of sharing! The first point sounds redundant doesn't it? Serving means sharing with others. That's the only way *to* share! Sharing and service are defined by an others-come-first attitude. Service means submitting to help others before helping yourself. Serving will sometimes mean putting yourself at an inconvenience. One of the best illustrations of this is what Peter mentions in verse 9 - **showing hospitality to one another**. Hospitality might seem like something that is just common courtesy but showing hospitality can actually be pretty tough! The Greek word for hospitality itself combines two words: "love" and "stranger." Showing love to someone you know might be easy but is more difficult with strangers. You have to go out of your way to love strangers. You will probably be inconveniencing yourself in some way by showing hospitality. You share food, that you bought. You share kind words, whether someone deserves them or not. You might share your roof, for an extended period of time, with someone in need.

And this was an even bigger deal in Peter's day. There was a lack of decent hotels for ordinary people and so many would open their homes to complete strangers in order to offer them lodging and food. There was a lot of persecution in Peter's day so especially believers would end up hosting fellow Christians for an extended time period

after they'd been forced out of their homes and cities. Maybe showing hospitality had more meaning for people in Peter's day but I think we get this. There's something really cool that I've experienced in the year since moving to Chattanooga. It's called "Southern Hospitality." This is a real thing! And I love it! Nothing against people from up north, but people down here are genuinely friendlier and more welcoming! I've lost count how many times I've been invited in to someone's house when doing community surveys. Whether you've lived in the south your whole life or you're transplants, I think taking on some Southern Hospitality is a great way to serve and share!

Serving means sharing with others, and it means sharing gifts. The first thing to realize is that any gift we share is a gift we've graciously received from God. God didn't owe us whatever personal, unique gifts he's given. They're *graciously* given, just like our salvation! We will use those gifts to serve others in our own unique way. Peter wrote, "**Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another.**" This means we serve in the personal way that we best can. We all have different talents and all serve more effectively in some ways than others. There's no shame in saying "no" to a service opportunity if it doesn't fit you, or if it's not a gift God has given you. This doesn't mean to say no to everything, and maybe you can try new ways to serve, but find your service niche! A couple months ago I heard a radio preacher giving a message about serving in the church. At one point he shouted, "Get in your local church, sign up for everything! Whatever they've got going on. If it's running a vacuum cleaner, knocking on doors, cutting the grass, washing the vans, I don't care what it is!" I don't mean to personally attack that man but I really think that his idea of service is totally missing the point! Please *don't* sign up for everything here at church! I'd be worried for you if you did! A better idea is to take stock of what gifts you have and serve in just a couple areas that you enjoy or excel at! Service in a church doesn't have to be exhausting or forced. It can be rewarding and enjoyable! Maybe you like talking to people and would love to be serving at the front door of church. Maybe some of you would rather operate the audio and video from the back of the church. Rejoice in the gifts you've been given and in the gifts God has given others.

Instead of seeing your gifts as your own possessions see them as God's possessions. You simply get to be a faithful steward, or manager, of those gifts. The gift we have isn't used for personal gain or glory. We were given this gracious gift so that we could share it with others –no strings attached! And when each of us use our unique gifts then we are all being **good stewards of the varied grace, the varied gifts, of God.**

Serving means sharing your personal gifts with others. Serving also means sharing what God supplies. We already know that God is the one who supplies us with gracious gifts for service. God also supplies us with the words and the strength we need for service. "**Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies...**" First, if we speak we might as well speak with the words that God has supplied. We speak the truth of God's Word. We speak in a God-pleasing way. We speak to build up, not tear down. This doesn't mean that every word we speak has to be an exact quote from the Bible. But we might as well speak in a way that pleases God. God also supplies us with his own strength so that we can serve! We have the best power source. Our energy and power to serve others don't run out because God himself is our "service fuel." Our strength to serve is God-given not self-supplied. Be confident that you are supplied for service! You know your supplier!

The final aspect of sharing service is realizing that when we serve we share glory. When we're praised for the loving service we've given we're sharing glory with God. As Peter says, "**Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.**" We give God glory through our acts of service because God is the one who has blessed us with our unique gifts in the first place. He is the one who supplies us with strength to serve! We serve in order to give God a good reputation in the world, the reputation he deserves. Serving means sharing glory.

So, now that you know service means sharing are you ready for what comes next? Are you ready to compare how well you've served in light of these verses? I'll admit I don't really want to. I'm afraid of what I'm going to discover about myself. Maybe as you heard the high standards of serving you're getting nervous about this too. First, serving

means sharing with others. How well have I served, putting the needs of others ahead of mine? If you're like me, you spend most of your day thinking about yourself; how to serve your own needs. Serving others might happen but can easily become an obligation rather than an act of love. Take hospitality for example. God says to **show hospitality without complaining**. But when that moocher relative keeps asking for money or that childhood friend overstays his welcome, isn't complaining the first reaction? Whispering to your spouse, "When are we gonna be done with this guy?" That's hard not to do. Second, serving means sharing gifts. But instead of seeing our unique gifts as things to be managed for others we might see them as possessions to be hoarded and kept to ourselves. Third, serving means sharing what God supplies. But sometimes the words God supplies aren't the words I want to use. Sometimes I'd rather serve using my own strength so that *I* can claim the credit for my service. Which brings up the last and hardest truth. Serving means sharing glory. But when I do something nice for someone don't I deserve the credit? I want people to see my great acts of service and I'd rather not have them glorify God for that service, I want that glory for myself!

We start to see that our serving mindset itself is warped. Above all we are to have love for each other! But when love isn't our mindset behind serving, things fall apart. Selfishness is hard to overcome. At times I sinfully want to serve *myself* most, on *my* terms, for *my* glory. Selfishness is the biggest obstacle to service. Selfishness is sin.

Now, more than ever, am I thankful that my God came not to *be* served but *to* serve. God sent his Son, Jesus, to serve sinners with the cure for selfishness. Jesus' service to me was not selfish but selfless. His service to me is colored by fervent agape love that covers over my countless acts of selfishness. Jesus loved you so fervently and intensely that he sacrificed himself to cover selfishness and sin once for all on the cross. Jesus does what we couldn't. Jesus serves sinners, on his Father's terms, for the Father's glory. Jesus keeps no record of your selfishness. He's not making a tally in a notebook each time you fail to serve correctly. He has nailed that tally of your sins to his cross and put them to death with him. This is love that covers a multitude of sins. This was the ultimate act of service by Jesus.

Jesus' selfless act of service supplies you for service too. Through faith you gain the same serving mindset of your Savior. When you love and serve your neighbor you are reflecting just a fraction of the amazing love Jesus has shown you; love that God has supplied you with. Because Jesus shared his perfect service with you, you are able to serve. You won't serve perfectly, but you're forgiven for the times selfishness creeps in. God has supplied you with your own, unique gifts and you'll find joy in using those gifts to bless others just as they bless you with their gifts. Living Hope will provide opportunities to serve at church, and we'll also come up with outlets for you to serve your community. And remember that as a redeemed child of God you *will* serve and love your neighbor because of the love God supplies you with.

Sometimes you may serve others without even realizing it or making a conscious decision to serve. Your new, Christ-given mindset will lead you to serve naturally. You can serve God and your neighbor in ordinary ways every day. Simply by living your God-given roles you will share the love God has already supplied you with. Are you a mother? You serve faithfully by performing the "ordinary" duties of taking care of your children's needs. Are you an employee? You serve your fellow man simply by going to work each day and supplying that service for others, no matter what the job might be! You don't have to go searching for big ways to "make a difference" in this world. You serve in everyday ordinary ways, probably without even knowing it! And no matter how big or little a difference you think you're making, God smiles to see you serving with love. He loves to see you share your gifts for the good of others. Your service is fueled by God's love for you: that mighty demonstration of the highest service given, by Jesus. You're supplied for service. AMEN.