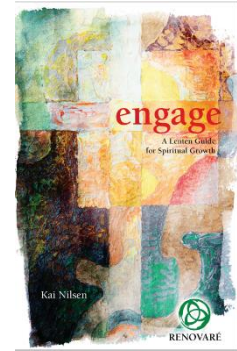


Engage: Service

Session Three



This guide for small group discussion is based on the *Renovaré* resource, *Engage*, written, compiled and edited by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe and Eric Magnusson and the *Renovaré* team. Download *Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth* from *Renovaré* at: www.renovare.org/books/engage.

Opening Questions

- What is something that made you smile today?
- How were you a blessing to someone else today or this week?
- What are some ideas or comments that you continued to think about after last week's gathering on the faith practice of "celebrate"? What gets in the way of living into this practice? What helps you to engage with this practice?

Introduction

Kathy Nycklemoe

Do we really *need* each other? And if we do, why? Can't I live my solitary life, with my individual rights as most important? Today our consumer culture encourages such thinking, and puts the "self" in the center. We can easily see others as worthy if they are like us and benefit us, and less than worthy if they do not. Yet this thinking is a deceptive illusion. God is in the center of all life and all people are of shared value and worth. Jesus showed us that truth many times, and in the divine design of God we are created to see others as worthy AND to simply help one another along the way.

God has created us to be in community and we are most "alive" when we live into this reality in humble service to one another. True service is alive when we share our gifts with joy, as well as when we allow others to share their gifts with us. True service leads to God and not to self. True service is much more than something we do – it is who we are created to be. It is more than an activity, it is a way of life. Any time we love, listen to, or lift up others, we serve. "True service is a life-style. It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It springs spontaneously to meet human need." (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p.129)

What Does the Bible Say?

Matthew 20:26-28

It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

- What do you notice in this text today?
- Where do you see God at work through people sharing their time, gifts, and love?
- Frederick Buechner teaches us that, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*) Where does your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet? How is God glorified when you share your gifts with others? How is God glorified when you allow others to share their gifts with you?
- How do you respond when others reach out to help you or be a blessing in your life? Is it easy or difficult to be on the receiving end?
- How does serving build a sense of community?

Supplement—

Look at John 6: 1-14 with Pastor Joel Vander Wal at the end of this session. This can be used individually or together as a group.

What Do Our Guides Say?

Richard Foster

"True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings."
(Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p.128)

- When have you experienced a "whispered prompting" to reach out to someone? What happened? What was the outcome?
- Do a "motivation check" – do you seek affirmation and results in your service to others, or do you simply do your best and let go and allow God to work?
- What are some ways to create space to listen for God's "whispered promptings"?

What Do Others Say?

Kathy Nycklemoe

I am heartened by the many ways children are encouraged to serve these days. When I was young I remember being taught the Golden Rule and watching my parents help others, but it was nothing near the emphasis of service that many children are taught today. Recycling, volunteering at food banks, and "adopting highways" are part of children's lives in contrast to our self-centered, consumer culture. There is great hope.

When I think of the many ways I have received God's great love, people are always involved. When I was a junior in high school there was a teacher with whom I would talk for hours. Who knows what we talked about but I do remember his generous ear and heart. When our children were young and my husband and I were trying to be good parents and pastors – it took a village. We received meals, encouragement, and prayers. And when my dad was dying of cancer, the service of love, prayers, casseroles, and the occasional good humor, got us through.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- What jumps out for you from this reading?
- What messages did you receive about serving others when you were growing up?
- Who models a life of service for you? What characteristics are evident in their life?
- Tell about a meaningful experience you've had while volunteering or simply reaching out to someone in your daily life.
- When someone you know is struggling, what are the things you think about or consider, as you try to figure out how to be helpful to them?
- If you've gone through a difficult time and others stepped in, what did they do that was most helpful or comforting to you?
- What kinds of service or volunteering have you considered, but not stepped into yet? How could you be a blessing? How might the experience be a blessing to you?
- What gifts do you have to offer? Where can you offer them or where have you already shared them?
- For you, what are the challenges or barriers to reaching out to serve others? What might make it easier for you to serve?

Faith Practice – What Can I Do?

"In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world." (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p.182)

- Pray for openness to see the needs of others. Opportunities to promote the good of others (friends and strangers) come to us all the time. Pray for openness to see these opportunities as well as the humility and wisdom to engage.
- Listen to others with no agenda or need to "fix" them. Imagine seeing them through Jesus's eyes and allow them the space to be heard.

"Worship is our response with all of our lives, everything that we've been given, to all that God is. And so, if we come in here into this place and we raise our hands and we raise our voices, but we don't stretch these hands out when we leave this place, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and [be a] light for the poor and for the oppressed, then what you and I have done is worship a singer or a song, but not a God."

– Shaun Groves,

<https://shaungroves.com/about/>
and www.compassion.com

- Let go and love. Take a chance to offer God's love to others in daily life. Hold the door open, attempt to be patient in the grocery line or in traffic, contact someone you are thinking of, surprise someone with a smile, speak up when others are being belittled.
- Practice hospitality in the workplace, where you volunteer, at home, at church, anywhere.
- Allow others to serve you with gratitude. You may be providing a great opportunity for their soul!
- What would you add to this list? Select one that you could intentionally try this week.

As a Group:

By serving together as a group you can have a bigger impact and you can deepen your sense of community within the group. The group didn't sign up for this, so this is optional – but for those interested, is there a simple way to serve together? For example:

- Consider packing with Feed My Starving Children at the Incarnation mobile pack.
- Bring donations for Ralph Reeder Food Shelf to the next gathering and say a prayer over them, asking God to bless the people receiving the items.
- Bring items to create blessing bags. Find instructions at: <https://www.incarnationmn.org/ministries/ministry-partners/blessing-bags/>
- Other ideas?

Closing Prayer

Spend time in silent prayer as the group leader guides you through these reflection prompts. Begin with a moment of silence.

- Call to mind the many ways you have been blessed by others throughout your life or just in the past few days. (silence)
- Take a quick inventory of what you already engage in that promotes the good of others as you go through the day. (silence)
- Offer a silent prayer of thanks for the many ways you have been blessed by others. (silence)
- Leader: "God, we give you thanks for our blessings and ask you to show us how to be a blessing to others. Amen."

Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Seekers ABC* HarperOne. 1993. www.harpercollins.com and <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/>

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. HarperOne, 2018. www.harpercollins.com.

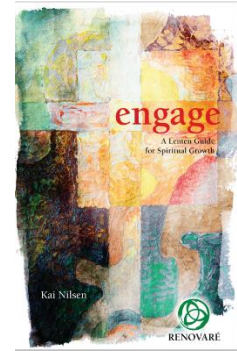
Nilsen, Kai, and Keith Matthews, Kathie Nycklemoe, Eric Magnusson & the Renovare Team. *Engage: A Lenten Guide for Spiritual Growth*. Renovare. 2014. www.renovare.org.

Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. HarperOne, 1999. www.harpercollins.com and www.dwillard.org

Engage—Reflection Time

Before the next gathering, spend a few minutes quietly reflecting, journaling or writing a few notes on one or more of these reflection questions.



Faith Practice Questions: Service

- What do you think about this practice?
- For you, what is the core intention or hope of this practice?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are various ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

Insights for the Journey:

- How have you experienced God's presence this week?
- How has your connection with yourself, with others deepened because of your intentional work with this discipline?
- What about this discipline will you continue to build into your life?
- Ask God for continued guidance and encouragement as you make the journey of this season.

Engage—Supplement

Service as a Spiritual Practice

Pastor Joel Vander Wal - created as part of the Wednesday Bible Study



In our Christian life and faith we are constantly invited into acts of service as an expression of love for our neighbor. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming as we drive around town and encounter people experiencing homelessness or the countless people who experience food insecurity every day. We may want to respond like the disciples, “Lord we don’t have enough food, we don’t have enough money, we don’t have enough time!” Yet, in the middle of the story is a young boy who offers an ordinary gift of bread and fish. Not because he believes it will be enough to feed 5,000 people, he knows it’s not enough. But simply because he believes Jesus can do something extraordinary with his ordinary gift.

John 6: 1-14 (NRSV)

“After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’”

Questions to ponder:

- In what ways do the disciples perform acts of service in this story?
- Why do you think Jesus asked them to pick up all of what was left over? What might the phrase, “so that nothing may be lost,” represent?
- What ordinary gifts do you have to offer that Jesus might be able to do something extraordinary through?