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DISCOVER GOD'S TRUTH:  
JESUS SERVED

## The Truth about Serving

*I*t must have been the end to a long, hot day. Having been on their feet for the better part of the day, the evening meal was a much-needed time of rest and refreshment for Jesus and His friends. It signaled the end of work and the beginning of a time of community. I'm sure the conversation centered on the events of the day, the miracles they had witnessed, and the people they had come in contact with.

Unnoticed by the others, Jesus “got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron” (John 13:4–5 MSG).

Peter protested, but Jesus continued. Jesus' companions must have looked at one another with amazement and the murmuring around the table probably sounded like the buzz of busy bees.

“What is He doing? Why is He doing the job of a servant?” they asked one another.

Jesus finished washing each friend’s feet, and then He removed the apron, put His robe back on, and went back to His place at the table. “Then he said, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as “Teacher” and “Master,” and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet. I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do’” (John 13:12–15 MSG).

It was the ultimate act of servant leadership. Most important, it set the example for how we’re to live our everyday lives.

## Servant Leadership

Every day you and I have the opportunity to practice servant leadership. The profession of motherhood is about meeting the needs of others, caring for them physically, emotionally, and relationally. It requires a giving heart, a selfless spirit, and a strong sense of identity to serve generously.

Most moms don’t think of themselves as a leader. But that’s what a parent is. They are the leader of their children. Jesus described Himself as “Master” and “Teacher.” We are that to our children. Certainly they don’t call us “master,” but a master is defined as “a person whose teachings others accept and follow.”<sup>1</sup>

Let’s be honest: my children don’t always accept my teachings, but for the most part they do follow them. And “teacher”—I doubt any of us would disagree with that. Mothers are natural teachers. We are imparting wisdom, giving direction, and helping our children learn about their world every day.

Jesus’ titles of Master and Teacher were titles of authority. He was their leader. But in the humbling act of washing His pupils’ feet, He balanced authority leadership with servant leadership. He

brought alive Matthew 20:16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” So is that saying that by being a servant we can become an even more influential leader in our kids’ lives? That’s exactly what Jesus said. I know . . . it’s hard to fathom. It’s mind-blowing. It’s countercultural. And it’s Christlike.

### What’s a Mom to Do?

They say with kids more is caught than taught. What they see us do is far more important than what we tell them to do. They follow our example and grow up to be more like us than we’d sometimes like them to be. They “catch” our good and our bad.

Many of the things I do as a mother I do because I’m following the example of my mother. But she’s not the only example I have to follow. For those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, we have His example to follow. He lived to give and He died serving. He was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, but He lived the humble life of a carpenter. He had the title of all titles: the Lord God Almighty, but He didn’t force Himself on anybody, nor did He require that people bow down and worship Him. Instead He shared meals with tax collectors and slept in the wilderness. He spent time with the “least of these” and showed love to the unlovely. Now that’s a hard act to follow.

We read in John 13:15–16 (NLT), “I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message.” Jesus asks us to follow His example. We’re not perfect. We won’t do it exactly right. But we’re called to become more Christlike every day. Personally I’m thankful to have a God who not only says, “Do as I say,” but also, “Do as I do.” He led by example and showed us that it is doable.

Our human nature struggles with the concept of “being last.” We often give to get. We serve with the expectation of being served in return. Yet the very nature of mothering responsibilities slowly erodes that sense of entitlement and selfishness that we often bring into adulthood. Once a child grabs hold of our heart, we find a generosity in us like we’ve never experienced before. The sense of entitlement fades away and we learn to work harder than we’ve ever worked in our lives. We go without sleep and forget to eat. We give even when it feels like we have nothing left to give. Sometimes all we receive back from a cranky baby is a headache and from a rebellious teenager a heartache. That doesn’t feel like much return for all the time, energy, and love we’ve given so freely.

Before we know it, we can begin to feel taken advantage of. And if we aren’t careful, we lose valuable perspective. This is where serving has to have balance—and to learn about that balance we need to again follow the example of our Friend who understands.

### Serve with a Curve

The Bible is full of stories of Jesus’ busy life. He traveled, He spoke, He healed, He listened, He shared, He taught; and then He went to bed and did it all over again the next day. Yet even in the midst of a life of service, He knew that if you give freely you have to curve around and receive freely as well. Serving with a straight line (giving and not receiving) may result in burnout, bitterness, and sheer exhaustion.

The Bible tells us, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). This was Jesus’ primary time of receiving. He refueled His emotional and spiritual fuel tank by spending time with God. He stepped away from the spotlight to pray and get His direction from His Father.

I once read that Susanna Wesley (1669–1742), the mother of nineteen, would pull up her hoop skirt over her head to find a moment to pray. Susanna was the mother of John Wesley, considered the founder of the Methodist Church, and Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer. That’s a mom who understood her need to pull up to the spiritual filling station so she had the love, perspective, and energy to serve her very large family. You and I need to do the same.

We’ll talk about prayer more in depth in a later chapter, but let’s look at spending time with God as an essential part of serving. Serving is giving. Spending time with God is receiving. You and I need to receive from God

hope, truth, love, encouragement, perspective, and value. Spending time with Him will fill our tank so that we serve out of the overflow of what God has filled us with. God confirms this in 2 Corinthians 1:3–5: “God

Spending time with Him will fill our tank so that we serve out of the overflow of what God has filled us with.

. . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” Also in 2 Corinthians 9:10–11 (MSG), “This most generous God . . . gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.” When we spend time with God, we fill up until we are overflowing and it is out of the overflow that we are able to serve others.

How do we receive from God? There are two ways: talking to Him (prayer) and reading His instruction manual (the Bible). Don’t worry about formalities here; God just wants you to talk

with Him. What are your struggles? Tell Him. What are you angry about? Tell Him. What is tripping you up in your relationships? Tell Him. What are you thankful for? Tell Him. What fears do you have? Tell Him. What are your hopes and dreams for the future? Tell Him. God just wants to hear our heart. He already knows our needs, but He longs for us to trust Him and invite Him into our daily life.

What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

Tell Him. God just wants to hear our heart.

Just like Jesus, I need to “withdraw from the crowds” to pray. Realistically, He probably sat on a rock in the desert to pray and I most often sit on a toilet in the bathroom (with the lid down, of course!). Seriously, the bathroom is sometimes the only place where a mom can find a few minutes of quiet. So use what you have! Keep a Bible and a notebook in the bathroom to read a few nuggets of truth and journal your prayers. Or just close the door, take a couple of deep breaths to quiet your mind, and talk with the Lord for a few moments.

If you can get up a few minutes before your family to spend time with God, you will fill up your tank before you start serving. Even just five or ten minutes can make a huge difference in a mom’s day. I’ve always struggled with this myself, because I’m more of a night owl than an early bird. But when I’ve managed to make it happen, I notice a huge difference in my ability to care for my family.

My friend Becky writes Scripture on index cards and places the cards all over the house: on her bathroom mirror, on the refrigerator, next to the computer, on the dash of her car . . . anywhere she will be so that she can be reminded of God’s truth for her life. Any time we read God’s Word—even if it’s one verse at a time—we fill up our tank so we can serve out of our overflow.



## Receiving The Serve

When Mark was attending Bible college and we were struggling to make ends meet, we were approached by the pastor of our church one Sunday. He walked up to Mark, extended his hand for a handshake and placed a \$100 bill in his pocket. Mark immediately tried to give the money back, but Don wouldn't allow him to give it back. Finally Don said something neither Mark nor I have ever forgotten. He said, "Don't ever deny me the opportunity to serve my Lord." We were powerfully affected by Don's word and we quickly learned another aspect of serving. If someone serves, then someone else has to receive.

Most of us struggle with receiving. We either see it as a sign of weakness to have someone help us, or we hate to cause another person any inconvenience. But an important part of serving is also graciously receiving when God asks someone else to serve.

As moms, most of us fall easily into the "I'll take care of it myself" mind-set. When someone asks if they can help, we respond, "No, I think I'm doing okay." We labor alone, often ending up emotionally overwhelmed or physically exhausted. A mother who does everything for the family and expects nothing from them will raise children who grow up and have no sense of responsibility. We need to invite our children to serve right alongside of us. And sometimes we even need to allow them to serve us. That's a challenge for most of us, but a very important part of modeling a balanced picture of serving.

Jesus also models the receiving side of serving. He allowed others to occasionally make dinner for Him. He let a woman pour perfume on His feet and wipe His feet with her hair. He permitted the disciples to steer a boat He was in so He could sleep. He gave

Himself completely, but He balanced the serving He did with allowing others to serve Him, as well. It's a pattern set for us to follow.

How do we apply this to everyday life in the trenches of motherhood? Consider these possibilities:

- When your husband says “How can I help you?” don’t brush away his question, but invite him to join you in whatever you are doing.
- If your neighbor comes over while you’re making a fruit salad for the neighborhood cookout, ask her to help you cut up the strawberries.
- Rather than making dinner alone for your family night after night, ask your children to help you with age-appropriate tasks. A preschooler can help set the table; a grade-schooler can help clean vegetables or make a salad. A teenager is fully capable of being in charge of planning and preparing one meal each week.
- When your mother-in-law comes over and takes it upon herself to clean your kitchen, be grateful for the help rather than offended by her actions. Thank her for her servant heart and graciously receive the gift.
- The next time you are sick and a girlfriend calls you during the day and asks if she can bring you dinner . . . say yes!

### A Servant Heart

In today’s me-first society, having a servant heart can be considered countercultural. But the joy of serving others offers an

experience like none other. Because we are made in the image of God, we are designed to serve.

The profession of motherhood is about caring for the needs of those around us. But as Christ showed us, we have to both give and receive. And we have to serve out of the overflow of our heart rather than our emptiness. There is great strength and beauty in serving our family, friends, and neighbors, and allowing them to serve us. Christ served freely and we are called to do the same!

*Jesus, Thank You for showing me the balance of serving. Help me to serve with a right heart and to recognize the gift I offer when I serve. Most important, though, help me to learn to receive. It's so hard to let others serve me, yet I know that's part of the deal, too! Let me both give and receive. As I hang with You, Lord, and learn more about You, help me to be more like You every day.*

## Perspective



*Help! Everyone wants a piece of me.*

**E**rica was so unhappy. “Uncomfortable” was the only word to describe this third child of mine. We never experienced colic with the first two babies, but this one had been crying nonstop for nearly six months. My two older children were six and four and still needed a lot of my attention. On one particular day I remember feeling like I had a baby attached to my breast and a preschooler attached to each leg the entire day. I finally tucked everyone into bed for the night and I made a beeline for my own bed . . . only to find a husband with a gleam in his eye!

I wanted to scream, “If one more person touches this body, I’ll lose it!”

Let’s face it. When we launch into the journey of motherhood, it takes a physical toll on us. If you give birth, you lose all sense of modesty once labor sets in. Every part of your body is pushed, pulled, looked at, and touched in ways you would have never

imagined possible. Once that beautiful little one is placed in your arms, he begins rooting for his first meal and your breasts suddenly have a new job.

Maybe you came into motherhood through adoption. Still, children have to be carried as infants. As they enter the toddler and preschool years they seem to think you are a moving piece of playground equipment—jumping, hanging, and climbing on you nonstop.

We can't forget Dad in all of this. In the midst of all the “little people” demanding their needs be met, Dad can easily move from his well-earned place on the top of the priority list to right under “feed the dog” at the bottom of the list. That's not the way it should be . . . it just happens if we're not careful.

When Jesus lived on this earth, it seemed that everyone wanted a piece of Him. There are many stories in the Bible that show people wanting Jesus' time and His touch. Some waited patiently for their turn and others pushed their way through the crowd to simply touch the hem of His garment. One particular story about a woman who was desperate to touch Jesus comes to mind. The Bible says she had been bleeding for twelve years and she believed Jesus could heal her. She pushed her way through the crowd and was able to just touch His clothing. Because of her faith, she was healed. (Read about her in Matthew 9:20–22.)

Jesus' experience on this earth is very similar to ours as mothers. Our family wants our time and our touch. Some wait patiently (like a weary husband) and others demand their way (like a screaming baby). Jesus was in high demand, and as mothers we are in high demand, as well.

Jesus modeled for us how to handle the demands that are placed upon us. His strategies included prayer and knowing how to find quiet moments in the midst of the chaos. We'll explore those more in the coming pages, but for now simply focus on the fact

that He understands. He gets it. He knows what it feels like for everyone to want a piece of you.

*Pray . . .*

*Thank you, God, for the diary of Your life in the Bible. Thank You for the stories about everyone wanting to touch You and spend time with You. You really do understand me and how it feels like everyone wants a piece of me. Help me to find Your peace in the midst of mothering. Help me to keep my eyes on You as I accomplish the tasks of motherhood. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Take a few minutes to talk with Him some more. Don't worry, He's not looking for formality—He just wants you to share your heart and what's on your mind.*

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*Discover . . .*

*Read Matthew chapters 3 and 4. Ask God to show you a different side of Jesus than you've ever seen before.*



TRUTH . . .

So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He's the centerpiece of everything we believe, faithful in everything God gave him to do.

HEBREWS 3:1–2 (THE MESSAGE)