

## Serve One Another

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**Sermon Series: One  
Anothering**

**1 Peter 4:7-11**

*I knew I had  
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I was sitting in the waiting room of the surgery suite, fidgeting impatiently and pretending to read, when the surgeon came out to talk with me. My husband, Steve, had hurt his knee while skiing several months before, and we finally decided to have arthroscopic surgery.

The surgeon began: “Well, Mrs. Braskamp, your husband’s surgery went well, we’re finishing up right now. I want to show you what we did.” This was the moment that I had been waiting for. Would Steve’s knee surgery mean that he’d be on crutches for two days...or six weeks? Those were the two options. As soon as the surgeon showed me the arthroscopic photos, I knew I had been drafted into six weeks of intense service to my husband on crutches. And, so, the adventure of service began.

The first trip to the grocery store was the most memorable event of the six weeks. Steve usually does the grocery shopping in our family; he insisted on coming along with me and pushing the cart. He’d give it a shove and then take a few steps on crutches to catch up to the cart. It was pretty precarious; produce and other shoppers were in danger. Thankfully, only a few tomatoes were lost.

The hardest part about serving Steve was in the little things: “Could I have a glass of water?” “Would you get me a Diet Coke, please?” “My book’s upstairs; do you mind getting it?” Those things that Steve can usually do for himself, all of the sudden I had to do.

It was hard for both of us. When I say hard, I mean character building. After the first week, the old way I used to serve others just didn’t work anymore. Through this experience, God taught us what it means to serve, and to be served—in God’s way, not our way.

We’ve been talking about “one-anothering” since the beginning of the new year: love one another, forgive one another, confess your sins to one another, encourage one another, be kind to one another and teach and admonish one another. We can’t do any of these things by being distant, connecting only on Sundays with a smile and a handshake. This involves getting into the messy details of each other’s lives. Are you feeling as if things are getting a little personal? Good, that’s the right attitude to approach this Scripture with.

We’ll begin by walking through the Scripture itself, sifting out God’s principles for serving, and discerning where each of us is called to serve.

***We are each handcrafted, one-of-a-kind creations of God, with gifts that God has given us for service.***

Let's set the context. This letter was written by Peter to counsel disciples about how to live in relationship with others. In chapters 2-4, Peter gives the believers instructions about how to treat those outside the community (outreach). Then, in today's passage, 4:7-11, Peter talks about how to treat fellow believers within the community of faith (in-reach).

Verse 7 kicks off this section with a no-nonsense punch: "The end of all things is near." That may be shocking to our postmodern ears. The first hearers would have heard the hopeful reminder that God's judgment is at hand. Therefore, be serious and discipline yourselves. More literally, keep your head and give your full attention to your prayers. If you're losing your head or your focus, then you're not going to be praying very much—and you'll lose your connection with God.

Now that Peter has our attention, he gives us the key to being a faithful community of believers, in verse 8: "Maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins."

Why is love the key? Love is the remedy to sin. The relationships we have with other believers will be broken in all kinds of sinful ways, but if we continue to love each other, those sins will be covered over and forgotten.

And, going on to verse 9: "Be hospitable to one another, without complaining." In the ancient world, there were no hotel chains,

there was no formalized system of housing and feeding travelers. Being hospitable literally means "friendly to strangers"—which would most likely involve housing and feeding a stranger in your own home. Peter is realistic: he says no complaining. Complaining undermines hospitality at its heart.

And, finally, in verses 10-11, our focus today, Peter gets specific about what love and hospitality involve: "You are good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Peter means that you and I are caretakers of what belongs to God—nothing less than the abundant, diverse grace of God. And we are called to: "...serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies."

God has made each of us for service. There's no spiritual assembly line, where God stamps us out with the same gifts. We are each handcrafted, one-of-a-kind creations of God, with gifts that God has given us for service. Other places in the Scriptures give a detailed list of these gifts (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). The list here is quite simple: the gift of words, the gift of deeds. Both the words and the deeds come from God.

And the end purpose of all this serving is in verse 11: "...so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ." Serving is not about you or me; it's about God.

*When you believe that you serve out of your own efforts, trying harder makes it worse.*

*Where do those needs of our community and your gifts intersect? That intersection is where you're called to serve.*

Serving may sound good in theory, but it is difficult in practice. I believe that most of us want to serve. And we need to learn God's way of service. Before my servant boot camp (Steve's six weeks on crutches), I held several beliefs about serving that kept me from serving in God's way. I bet that many of you hold these misconceptions as well.

**Misconception #1. The one being served has it easy.**

By outward appearances, Steve was being catered to, by me. He was chauffeured to work the first week. His choice of beverage was always being served. He was king of the couch.

That's just part of the picture: it's hard to admit that you need help. Steve wanted to grocery shop with a full-sized cart while on crutches. It's humbling to need the service of others.

Believing that the one being served has it easy is actually a back-handed complaint. God instructs us to "be hospitable to one another without complaining."

**Misconception #2. Having trouble serving? Just try harder.**

I mentioned earlier that my old ways of serving just didn't work after the first week. When you believe that you serve out of your own efforts, trying harder makes it worse. You find yourself grumbling and complaining, wishing that the other person would just get it together and do something for himself. God calls us not to try harder but to lean on him harder,

to "serve one another with the words of God and the strength of God."

**Misconception #3: You'll have tours of service.**

I knew I had a season to serve (six weeks), and then I hoped for a season to be off-duty. Maintaining constant love and service is a life-long habit, not an on-again, off-again duty. You're always on. And if you have the mind of a servant, you'll always be looking for a place to help; and asking for help as you need it.

Serving doesn't involve complaining; serving doesn't involve our strength; serving doesn't involve a limited amount of time. Serving involves hospitality; serving involves the strength of God; serving involves a life-long habit.

To conclude this message, I want you to imagine all the needs of this congregation—of individuals, families and groups. You may want to begin with the people you know, or people on the prayer list. You can look around at us gathered here. Imagine the ministry and service opportunities—those that are ongoing, those not yet dreamed of.

Now, remember the gifts that God has given you specifically—maybe you're a good listener, good cook, teacher, a pray-er. Remember the ways that you love to serve.

Where do those needs of our community and your gifts intersect? That intersection is where you're called to serve.

***I challenge you to find one way to serve one another this week. It may be simple or ordinary—such as a phone call to someone who is sick. Or it may be a step in a process, such as investigating a service opportunity that would use your gifts.***

I challenge you to find one way to serve one another this week. It may be simple or ordinary—such as a phone call to someone who is sick. Or it may be a step in a process, such as investigating a service opportunity that would use your gifts. Already know what you need to do? Go ahead and write it down, and follow through this week. Don't know where to begin? Start with prayer. Have a conversation with a friend.

Maybe you've come here today needing help. I encourage you to ask a fellow member, friend. Many needs go unknown in this congregation—so opportunities for service are lost. Maybe you need a listening ear, a spiritual friend (such as a Stephen Minister), or a ride to the doctor. Get up the courage to ask.

Habits are cultivated by getting serious and disciplined. The only way to learn how to serve one another is to start doing it, until it becomes second nature.

Whom are you going to serve this week? How are you going to serve? "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift that each of you has received."

Holy God,

You came not to be served,  
but to serve.

Impart to us, your servants,  
that attitude, by the power of your  
spirit.

Give us the words to say, and  
the strength to serve, in the ways  
that you have prepared us for.  
In your name we pray, Amen.

