

Forty Days of Purpose Devotional

Day 29 "Service is not optional."

Anyone who has elderly parents knows the relationship between LOVE and SERVICE. Dad might be thirsty, but have trouble walking. Out of love, you would gladly get him a glass of water. Where would your love be if you would not? Mom might need help getting her shoes on and off, so you cheerfully do that for her. Where would your love be if you would not? Service in the body of Christ is not "extra", something that you can choose to add to "love" or perhaps refrain from adding, but rather is the expression and the measure of love. There is no actual distinction between LOVING your heavenly Father and serving Him, nor is there a distinction between loving and serving your neighbor. Numerous passages in the Bible make this clear:

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." (1Jn 3:16-20 [NIV])

Notice carefully what this passage says – anyone who does not serve his "brother" does not love God, and is therefore guilty of breaking "the first and greatest commandment". But also notice the promise that, if we love and serve God and our brothers, we "know that we belong to the truth", i.e. we have the peace of inner assurance of our salvation. But "service" without love, service that comes from fear of punishment, does not help our cause:

"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1Cor 13:3 [NIV])

- Love for God comes as we get to know Him in all His kindness, beauty and majesty.
- Love for our brothers and neighbors comes as we are filled to overflowing with God's love.
- Service to God and others is simply what this love looks like when it is real in a human life.

How do you feel about yourself? Psychologists and psychiatrists around the world are witnesses to the simple fact that a person who sees himself as unnecessary is not a happy person. Someone devoted to self-gratification is an addict, and while an addict may be *high* they are never really *happy*. But what does it mean to be "necessary"? There are two basic requirements: first, there must be at least one need in the life of at least one person, and secondly, you must be the one meeting that need. We all know that there are lots of people with lots of needs, so that is seldom the problem. The real issue is whether you are meeting anyone's needs – whether you are serving them in an effective way. Notice the word "effective", which means that we don't get to do whatever we want, but rather what is actually needed. It also means that we need to do something that we can actually do well, lest we be the source of more trouble than help.
