

Sermon Series: Draw Near

Sermon Title: 21 Christlike Ways of Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Serving

Sermon Text: Romans 12

Sermon Summary:

This study examines the entire chapter of Romans 12 to discover at least 21 Christlike ways to practice the spiritual discipline of serving! We are confronted with this truth: because of God's mercy in Christ, we should become living sacrifices serving God in love with our God-given abilities so we can overcome evil with good! The detailed way in which Paul directs his readers to understand this concept uncovers proper motives behind the discipline of service along with proper actions of service. When practiced in our lives, the discipline of service has the potential to change you and the world around you!

Full Sermon Notes

"You have broken every chain. There's salvation in Your name Jesus Christ my living hope." Folks that's the reason I want to serve Jesus every day of my life! He died to save me and I want to live a life of gratitude! I owe Him everything! Let me pray for us!

"Father God, I desire to be Your servant in what I say and what I do! I want all of my life to reflect my service to You! I know I fall so short of being all that You created me to be and of being like Christ in the way I live, but with Your precious Holy Spirit as my guide, I know I can learn, and grow, and do so much better. Not to earn Your love, I don't have to do that, but because of Your love and I want to do that! Every day I want to do that as I serve You and the people You love. What a privilege to be a servant of The Almighty God! I desire to be hidden behind the cross so that Your glory is all people see! In Jesus Name I pray and I believe, Amen!!"

Today we're going to look at Romans 12. We're going to take this chapter verse by verse and discover 21 ways we can practice the spiritual discipline of service! Sometimes we act like God is playing a guessing game with us on how we are to serve Him, but He's not! He's made it really plain, simple and detailed. So without further adieu let's jump right in.

1. Practice serving with gratitude!

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy...

Ok, we'll stop right there for a moment. This is one of the most important statements in all of the Bible. It is one of the most important principles when it comes to a Christ follower's life! It is the motive for everything a disciple of Christ does. It should serve as the underlying motivation for any Christian Church. In view of God's mercy! In view of, because of, as a result of, considering, owing to, thanks to, due to, through and by the mercy of God we live. If not for the mercy and breathtaking grace of God where would we be? Hopeless, purposeless, directionless, just plain lost! So everything we do should be done in view of God's mercy! Our service to God is only possible because of His mercy! Listen...

Ephesians 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,
Ephesians 2:5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions —it is by grace you have been saved.

Our church purpose statement is based on the mercy of God in what Jesus did on the cross...

To see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

2. Practice serving with your life!

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...

First of all this verse says offer your bodies as "living sacrifices." Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice in death in order that we might give sacrifices in life! He died for us so we could live for Him! When you get up in the morning, in view of His mercy, immediately thank God for another day to live for and to serve Him. Thank Him for the privilege of being a living sacrifice. Now, there's only one problem with a living sacrifice. It has a bad habit of crawling off the altar! Do you struggle with that? I do! I have found that I must daily yield my life as a living sacrifice for Him. In fact this whole concept is found in the very words of Jesus in Luke's gospel, Luke 9:22-25...

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Luke 9:25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

3. Practice serving with your best!

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...

Holy and pleasing to God. We should desire to give God our very best, nothing less! If we're honest, God many times gets our leftovers, our seconds, our scraps. But what happens when we put God first place? Check it out...

Psalms 37:4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psalms 37:6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

4. Practice serving with worship!

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

So serving God with our life is our spiritual act of worship. There's a whole message on the discipline of worship coming. We gather to worship together on Sundays and this we should do, but a true follower of Jesus wants to live a life of worship every day! The Psalmist prayed these words...

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

5. Practice serving with what you don't do!

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world...

A servant of God dances to the beat of a different drummer. We are motivated by a different standard, a different set of rules. We make the choice to avoid things that don't help us achieve our God-given mission. We now know the truth about the ways of the world and its deception! We choose a different pattern. A pattern of life.

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

1 Peter 4:2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

1 Peter 4:3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

1 Peter 4:4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

The world can't figure us out, but we know the end result of bad behaviors and we don't want that kind of drama and pain in our lives anymore. Oh to be sure, being a living sacrifice and serving God is not always easy and can sometimes be painful and even costly, but the end result is always worth it. Not so with the ways of the world.

6. Practice serving with your mind!

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We actually allow The Holy Spirit of God to begin redirecting our thoughts and minds. We find

this explained in Colossians 3:1-3...

Colossians 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When you set your hearts and minds on the things of God you will begin to discover the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God!

7. Practice serving with Humility!

Romans 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought...

Unfortunately the church is not immune to the sin of pride! It's strange and weird how God can bless us and do amazing things in our lives and all of a sudden pride creeps in and we act like we did it, we figured it out, it was our idea, it was our brilliance, it was because we are so strong and so spiritual! Sometimes I think God just shakes His head and says, "Really! Wow! That just happened!" God doesn't want servants with false humility, but He sure doesn't need servants who have lost their view of God's mercy in their lives. In fact God gives us direction for dealing with the pride thing in James 3:13-4:3

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

8. Practice serving with faith!

Romans 12:3b...but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

You must realize that your ability to serve and even have faith is a gift of God! It's up to you to exercise your faith in service to God, but God put the capacity to know God in your heart in the first place! I call it the God shaped hole in your heart!

Paul put it like this to young Timothy...

1 Timothy 3:13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

A servant's standing with God and assurance in God are not based on how much faith they have but who they place their faith in! In other words, it's not how big your faith is but how big your God is in whom you place your mustard seed of faith. God's Word says...

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

9. Practice serving with others!

Romans 12:4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

Romans 12:5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Folks, serving God is a team thing! God believes in teams. The Holy Trinity of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus built a team of twelve. God has included us on His team in order to reconcile the world to Himself. Without teamwork, the church ceases to be the church and simply becomes an organization. Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of a large church in Hawaii put it this way...

"In order to accomplish what God has intended for us as individuals and as a whole, we must do church as a team. A 99 percent involvement is still 1 percent shy! We need all of us functioning in our gifts, with respect and love for each other. That's what the local church body is all about. No one is unimportant. Everyone is part of sharing the gospel, not just the pastor. We do church as a team!"

God's Word says...

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

10. Practice serving with your gifts!

Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

Romans 12:7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;

Romans 12:8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others,

let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Serve with the gifts you've been given. Way too many people spend their time wishing they had somebody else's gifts. Don't waste your life wishing you were somebody or something else other than who God created you to be. You may not think you have anything special to offer, but I can promise you do. God has given you unique gifts and abilities unlike anyone else. God doesn't give everybody the same gifts for a reason. We are parts of the Body of Christ. It would not make sense and would not work if we all did the same thing. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Corinthian Church...

1 Corinthians 12:14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

1 Corinthians 12:18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

11. Practice serving with love!

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

A servant of God must have a love that is sincere. The only thing he or she should hate is evil! A servant of God is to never hate anyone, not even their enemy. Our love helps us become like God in the way we serve God. God's Word says this in Ephesians 5...

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

Ephesians 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul says this in what is known as the love chapter of the Bible...

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

He then gives us directions for serving with love...

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

1 Corinthians 13:5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record

of wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13:6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

12. Practice serving with devotion!

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

A servant of God is devoted to God, and one of the greatest ways we show our devotion to God is by our devotion to serve our brothers and sisters in the family of God! What is devotion?

Devotion - Ardent, often selfless affection and dedication, as to a person or principle.
American Heritage Dictionary

Paul explains his devotion to the Thessalonians this way...

1 Thessalonians 2:8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

13. Practice serving with zeal and spiritual fervor!

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Why combine these two like Paul did? Because zeal, eagerness, and passion, without spiritual direction can be dangerous! Paul knew a thing or two about this. Remember his testimony. He thought he was doing the right thing when he traveled around arresting Christians and watching them persecuted. Zeal without spiritual direction is what led the mob who called for the crucifixion of Jesus! In fact here's what Paul said a few chapters back in Romans.

Romans 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

Romans 10:2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Romans 10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Romans 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

So our zeal must remain connected to our spiritual fervor.

"Fervor is an intense and passionate feeling."

Spiritual fervor should be driven by an intense and passionate desire for God's direction in every single aspect of our lives! The Psalmist said...

Psalm 73:24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

14. Practice serving with joy, patience, and faithfulness!

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Now Paul combines three directives into one. Why? They go together. They work together! A servant of God is joyful because of the hope God has placed in their life! We have patience because we trust God is going to work even in our afflictions! And we remain faithful in prayer through it all! Paul explained it like this in Romans 5...

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

Romans 5:4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You know what you're dealing with right now, so does God! Keep serving the Lord and let Him work in the midst of your difficulties!

15. Practice serving with Generosity!

Romans 12:13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

What a beautiful thing it is to live a life of generosity! One of Jesus' most famous teachings was quoted by Paul when he met with the elders of the church of Ephesus in the book of Acts...

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Notice Paul said "by this kind of hard work we must help the weak." Sometimes generosity has nothing to do with money, but everything to do with being generous with our time, our talents,

and our willingness to just be there for someone who's hurting! Jesus takes our generosity to others, personally! Jesus put it this way...

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Matthew 25:36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Matthew 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Matthew 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

Matthew 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

16. Practice serving with no discrimination!

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Yes, we are even to serve our enemies. What more powerful testimony of God's love than to serve in love someone who doesn't love you? Jesus said this...

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Oh, and by the way, our text says something else about serving without discriminating in the second part of Romans 12:16...

Romans 12:16...Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Discrimination was a serious thing in God's Word way before it became a serious thing in the laws of America.

17. Practice serving with empathy!

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Empathy - The ability to identify with or understand another's situation or feelings:

American Heritage Dictionary

A servant of God is going to be motivated by the things of God! God rejoices when one of His children rejoices. When a brother or sister rejoices, don't be jealous of their blessings, genuinely rejoice with them and be thankful for them! It's what a servant of God does. And on the other hand, when a person mourns, mourn with them! Some of the most powerful times in my life have been when a brother or sister in Christ helped me carry the burden of a loss by just being there. It's called the ministry of presence! Knowing someone really cares even when they can't do anything to change your circumstances is just powerful. Knowing they would if they could, means something. Sometimes you won't have the words to say, there are no words for some things. But the fact you showed up, counts! That happened to me Saturday a week ago when three men from our church showed up at my house just to pray for me because they cared about me!

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

18. Practice serving with harmony!

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another...

What is the defining characteristic of followers of Christ?

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Paul was in prison for his faith when he wrote this important instruction to the church at Ephesus...

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Now you might say, "But I was wronged and I can prove it!" Sometimes that happens. We are imperfect humans serving a perfect God together as the family of God. God knew we would make mistakes. That's why He gave the following directive for a servant of God...

19. Practice serving with forgiveness!

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Romans 12:20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Verse 20 is a direct quote of Proverbs 25:21-22. There was an ancient Hebrew tradition of giving someone live coals from your fire if their fire has gone out. People would do this for a friend or family member, but for an enemy? Paul is saying yes, even for an enemy! So the heap burning coals on their head is to heap nice things on your enemies like, kindness, help, and love even when they don't deserve it!

Some dictionaries actually have a hard time with the concept of forgiveness. They will say things like..."The act of forgiving, To pardon" Now I'm going to do something you might find surprising for a Pastor. I'm going to quote the psychology department of The University of California at Berkeley...

"Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness."

That's a good definition! And I like the part that says "whether they actually deserve your forgiveness!" I know I don't deserve the forgiveness Jesus gave me and still gives me when I mess up! How can I receive His forgiveness and not be willing to give forgiveness? God's Word makes it clear...

Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

20. Practice serving with discernment!

Did you see this one? It was kind of hidden in the verses on forgiveness...

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

As a servant of God, and as a child of God, I have rights. I have freedoms. I have privileges. But as a servant of God I must exercise discernment! The Corinthian Church had problems with discernment so Paul gave them specific instructions. Check it out...

1 Corinthians 10:23 "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive.

1 Corinthians 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Do you think about the impact on others before you say something or do something? It's not what everybody else thinks about you from a personal pride standpoint, but what they think

about you as a servant of God! You see, you and I are representatives of God and that means something. Think about it!

21. Practice serving with vision!

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Our vision should be one of victory over evil and to win the victory in a good, Godly way. Your vision should be a victorious one, because as you serve God you begin winning the battles against temptations, bad habits, bitterness, and any number of destructive behaviors!

Your vision should also be a vision of the good you will begin to do, not because you have to in order to be saved, but because you have been saved and now have the privilege and honor of becoming a living sacrifice! Out in the foyer at the Relationships center, we have a handout for you to take with you that will point you in the right direction if you want to begin practicing the discipline of serving here at Northshore Church! And remember: Serving the Lord is not just a church thing, it's a life thing! This week be a living sacrifice! It will change your marriage, your parenting, your work, your life as a student, your everything! Let's pray!