

THE VALUE OF SERVING TOGETHER

Be honest. How do you feel when you hear the word “service”? Does it fire you up? Or does it make you feel a little guilty? Maybe it’s a little of both.

I imagine most of us have a nagging feeling inside that we should be doing more to serve others. Typically, during the holidays, we feel especially motivated to put those good intentions to work. But most of the time, it’s tough to put that motivation into action.

Why is that?

We know what the standard is.

We know what the stakes are. After all, Jesus came right out and told us:

“Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40, NIrV)

We know that serving others should be our priority:

“Work hard to feed hungry people. Satisfy the needs of those who are crushed.” (Isaiah 58:10, NIrV)

Not only that, little eyes are watching. They see when we give up something that benefits us in order to benefit someone else. I think all of us would say that somehow, we want to pass along

the value or serving to our own kids. We want them to “get it.” So why not model it?

Why is it so hard?

So why is it so hard for us to get out there and serve? I don't think it's because we don't care. I don't think it's because we're selfish—at least on purpose. I think it happens because life happens. And there's another layer that crowds out service that I think has been building more and more in recent years: we're afraid that we're doing it wrong.

I think that's the result of living in a connected, social society. We're more aware than ever about other people who are doing good things in the world. That feeds our guilt about everything we aren't doing. At the same time, it seems like every good thing WE do comes along with a nagging objection.

The Objections:

Let's say you write a check to help a local nonprofit.

That's too easy. You really should get some skin in the game.

Your child goes on a mission trip with the youth group to a less fortunate country.

That's great; but come on. It's one week. And aren't there people in need here at home?

You bring canned food for a food drive at your church.

The problem is so big and so complex. Honestly, will these few cans really make a difference?

Those nagging voices can basically talk us out of doing anything. But as followers of Jesus, we have no choice.

We can't throw up our hands and abandon our responsibility for the needs of others. We have to remember that we can't do everything . . . but we can do something. Our kids don't need to watch us rail against what's wrong. They need to see us actively fight to make the world a better place.

1. Service teaches kids to think outside themselves.

No matter the person's age, when someone is working hard at serving others, they think less about their wants and needs and more about the wants and needs of others. It's not common for kids to realize that some people don't have food or that some kids don't have money for school supplies. So one of the benefits of community service is that it opens their eyes to how others live.

Whether it's organizing a food drive, collecting backpacks, coloring pictures for nursing home residents, at the very least spending time doing something for others is a great way to take your child's attention off his or her own needs, even if it's just for a few hours.

2. Service gives kids an opportunity to see how others handle difficulties.

Taking your kids to various service opportunities will teach them more than any book or lesson could. They will see how others respond to tough situations. They will see brokenness, hurt and anger. But they will also see how some have overcome their circumstances and done something wonderful with their story.

Allowing your kids to see firsthand how others have maneuvered through difficult situations will show them how to be resilient and that *down* doesn't necessarily mean *out*.

3. Service teaches kids to be thankful for what they have.

It's easy for kids to focus on the things they don't have when all they do is try to meet their own needs. But when they focus on the needs of others, priorities tend to shift. It's not always enjoyable or easy, but one of the benefits of community service is that it provides a lot of eye-opening experiences for kids.

After picking up trash for a few hours, they will be grateful that the garbage man comes twice a week and if they sort clothes for kids in need, they'll be glad to come home to drawers of clean socks and underwear. Even if you feel like your family doesn't have enough time to serve, just a few opportunities here and there can show your kids how much they have.

4. Service teaches kids responsibility.

One of the clearest benefits of community service for kids is that it's hard work! And you can't underestimate the power of manual labor on building character. When you volunteer, you work with people you might not know, listen to instructions, and see a job to completion—all without getting paid.

If you have a son, for example, who doesn't listen well to you or to teachers, you might find that he responds differently to a leader when he's in a volunteer capacity. Volunteering can open the heart and soften a rebellious spirit. Respect, cooperation, and responsibility are all areas your kids will grow in when they help fulfill a need in the community.

5. Service provides opportunities for kids to use their talents.

It's worthwhile to expose your kids to enough service opportunities that they learn how and where it's best to serve in their skill-set. When you're able to serve in an area that you're good at and enjoy, it becomes more of a lifestyle pattern instead of a box to check off.

Maybe your daughter has great organization skills or your son loves art. Both of those interests can be used in service to others. When we use the gifts we're given to help people around us, we are living out our purpose. It also shows kids that they can affect change, even in just one hour on a Saturday.

5 Benefits Children Can Gain from Volunteering

It is often said that the most valuable thing we can do is to give away our time. Volunteering is beneficial not only for those who receive help but for those who give it. Teaching kids to volunteer helps them develop important skills and also sets them up for success in other areas of their lives. According to the Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning at Tufts University, Peter Levine, children who regularly volunteer tend to perform better in school and have higher high school and college graduation rates compared to children who do not volunteer.

For parents and caregivers who want to introduce their kids to the wonderful world of volunteerism, there are a variety of ways to do it. Here, we'll discuss the main skills that children can learn from volunteering and how parents and caregivers can get younger kids interested in helping others.

Social Skills

It may seem obvious, but volunteering helps children build social skills because it's typically a group activity. In addition, because volunteering usually involves working with new people we do not see on a regular basis, volunteering allows children to gain a new perspective on the world beyond their usual surroundings. It also allows them to learn how to interact with people who are different from themselves.

Children who regularly volunteer may have better communication skills and maybe be more able to work with others to overcome challenges. Volunteers often support each other and figure out solutions to problems together, so it is a good opportunity for parents and caregivers to encourage children to socialize and develop teamwork skills. Children who volunteer get a chance to view the world outside of their home and school environment, and adults get the chance to teach children about being social and helping out in a fun, hands-on way. Moreover, children can also establish friendships through volunteering.

A Sense of Community

Another main benefit of volunteering is that it gives children a sense of community. Children are exposed to a variety of messages about the country and the world as a whole on a daily basis, so seeing what is going on in their own

neighborhood is essential to have a grounded view. Don't forget that children absorb more than you might think of the news, and some of the information and the pictures may be upsetting and scary. By volunteering, children can feel like they are making a real difference in the world and helping others in need. This, in turn, can help them feel less overwhelmed and more empowered.

By volunteering in the surrounding community, children can learn about the people and places that are closest to where they live, and how their community functions. It's easy for adults, let alone children, to get caught up in the routine of daily life and forget about everyone else in the community. Volunteering gets kids out of the house, away from their screens, and engaged in the real world.

Your child will learn about civic action and the importance of helping out within a community. Parents and teachers can also include children in volunteer activities to help them learn about social causes and to teach them that they have the power to address issues that they are passionate about.

The Power of Gratitude and Empathy

Gratitude is a major benefit of regular volunteering, and it is something that young children can learn about easily. If you are

volunteering to help people who are less fortunate than you, gratitude is a worthwhile skill to teach your children. Some may say that gratitude is a spontaneous feeling, but gratitude is something that can be cultivated, too! Volunteering in this capacity, children see firsthand that not everyone is as fortunate as they are. They may gain a new appreciation for the food they eat and the roof over their heads.

Similarly, children can learn about empathy through volunteering. Most children have a natural sense of altruism and a desire to help out, and volunteering is a great way to tap into this.

Bonding Between Parents and Children

Volunteering as a family helps parents develop a bond with their children. At a basic level, volunteering is a fun activity you can do as a whole family that gets everyone out of the house and into a new environment. Just this much can be a breath of fresh air and a good time for everyone. In addition, volunteering reinforces the value of teamwork and the benefits of working together.

New Interests and Abilities

Volunteering can also be a great way to help children find new interests beyond what they are exposed to at home and in school. For example, if your child likes plants and the outdoors,

try volunteering on a community farm if there is one in your community, or participating in a creek, beach, or park clean-up event. Kids who love animals may enjoy volunteering at a shelter or rescue. All these experiences can help kids pick up new interests and skills they carry with them throughout life.

Health Benefits of Serving Others

1. Helping others lowers blood pressure

While you are taking all the lifestyle measures to maintain your blood pressure and cut on the risks of heart problems, we suggest you add one more task to your list. Start extending your helping hand more often. Even your small gestures can help you and others a long way. It is found that those who volunteer have a decreased rate of hypertension. So, you can also join a volunteering group and see your physical health improving.

2. Helping others brings relief to chronic pain

If you are on regular medication or therapies to reduce the symptoms of your chronic pain then you may add another pill to your treatment. This pill is cost-effective and comes with no side-effects label. We are recommending you to help others! Helping others is found to reduce symptoms of chronic pain. So, next time don't miss a chance to hold the door for someone (it's your pain reduction dose).

3. Helping others extends your lifespan

We all wish to live long and healthy (don't we?). Well, while you are working on your health proactively start helping others with the same zeal! There are many benefits of helping others that combined together extend our lifespan. This includes our improved ability to manage stress, a better immune system (safeguarding us from diseases), alleviate loneliness, and an enhanced sense of life satisfaction. Thus, not just lengthening your lifespan but also adding quality to it.

4. Helping others gives you inner peace.

If a lot is going in your life and you need something to hold it all back for you, just try and help someone. It will help you feel calm and peaceful (even studies support this notion). Helping others helps us regain our focus and puts chaos at bay thus, making us enjoy inner peace.

5. Helping others improves your bonds.

It is a known fact that acts of good deeds help us build stronger bonds. The same applies to the act of helping others. When you are there for your loved ones and you help them when in any way possible, it gives them a message that you care for them, thus building a lasting bond. Well, you really don't have to go out of the way to help someone here. Even your small act of lending a pen will do.

6. Helping others boosts your self esteem.

According to experts, when we are engaged in helping others, we experience feelings of social connectedness. This further gives you a sense of being empowered, boosting your self esteem. PS: The more consistent you are; the more confidence you can cultivate. So, make helping others a daily task in your to-do list.

7. Helping others is a stress buster.

Many studies show that people who do more charities or are active volunteers have comparatively lower levels of cortisol levels (stress hormones). Donation and volunteering are acts of helping others which takes stress, anxiety, and tension away from our lives. Now, you know a perfect stress -buster for yourself- helping others. So, next time when a stressful situation occurs in your life, just help someone instead of involving yourself in an unhelpful habit.

8. Helping others leads to emotional satisfaction.

When you are on an emotional roller coaster kind of day, helping others might help you find emotional stability. The quantity of our acts of helping others is positively linked with the quality of our emotional state . Helping others gives us a feeling of satisfaction (simple).

9. Helping others safeguards from negativity.

You may think of helping others as a way to change your negative vibes to positive vibes only! Whether it is our negative thinking or feeling, helping others can easily and effectively safeguard us from its ill effects. By helping others you will leave a positive impact on their life which will reciprocate in your attitude. Now, get ready to be more optimistic.

10. Helping others adds purpose to your life.

A study interestingly found that volunteering enriches the sense of purpose in an individual's life. Ideally, helping others is not a one-way process. While the receiver feels happy and loved, you too feel rewarded, refreshed, and fulfilled.

11. It keeps things in perspective.

Helping others gives us a front-row seat to witness their hardships. Seeing these difficulties can help us feel better about our own circumstances and practice gratitude.

12. It creates a sense of belonging and fosters friendships.

While helping others, we have opportunities to meet new people, connect with our communities, and fellowship with existing friends. Therefore, face-to-face activities (volunteering at the food bank, driving an elderly neighbor to an appointment, taking a meal to a coworker who just had a baby, etc.) help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.

13. It's contagious!

Researchers have found that kindness can resonate through communities. In other words, when people witness altruism, they tend to turn around and act altruistically towards others. Because of this, one simple act of kindness can have a ripple effect that benefits an entire community!

14. Helping others makes you happy.

Did you just help someone? Well, *"You Look Happier You Do."* That's not just me saying even science supports this notion! When you help others, endorphin (the feel-good hormone) is secreted in your body, making you feel good from within. Surprisingly even while seeing someone help others we enjoy good feelings. So, now it's time for you to start giving back and let the happy hormones flow in your body.

Let us make the world better for ourselves and others by helping each other.

"We rise by lifting others"
~Robert Ingersoll

I'm not suggesting that we be kind and help others because it makes us feel good. We're supposed to help others regardless of how it makes us feel (Micah 6:8, Luke 10:27, Ephesians 4:31-32, Philippians 2:4, etc.). However, there's no reason not to embrace and enjoy these benefits of altruism. In fact, the Bible even speaks of some of these benefits:

"A generous person will be enriched, and the one who provides water for others will himself be satisfied." Proverbs 11:25