



Cardio Condition: Training a Servant's Heart

by Derek Brotan

Leader's Notes for Lesson One

The basis of this two part study (could be a four part study) is the Scripture text in Matthew 22:37-40, in which God commands us to first love God, and then to love our neighbors. These two lessons aim at developing a servant heart and looking to God to help shape and mold us for continual service.

The first place to start looking is at our own hearts. Do we love God with our whole hearts? We need to examine what is getting in the way and stealing our attention away from God. This is a lifelong process of spending time with God, listening, and adjusting our lives in obedience to God's prompting.

Goals

- To spend some quiet time with God focusing on God's activity in our lives.
- To understand the importance of daily spending time with God in order to keep our focus directed toward Him.
- To reflect honestly on how we live our lives and challenge us to live lives of obedience to God's leading.

Lesson Options

These two lessons are designed so that you take the outline of the study and select the activities, Scripture passages, and content that will fit your group. You don't have to use all the scripture verses, just the ones that will challenge your group the most. My key goal in Bible studies is for my youth to spend time with God, to wrestle with God's Word and their lives, and to challenge them to live out one thing from the lesson during the week. Your most important part of preparing the lesson is to figure out what parts of the study will have the most impact. As you are figuring out what to use, I would encourage you to be in dialogue and still time with God. Leader's Notes for each option are in italics.

The Heart in Scripture (Background Information)

"The heart is the center of emotions, feelings, moods, and passions. Equated with the heart are joy (Deut. 28:47; Acts 2:26), grief (Ps. 13:2; Lam. 2:11), ill-temper (Deut. 15:10), love (Phil. 1:7), courage (2 Sam. 17:10; Ps. 27:14), and fear (Gen. 42:28). A swollen heart breeds arrogance (Isaiah 9:9), which is in marked contrast to the gentle and lowly heart of Jesus (Matt. 11:29). The heart's function as the source of thought and reflection highlights its intellectual capacities (Isa. 6:10; Mark 7:21-23). The heart understands (Deut. 8:5; Isaiah 42:25), provides wisdom to rule justly and wisely (1 Kings 3:12; 10:24), and discerns good and evil (1 Kings 2:44). The heart also represents the idea of volition and conscience (1 Sam. 24:5; 2 Sam. 24:10). The request for a pure heart is the desire for a new and more perfect conscience (Ps. 51:10; Matt. 5:8). Since the heart is the center for decisions (2 Sam. 7:21), obedience, devotion, and intentionality, it represents the total human person. Within the heart, human beings meet God's word (1 Sam. 12:24; Jeremiah. 32:40) and thus it is the location where conversion takes place (Ps. 51:10; Joel 2:12; Acts 2:37)."²

The Heart in Science and Medicine (Background Information)

"The heart is a hard-working marvel. It can keep on beating automatically even if all other nerves were severed. And what a beat! It beats an average of 75 times a minute, forty million times a year, or two-and-a-half billion times in a life of 70 years. At each beat, the average adult heart discharges about four ounces of blood. This amounts to three thousand gallons a day or 650,000 gallons a year—enough to fill more than 81 tank cars of 8,000 gallons each. The heart does enough work in one hour to lift a 150-pound man to the top of a three-story building, enough energy in twelve hours to lift a 65-ton tank car one foot off the ground, or enough power in seventy years to lift the largest battleship afloat completely out of the water."³

LESSON ONE: IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU—GETTING YOUR HEART RIGHT

Key Scripture: Matthew 22:37-40

Still Time With God

"The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is a new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts."

We live in a time that rewards busyness, full schedules, and fast paced lifestyles. Yet, God commands us to be still before Him (Exodus 14:13-14) and to keep our focus on Him. Sometimes it is our job to be still; He will fight for us. This is a skill we need to teach our youth. Instead of rushing into our lessons and trying to get as many teaching points across as we can, we can take the first five minutes of class time (if this is a new practice for your group you may want to start with 2 minutes) to model silence and reflection. I like to play some type of instrumental music (very softly), which helps some kids focus and also indicates that the silent time has started.

This exercise helps us see that God has been active in our lives and how important it is for us to recognize that. The more we recognize it, the more it will help us focus on God throughout the week. The more we can see God in our lives, the more we can see His activity in shaping us for service. You can begin by giving them an example of how God has been active in your life before you have them meditate on how He is working in theirs.

1. Take some quiet time to think over the last week and note times of God's activity in your life.
2. What are the three things God gave you last week for which you are most grateful?
3. What is the biggest pressure you are facing today?

Prayer Option

One of the options I really like to encourage (if your group isn't too big) is to have the youth pair up with one or two prayer partners and end their still time with God in prayer and thanksgiving for one another. It is very powerful for one student to share with another student where they have seen God active in their lives. It also helps shape a caring community, where students share what is going on in their lives.

Introduction

This section sets up the real battle that is going on between what God says, and the messages the world sends. God wants us to slow down and spend time with Him. The world says it is all about personal happiness which comes through buying and doing things that make you happy. This is one of the biggest clashes of our day and depending which road you take, you will be led to two very different outcomes in your life. If your students think it is all about being happy, then it will be hard to get them to move outside of themselves and serve anyone but themselves. I call this Satan's "heart attack."

The most important thing we can do is stress and model for them the importance of having their first focus on God. Everything else will flow out of that. If you do not have that relationship, how can you possibly be happy? (Mark 8:34-38)

One of the main messages we hear from the world is that it's all about you and your happiness. If you are not happy, then something is not right. If you don't get what you want, then someone has wronged you. If it feels good, then it must be right. All you have to do is to look at TV commercials and you will clearly see how much this world revolves around convincing people that if they only had this car, toy, product, video game system, vacation, relationship, money, or sound system, that their life would be much better. (Everything mentioned above appeared during the last 4 commercials I just saw on TV).

If we look at Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-38, we understand who our focus should be on first. Does that mean we have to stop thinking of ourselves? No, we are an important part of God's creation, He created us. He has placed us here primarily to honor and obey him. The more we can focus on Him, the more it sets us free to serve.

Heart Exam

After spending some quiet time with God and allowing them to focus a bit, it is time to do some examination. This exercise is a “State of the Union” for our heart. First, I like to have my students identify how they are living and spending their time. This section isn’t designed to tell them how bad they are, but to help them identify where they are. Once they have identified where they are, we move into God’s truth in Scripture.

It is really important that we make sure to open ourselves up and look at the condition of our hearts. The heart is such a key muscle in how we function and live our lives. This is also very true in our faith walk. Certainly the evil one is trying to produce a heart “attack” with all the temptations he throws at us. It is important for us to take a look at our heart and see in which areas we need a heart “transplant”. Take some time and do a personal inventory on the condition of your heart.

Draw a pie chart and divide your chart to reflect the percentages of how you spend your time. Some of the categories may be school, sleep, time with family, hobbies/interests, TV/video games, time with God (devotion, worship, serving) Your pie should be divided into 24 hours and should be an approximation on how much time you spend each day on that particular activity.

- What do you spend most of your time on?
- What are the things you do that get you most excited?
- What do you buy with your money?
- If you had a day off and could only do one thing what would you do?

Digging Into God’s Word

Have youth discuss the questions in small groups of 3-4.

Genesis 4:2-8

In this passage, the key is to note the condition of the heart. Abel gave his first fruits (his best stuff), and even though Cain gave to God, it was not in a way that loved God first (Matthew 22:37-38). The result was that God was pleased with one, but did not find favor with the heart of Cain. The condition of our hearts is shown through our actions.

1. Describe the condition of both Cain’s and Abel’s hearts.
2. What did the condition of their hearts lead to?
3. Abel brought his first fruits (his best) for an offering. In your life, what can you offer to God as your first fruits giving? (The answer isn’t always money!)

Matthew 4:18-22

In this passage, each of the disciples was in a place of complete obedience. That morning when they woke up, they didn’t know that they would be asked to abandon it all and follow Jesus. When they dropped their nets and followed, they didn’t know where they were going, how they would support themselves, what they would need for the journey, or what would happen. They just followed in obedience. They followed the command of putting God first.

1. How would you describe the hearts of the disciples when Jesus called them?
2. When the disciples followed Jesus in obedience, how much did they know about what lay ahead in their journey with Him?
3. If Jesus approached you today, what would He need to do to get you to drop everything and follow Him?

Luke 10:25-37

This well-known parable is a very fitting one for the church. It is expected that the people in the church would reach out and serve others. However, we find that the religious leaders in this passage are too wrapped up in themselves to stop and help out. Their hearts were focused inward. Then there was the Samaritan, a social outcast, whose heart was in the right condition and therefore recognized the opportunity to help someone in need. Because the Samaritan’s heart was right, he was able to serve his neighbor (Matthew 22:39).

1. What was the condition of the hearts of the Priest and the Levite?

- What do you think the Samaritan did to keep his heart open to serving this person in need, even though the Samaritan was an outcast?
- Who are the people in your life that need you to be their good Samaritan?

Proverbs 3:5-6

The challenge of this verse is to help youth get away from trusting their own understanding. This speaks directly to the importance of spending time with God in everything, and through that He will shape and guide us for service. The more we can lean on God, the less we need to trust in our understanding.

- What does it mean to trust in God with ALL of your heart?
- Can you give an example of a time when you leaned on your own understanding and discovered that it didn't please God?
- What does it mean that God will make your paths straight?

2 Timothy 2:22

Help the youth think about the evil desires they are tempted by. Once they identify that they are evil, it is much easier to talk about how to pursue the opposite. What makes those desires evil? The key pattern here, once again, is to call on the Lord first, and out of that comes a pure heart.

- What does it mean to call on the Lord with a pure heart?
- What are some of the evil desires youth have today?

Optional Activity: Focus on God Chart

Do this in small groups.

I use this chart with my students to talk about the importance of prayer and dialog with God in order to see what things we are blind to. I try to get them to discover that everything in their life either helps or hinders their focus on God. The more we can focus on God and listen, the more our eyes are open to the hurt of others and opportunities to serve around us. When they do this exercise, I make sure that they focus on the relationships that hinder them, without creating a negative reflection on the person. For example, if our relationship with our girlfriend/boyfriend hinders our focus on God, it challenges us to ask for God's direction in that relationship.

As my youth identify things that move their focus away from God, I challenge them to dialogue with God about that activity or relationship and seek where God is leading them to change it. Another twist I like to use is to get them to think about where their friends and family would put them in their grid. This helps them see where they are light and where their role in relationships might need change.

One of the key things in our lives is to keep our focus on God (Matthew 22:37-40). One way to do that is to chart the things in our lives that help keep our focus on God and the things that keep our attention away from God. Draw four columns and label them as in the example below. Make a list of the people and things that make up your day. Then do your best to put those things in the most appropriate columns.

Focus Away	Focus Slightly Away	Focus Slightly Towards	Focus Towards
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Things in your day: Girlfriend, Basketball, Grandma, My Mom, Going to Parties, Getting Good Grades, Attending youth group, Doing Devotions

Faith Challenge

This is a key section because I want my students to practice what they are learning and identify where they are being stretched. I want them to know that their faith is a daily practice made up of trials, errors, and corrections. I challenge them to pick one thing from the list and write a mini-action plan of how they are going to try to work on that particular challenge this week.

The goal in this lesson is to get them to spend more time with God and allow Him to shape their hearts. If we want our kids to love their neighbors and have a servant's heart, it starts with spending time with God.

- Find a time daily to do a heart exam, like we did earlier in our lesson. Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 as your text in keeping you focused.

2. Pick something in your "Focus Away from God" Column and journal with God about how He would like that relationship to change.
3. Spend 10 minutes with God each day this week, asking Him these questions:
 - Where were you in my life today?
 - What were things I did that you were probably not pleased with (things I did and left undone)?
 - What would you like me to do tomorrow?

Closing Prayer

Do this in small groups of 3-4.

Have students find the same small group of 3-4 they formed earlier. Encourage them to share what they picked as their faith challenge this week. Sharing out loud presents a form of accountability. You will notice that in your "still time" next week, there will be a reflection question. Always encourage them to ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength so that all they do may honor God.

Gather in your small group of 3-4 and share your faith challenge for the week. Then go around, lifting each other up in prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to guide each of you as you try to keep God first this week.

Leader's Notes for Lesson Two

Goals

- To spend some quiet time with God, focusing on God's activity in our lives and the lives of those around us.
- To spend time with God, asking Him to open our eyes to the needs around us.
- To try to discover the gifts God has given us with which we are to serve others.
- To understand that we have a responsibility to serve those in need and walk in obedience to God's command.

Possible Stories and Attention Getters

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The Constant Security

"In Abyssinia, when a man is convicted of an offence for which he has to pay a fine, he must find a friend who will offer himself as a security that the culprit will not run away till the fine be paid. The prisoner and the man who has the misfortune to be his friend are then chained leg-to-leg and turned loose to roam about, sharing one another's misfortunes, and begging together the money necessary to pay the fine, until either they are able to regain their liberty or the death of one puts an end to their existence."

—E. A. De Cosson⁴

No Man Is An Island

Nearly four hundred years ago the English poet-clergyman John Donne wrote:

"No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind;
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee."⁴

He Inspires—We Perform

During the last war, a church in Strasbourg was destroyed. Nothing remained except a heap of rubble and broken glass, or so the people thought till they began clearing away the masonry. Then they found a statue of Christ still standing erect. In spite of all the bombing it was unharmed except that both hands were missing. Eventually rebuilding of the church began.

One day a sculptor saw the figure of Christ, and offered to carve new hands. The church officials met to consider the sculptor's friendly gesture—and decided not to accept the offer. Why? Because the members of that church said: "Our broken statue touches the spirits of men, but that He has no hands to minister to the needy or feed the hungry or enrich the poor—except our hands. He inspires. We perform."⁴

Under Orders

Dr. Wilder, a dynamic missionary leader in India, was dining with three naval officers. During the course of the conversation one of the officers remarked,

"Why don't these missionaries stay at home and mind their own business?"

Dr. Wilder replied, "Suppose you were ordered to take your battleship to Constantinople tomorrow, would you choose whether to obey or not?"

The officer retorted, "If we are ordered to go, we must go, even if every ship is sunk and every sailor killed."

"Quite right," said the missionary. "I have orders from the divine government: 'Go and preach the gospel to every creature.'"⁴

LESSON TWO: SHAPED BY GOD TO SERVE OTHERS

Key Scripture: Matthew 22:39-40

Still Time With God

"In silence and quietness the devout soul makes progress and learns the hidden mysteries of the Scriptures."
Thomas a Kempis⁵

We live in a time that rewards busyness, full schedules, and fast paced lifestyles. Yet, God commands us to be still before Him (Exodus 14:13-14) and to keep our focus on Him. Sometimes it is our job to be still; He will fight for us. This is a skill we need to teach our youth. Instead of rushing into our lessons and trying to get as many teaching points across as we can, we can take the first 5 minutes of class time (If this is a new practice for your group you may want to start with 2 minutes) to model silence and reflection. I like to play some type of instrumental music (very softly), which helps some kids focus and also indicates that the silent time has started.

This exercise helps us see that God has been active in our lives and how important it is for us to recognize that. The more we recognize it, the more it will help us focus on God throughout the week. The more we can see God in our lives, the more we can see His activity in shaping us for service. You can begin by giving them an example of how God has been active in your life before you have them meditate on how He is working in theirs.

1. Take some quiet time to think over the last week and note times of God's activity in your life.
2. What are the three gifts from God for which you are most grateful this week?
3. What is the biggest pressure you are facing today?
4. How did you do on your faith challenge from last week? Share this with a prayer partner.

Prayer Option

One of the options I really like to encourage (if your group isn't too big) is to have the youth pair up with one or two prayer partners and end their still time with God in prayer and thanksgiving for one another. It is very powerful for one student to share with another student where they have seen God active in their lives. It also helps shape a caring community, where students share what is going on in their lives.

Introduction

When we spend time focusing on God and making sure our heart is right, we can't help but see a change in how we see other people. It is as if we experience what Paul did when the scales fell from his eyes and he could see. We start to see all kinds of opportunities where we can serve our neighbor.

Who is our neighbor? Are they only the people with whom we are most comfortable and with whom we spend most of our time? This lesson will help answer the question and broaden the definition of "neighbor." To love our neighbor as ourselves is to see anyone who is in need as our neighbor and, through our time with God, to develop a heart to serve them.

Last week we talked about Matthew 22:37-38 and our heart condition. We were challenged to get our heart right with God and to put Him first, above everything else in our lives. In conducting our daily heart exam (time with God), we discover where we are experiencing "heart attacks" from Satan and in which areas we need a heart transplant.

This week, we are going to look at Matthew 22:39-40. If we were to live a life where we loved our neighbor as ourselves, what would it look like? What things in our lives would we have to change? What would the results of that life look like?

Heart Exam

Once again, this is an exercise to look at our hearts and see where our motivation is. It is important to facilitate students to be able to struggle with the decisions of how they spend their time and money and how that connects to the life that God has commanded us to live.

God has a design for each of our lives. All of us have been created to first love God above all things and out of that, to serve others. Therefore we have a responsibility to each other.

Think about how you spend your time. How much of it goes to serving yourself and how much goes to serving others?

Consider the money you spend. How much of it goes to serving your needs and how much goes to serving others?

How good are you at identifying the needs of people around you?

If you and Jesus were to engage in a conversation right now, what do you think He would say to you about how you serve others?

Pyramid Activity

First, find three volunteers who have strong backs and can support a good deal of weight to form the base of the pyramid. Next, find two other volunteers to form the second level. Finally, find a smaller person with good balance for the top of the pyramid. Make sure you have several people to help spot during this activity. Ask them to stay in the formation long enough for everyone to take note of it.

While they are supporting each other tell them that this pyramid represents how God created us. Each of us has a unique responsibility to the others in the pyramid. We each have been given different gifts and talents with which to serve one another. The middle person on the bottom is a key person in the pyramid, because he takes some pressure off of both the people to his right and left, and also bears the weight of the three people above him. Without the top person, you don't have a pyramid. The movement and balance of the person on top has a direct effect on the people supporting them below. Depending on how strong and steady your pyramid is, you can go through and note the importance of each person in their role in the pyramid.

In our responsibility to each other, it is very important that we understand the gifts and abilities God has given us to help us know how we can support others in the body of Christ. To some He has given the gift of money. They can support the pyramid by sharing it and lending support to those that don't have as much. To some He has given the gift of teaching. It is their responsibility to support others in the pyramid by teaching them and guiding them in life. Each of us has been given gifts for the sole purpose of serving others. This is the picture of how God designed the body of Christ.

Optional Scripture Talk with the Pyramid

If you would like to go further into the concept of connectedness and responsibility to the whole, you can use 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Each of them has a specific role, determined by the functions of their gift, and they all serve a common vision to serve each other (loving our neighbors as ourselves).

Digging Into God's Word

Have youth discuss the questions in small groups of 3-4.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

This verse helps build a bridge from last week and shows us the importance of staying focused on God. Time with God and His Word equips us for every good work. He makes sure we are equipped for the works of service He is leading us towards.

1. When it comes to your faith walk, what are you convinced of?
2. What does "All Scripture is God-breathed" mean?
3. What does the Word of God help us do?

John 14:15-21

This verse can make us very uncomfortable by comparing our disobedience with God's expectations. The Holy Spirit is like a guidance counselor at school. He notes our interests and passions and helps guide and equip us for the next steps of life. Important to note that this shaping is a lifelong process and we need the Holy Spirit's guidance. When looking at the world we can see the struggle we have as Christians. The world says we should serve ourselves, but God says we should serve Him first by serving others. This is why the world so often doesn't understand our motivation to serve. But the spirit of Jesus in you is so much more powerful than the one in the world! I like my students to see that there is a battle that is raging for their focus and how they live their lives.

1. What does God command us to do?
2. Who is the Counselor that the Father gives us?
3. Are there any commands that God has given that you are not following in your life?
4. How does it feel to know that Jesus is in you?

1 Timothy 6:18-19

Lead students to struggle through what it means to be rich in good deeds and generous to share. How do they live that out in school? We live in a world that encourages us to store up treasure for ourselves, but God is speaks of a different kind of treasure, one that is deeper and will bring more joy. Help students too on what is "truly living." (This takes us back to God's creation and His original design).

1. What does it mean to be rich in good deeds?
2. Name a time when someone was generous and willing to share with you.
3. What does it mean to "take hold of the life that is truly life?"

Hebrews 10:24

This verse links the example of the pyramid; we were created for others. Part of developing a servant's heart is being surrounded by a caring community that spurs us on. This also speaks to the importance of a community that is focused and directed toward a common mission. It is like a basketball team at the end of a season that starts to focus on going to the state championship next year. They spend their off season training and practicing as a team with a common vision. When the whole team has that vision, they encourage each other and it often spurs them to a higher level of output. As Christians, we have a common vision of sharing love and good deeds.

1. Tell us about someone in your life who spurred you on toward something good.
2. Name five people in your life that you think God has called you to spur on towards love and good deeds.

Ephesians 2:10

This verse speaks to God's design. We were not created for ourselves, but to be God's hands and feet. Help your students understand that God is preparing things for them to do and ways for them to serve. For me, a key in this verse is that God is shaping me through experiences right now, for plans He is preparing in the future.

1. You are God's workmanship. What kind of images and thoughts does that fact bring to mind?
2. For what purpose were you created?
3. How does God prepare us in advance for those works of service?

What is Your SHAPE?

I would encourage you to find a "gifts inventory" and have each person discover what their SHAPE (Spiritual Gift, Heart, Ability, Personality, Experience) is. Woodbury Lutheran Church encourages its members to find out what their SHAPE is so that we can plug them into areas of ministry and serving that fit their God given gifts. You can take the SHAPE inventory at: http://www.woodburylutheran.org/servantops/shape_assessment.php. One of the key areas in encouraging youth to serve is to help them determine the gifts that God has given them to support others. Help them understand that when we serve in our areas of passion it shows us the joy of serving.

Another challenge you could give youth is to give them three blank SHAPE forms and have them give it to three people who know them best and have them fill it out with the gifts and abilities that they see in that youth. Sometimes it helps to get the opinion of others who know us in order to see our gifts.

Once they see their gifts and abilities they can better recognize how God is calling them to serve. The better we help them discover those gifts and connect them to ways they can serve, the more joy they will experience in serving. It is often this kind of joy that helps develop a consistent serving heart.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

There is One God, but He has given us a variety of gifts. He has given us a variety of gifts because there are a variety of services that are needed. The distribution of those gifts is for the common good. We each have a part that was specifically given to us for the common good of all.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

We have been given a specific function in the network of God's plan.

God has given each of us wonderful talents and gifts. To use them is a great way to honor and worship our creator. God is very intentional in the gifts He has given you. They are not by accident, in the hopes that you might use them. They are very intentional, given so that you serve others and share the love of Jesus. God will put people in your life who need you to serve them, who need your gifts. For example, if you have been given the gift of encouragement, God is going to put people in your life who need encouragement.

Take the SHAPE Inventory.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

1. Why do you think that God gave us different gifts?
2. What does it mean that gifts are given for a common good?
3. Why do you think God gave you the gifts He did?
4. Are you using your God-given gifts? Are you using them in a way that is God-pleasing?

Who is Your Neighbor?

This is a simple exercise to try to expand the definition of neighbor. A group of neighbors that often gets overlooked are the neighbors we don't see. Have a list ready of the neighbors in your life that you tend not to notice. As God continues to open our eyes and expand our understanding of who we should notice and serve, we start to notice opportunities to serve those people.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:39 that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. But just who are our neighbors? Your neighbor is anyone that God has placed in your circle. They are both the friends you hang around and the enemies you ignore. They are the members of your family and the kid who sits alone at the lunch table at school.

Sometimes it's hard to identify the different neighbors that God has placed in our life. Draw three columns and list as many of the people that God has placed in your circle as you can think of. Then divide them as best you can into one of three columns below

Neighbors I don't like (at the moment)
Neighbors I ignore (at the moment)
Neighbors I like being around (at the moment)

Possible neighbors: My art teacher, the janitor at school, my science teacher, my football coach, my sister, my girlfriend, etc.

Faith Challenge

This is a key section because I want my students to practice what they are learning and identify where they are being stretched. I want them to know that their faith is a daily practice made up of trials, errors, and corrections. I challenge them to pick one thing from the list and write a mini-action plan of how they are going to try to work on that particular challenge this week.

The key in the challenge this week is to spend time with God so that our eyes will be open to the service that God wants to do through us, right where we are. Loving our neighbors doesn't just happen once a year on a mission trip, but is a daily decision and opportunity we have. Help students determine who the neighbors are that God has called them to serve.

1. Spend 10 minutes a day with God, looking up the following words from God. Journal "what does this mean for my life?"
 - Monday: John 15:12-13, 17
 - Tuesday: Luke 18:18-25
 - Wednesday: John 13:34-35
 - Thursday: 1 John 4:20-21
 - Friday: Romans 13:9-10
 - Saturday: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

2. Pick someone whom you would describe as your enemy (maybe a person in your "Neighbors I don't like" column). Spend each day next week praying for that person and looking for the gifts God has given them. Ask God to help change your heart toward this person.
3. Spend time in prayer and read over your Neighbors chart. Ask God to give you a heart to serve the people on that list, help you reconcile the issues with those you don't like, open your eyes to serve those you ignore, and to give thanks for each of them.
4. Pick a behavioral trait of Jesus (spent time with the socially unacceptable, spent time with the sick, served hungry people food, etc.) and practice that trait during the week.
5. Pick an ongoing way to serve others (local food shelf, sponsor a Compassion student, adopt someone in your congregation who can't do chores around their house anymore).

Closing

Recently I attended a funeral for a person that I did not have the opportunity to meet. I went to show my support and care for two other people in the pyramid of my life. There was a point in the service where they asked people to stand up and give remembrances of the life that this person lived. As several different people started to share, I realized that this individual made an impact on the lives of the people in that room. He didn't do it by living for himself and pursuing whatever felt right to him. He did it by investing in the lives of others. He served by taking time and listening to a friend who was hurting. He served by giving to people who found themselves in financial difficulty. He served by giving his time and investing in relationships with kids that were looking for guidance. He served by using the building skills he had and helping others who did not have those skills. This person really made an impact on the people in that room, because he loved and served like Jesus did. This person spent a lot of time with God each day and because of that, walked a life of obedient service to those that God placed in his path.

May your life include daily "heart exams," in which you put God first and may God use you in powerful ways to serve your neighbor.

Closing Prayer

Have them find their same small group of three - four and start by encouraging them to share what they picked for their faith challenge this week. I would encourage them to share because it presents a form of accountability when it is said out loud. Always encourage them to ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength, that all they do may honor God.

Gather in your small group of 3-4 and share your faith challenge for the week. Then go around, lifting each other up in prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to guide each of you as you try to keep God first this week.

[1] Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth, Richard Foster (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 98.

[2] Achtemeier, Paul J. ; Harper & Row, Publishers ; Society of Biblical Literature: Harper's Bible Dictionary. 1st ed. San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985, S. 377

[3] Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

[4] Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

Thoughts in Solitude, Thomas Merton (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 77.

Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth, Richard Foster (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 98.

[5] Thoughts in Solitude, Thomas Merton (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 77.