

The Christian and the Social Order

By Benjamin Phillips

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Mark 10:35–45; then read the comments related to Mark 10:41–45 in the section **It's in the Book**. Apply Jesus' teaching on service to working in the business world. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How does a business serve its customers, employees, and investors? What happens to businesses that don't serve these people well?

Assignment Two

Read James 1:27; then read the comments related to James 1:27 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Who are some people our society considers helpless and useless? How are Christ followers trying to help and serve them through non-government organizations such as charities and churches, through businesses, or through working in government?

Assignment Three

Read Jeremiah 29:4–7; then read the comments related to Jeremiah 29:1–9 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How hard would it be to work for the welfare of those who had destroyed your home and despised you? Read Romans 5:6–11. How did God respond to our hostility toward Him? What effect has that had on believers?

Scripture to Memorize

... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will respond to God's call to serve their community and culture in a way that will draw people to Jesus and His kingdom.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

You start a new job for a local business, and after a few months you are called in for an evaluation by your supervisor. What should you expect if you have acted as if the business is lucky to have you around? What if you refused to do anything unless you were specifically told to do it? How would the conversation be different if you went out of your way to help and did things without even being asked?

Read Mark 10:41–45 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 41. Heard it. Jesus had just told the disciples they were going to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. Two of them had selfishly asked for special treatment in His kingdom. The rest were upset, perhaps because the two thought of it first?

Verse 42. rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Jesus reminded them that it is characteristic of fallen people to act selfishly and to use their power primarily to help themselves, whatever kind of power that may be (political, economic, military, etc.)

Verses 43–44. it shall not be so among you. Jesus wanted them to know that the path to greatness goes through service. The greater the service, the greater the honor the servant receives. The better the service, the greater number of people served, the deeper the need met, then the greater the honor.

Verse 45. give His life as a ransom. If anyone deserved to be served, it was Jesus! Instead, He set the example by serving humanity at the deepest point of need—He was crucified and rose as a ransom for the world.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: How does a business serve its customers, employees, and investors? What happens to businesses that don't serve all these people well?

Discussion Question

If someone claimed that a drug dealer or pornographer was serving his customers, how would you answer? Why is pushing drugs or making pornography not genuinely serving others?

On Your Own

People can serve others through working in large or small businesses, starting their own company, or inventing new products or services. They can also serve in nonprofit groups or through government.

As you think about the type of work you do or would eventually like to do, how will it serve others? Is it your responsibility to help improve that service? Write some of your thoughts in the space below.

Read **James 1:27** out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 27. religion. *Religion* is a bad word for many, but James was referring to the spiritually significant ways our relationship with God is expressed, including acts of respect for God and obedience to His will. **visit.** *Visit* refers to more than showing up; it means showing up to make a difference. This can look like taking care of someone, helping, encouraging, empowering, and/or defending them. **orphans and widows.** These people were not only helpless; they were easily seen as useless in ancient societies. Other passages speak of serving prisoners and the sick in the same way.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: Who are some people our society considers helpless and useless? How are Christ followers trying to help and serve them through non-government organizations such as charities and churches, through businesses, or through working in government?

Discussion Questions

Who are the weak, helpless or useless around you? Note that weakness and helplessness can be in relation to other people, specific temptations and sins, or mental or emotional challenges. How can you and other Christ followers help them? What might helping them cost you?

Read Jeremiah 29:1–9 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile. 2 Chronicles 35:11–21 describes the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The Jews were seen as enemies to be eliminated. Nearly all the surviving Jews were sent into exile in Babylon, probably through a long march in which the weak, sick and old would have died. The goal was for the Jews to cease to exist as a people. Jewish hatred for the Babylonians would have been strong.

Verse 5. Build houses and live in them. God told His people to settle down because they would be living in a foreign country for a long time.

Verse 7. Seek the welfare of the city. The Jews were to work to make life better for everyone in the city and land that had taken them captive. The motivation for obedience here seems selfish, but Mark 10:45 identifies an even stronger motivation for Christians: following Christ's example of loving His enemies. Christians have experienced this, themselves, when Christ saved them!

Verse 9. A lie that they are prophesying. The false prophets were telling the exiled Jews the Babylonians would soon be defeated and the Jews would be allowed to return home quickly. These lies fed the exiles' anger at the Babylonians.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: How hard would it be to work for the welfare of those who had destroyed your home and despised you? How did God respond to our hostility toward Him? What effect has that had on believers?

Discussion Question

Significant, influential segments of our culture are increasingly seeing Christ followers as an enemy to be suppressed. If believers should be engaged with society, how can we serve a culture that may see us as part of the problem?

On Your Own

People tend to develop loyalty toward those who serve them well, to businesses that meet their needs, to politicians who help them have a better life, etc. If someone benefits from your service, how could you direct their loyalty to Christ? Write your thoughts in the space below.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The Bible has much to say about culture and society. One way to approach that subject is to consider the various moral issues that exist in a particular culture. Disciples can discuss how to help their society move toward greater faithfulness to God's ideal. These kinds of conversations involve questions, such as:

- Which issues require the greatest and most immediate attention?
- Which strategies and methods should be pursued to achieve those goals?
- Which strategies should be avoided?

These conversations are necessary and valuable, but a disciple can easily get lost in the details.

This lesson takes the approach of considering the big picture of service and the overall orientation of disciples to the culture in which God has placed them. The three passages we considered help us to see that:

- Jesus established service to others as the path to greatness and then set the supreme example in giving His life on the cross for the sins of humanity (see Mark 10:41–45).
- God calls disciples to serve those the world considers helpless and useless (see James 1:27).
- God calls disciples to serve their enemies, even those who hate and despise them (see Jeremiah 29:4–7).

Disciples can live this out when they:

- Understand that serving others is the major “horizontal” goal of work in any field. (“Vertical” service is to God and “horizontal” service is to mankind.)
- Look out for the weak, helpless or useless around them and find ways to serve them, especially when no one else does.
- Find ways to serve others even when the culture doesn't want disciples doing so.
- Make developing people's allegiance to Jesus the sole “vertical” goal of serving others rather than seeking their allegiance to ourselves or our organization.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed disciples to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The good we do in any area of life should lead people to give glory to God. For the non-Christian, this will begin with glorifying God by receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Follow up Question

Through your time at school, at a job, or in your neighborhood, what is an immediate way you can serve someone and thus, point that person to Christ?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.