

Go Serve

Scranton PA Workcamp, 2022

The idea of serving is a central part of any mission trip. Everyone knows they're going to serve when they decide to go. But why serve? What is it about serving that is appealing – so dynamic? We experience pressures in our lives. Pressures that push and pull us toward focusing on ourselves instead of others. Serving changes our focus from the internal to the external. And when we Go Serve, we have a chance to get outside of ourselves and reorient our lives around others and around God. Galatians 5:13 puts it this way, **“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.”** (NLT).

On July 3, 8 of our youth and 3 adults were called to *Go Serve* and move people from doing service projects to becoming people who serve as a lifestyle. Those youth are Brooke Bishop, Megan Bishop, Roland Bogdan, Lillie Crouch, Makaila Mattison, Joshua Rohde, Micah Rohde, and Rachel Schroeder,. Adults were Ashley Schroeder, Karen Moore, Jeff Bell.

During our week in Scranton PA we focused on God's call to serve in freedom. We discovered that Jesus is the reason we serve and that serving is one of the ways that we can give praise to God. We challenged ourselves to serve even when no one notices and were reminded that the ultimate example of service is Jesus' humility and willingness to die for us. And we discovered that God blesses us when we serve.

During this epic week, our group learned, grew, and served. And people in need received the gift of our service and an opportunity to grow in their faith.

On behalf of all eleven of us, thank you for allowing us to step out of our comfortable places—to see where Jesus wanted us to *Go Serve*.

For the record, at the Scranton PA Workcamp there were 268 campers from 14 different churches in 10 different states. Those 268 campers formed 46 crews of 6 individuals and were sent out to work on 35 different sites (some crews double up on a home because the project is so large). 80% of the projects that we tackled were completed through 8,040 volunteer hours of service.

Monday: Freedom. (Galatians 5:13-14. “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.”)

Paul teaches that we are in Jesus and our identity is in him. There is no longer any need to be under the law and so we can use this freedom to joyfully serve one another.

Knowing Jesus means knowing that he loves us because we're the unique person we were created to be. Which is the way God works - creating each of us with specific skills and qualities that make us who we are. From athletes to artists to musicians to math teachers, we're all different.

It's when we realize that we're only expected to be who God created us to be that we're FREE of the burden of trying to be someone we're not. And we're free from the toxic habit of comparing ourselves to others.

We learned that the comparison game is destructive because when we spend all of our energy wishing we were different like other people, we lose sight of the miraculous person we already are.

Monday is also the day when we met our resident and began to work on the project we were assigned.

Tuesday: Purpose. (Ephesians 2:8-10. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”.) When you serve others, you take your focus off yourself and you become more of who God created you to be. Your purpose becomes clearer the more you serve. Your purpose is to love God and your neighbors.

We’ve all heard that command and usually think that loving God and neighbor is all outward focused. But the youth group devotional that evening taught us that underneath that command is the idea that God wants us to love ourselves, too. Not love ourselves like we’re better than others. But to love ourselves and see ourselves the way God sees us, and seeing that to treat ourselves with kindness and understanding.

Wednesday: Humility. (Philippians 2:3-5. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”) In this passage Paul talks about serving not to be seen, but to serve with humility.

During the evening program we watched a drama that centered around Active Listening. You know, in a world where we spend a lot of time inside our own heads, looking at our phones, distracted by things going on around us, active listening is rare.

We learned in our devotional time that evening that to be an active listener means to put other people first and really tune in to what they say, both verbally and physically. To be an active listener we need to be generous with our time, be present in the moment, look people in the eye, and really listen.

And after talking about this, we practiced it with each other. It was a good exercise that we should all practice often.

It’s ironic that our theme for the day was Humility, and honestly I failed miserably at it. Because Wednesday is our half day, and for our time off in the afternoon we went to a water park. The youth made me join them on a water slide and taunted me by saying that they were going to be first down the slide. They didn’t. I did. Old men rule! You might be able to see my victory slide in the videos in the Fellowship Hall after worship...

Thursday: Gratitude. (Colossians 2:6-7. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”) One thing that we talked about was how gratitude should be overflowing. And we heard a story about a Workcamp resident named Granny, whose gratitude overflowed after a meaningful week with a crew working on her home. Granny gave the Camp Director, a person she had not met other than on a few brief encounters, a signed copy of a book by Samuel Longhorn Clemens (otherwise known by his pen name, Mark Twain). We also talked about the fact that gratitude is something we can practice. We took some time reflecting on things we’re grateful for.

We also learned something about gratitude from the story of Jesus healing 10 men who had leprosy. You’ll remember that only 1 returned to say thank you, and 9 did not. That’s 90% of those healed. That’s huge ! That’s sad.

Friday: Go with God (2 Corinthians 9:12. “This service that you perform is not only supplying the need’s of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”). At this point in our week our crews were being re-assigned to help finish what other crews had struggled to complete. And we focused on where we had seen God in our week together:

We came to understand that in every struggle, God had been with us (even while reaching into a 3-foot hole to fix a broken water pipe or painting facia in the hot sun that another crew didn’t finish); that God had been with us in all our laughter; that God had been with us at each of our meals; that God had been with us on the days that we got a lot done and on the days when we found it hard to get started. That through it all, God had been with us.

As we started to pack up and think about our trip back home, we were encouraged to use our new understanding of service to see all opportunities to serve with FREEDOM, PURPOSE, HUMILITY, and GRATITUDE because of the gift of eternal life that God has blessed us with. And we drove home with a new understanding that as His people, we Go Serve with God.