



FOR versus WITH

RELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF PARTNERSHIPS

For those attempting to follow Jesus in faith backed by action, serving others in love becomes a lifestyle priority. On multiple occasions Jesus commands and/or illustrates this expectation. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is second only to “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” The story of the man we call the Good Samaritan was given to explain what it meant to be “neighborly” - that is, to love a neighbor. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a story about a future time when people who are truly His followers are identified by their past actions of service toward people in need. These are all examples of Jesus’ attitude towards service.

Obviously Jesus followers are to supply services FOR those in need. In addition to responding to Christ’s expectation, there are some wonderful reasons to participate in ministry for the sake of others. An expression of love and care to someone who is suffering reveals the love and grace of Jesus to the one receiving the kindness. It provides an opportunity for a relationship to begin. The action shapes the performer of the ministry into the character of Christ. These are only a few of the many good reasons to engage in service FOR others.

Still, there can be some inherent and less obvious dangers in focusing solely on meeting needs. Could there be any negatives about ministry FOR others, which we should avoid? In too many cases, well-intentioned servants have disempowered those in need and/or taken away their dignity through the service. “Us” and “them” attitudes can influence the interaction, breaking down relational potential. Recipients of the service can be affirmed in their inferiority complex while the servers have their sense of superiority stroked and develop a false pride. This further defines and divides the servant from the served.

It is hard to imagine that Jesus had any of these harmful results in mind when He insisted that we serve others. So, the difference must be in **how** we engage. Is there a way to serve so that people are consistently dignified, needs are met and real relationships are deepened? The perfect community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit show us how we are to relate to God and to fellow human beings. The Incarnation of Christ puts an exclamation point on the relational dynamics of WITH. Immanuel, God with us. Jesus’ name gives the key. Jesus came and did many things FOR us, but His approach is to be WITH us. In the same way, when those in “need” are invited to be a part of the solution to their own struggle, they are empowered. They begin to redefine their sense of personal identity as participants, not just as recipients.

Yet, this approach to service does not come without its own set of challenges. The results are tangible but produced at a much slower pace. A single mother who is unable to pay utilities would find quicker results to her crisis if a church partner would just pay her bill, rather than figuring out a solution together through relationship. What has been sacrificed for efficiency is more costly than can be accurately assessed because it cuts out opportunities for relationship-building. Efficiency keeps server and receiver in distinct classes - the empowered and the disempowered, the capable and the needy, the valued and the pitied.





The following chart displays the natural flow of FOR relationships to WITH relationships:



EXPOSING AND ESTABLISHING PHASE ▪ Often a school partnership begins with more of a FOR emphasis. In this phase, the church and school communities are exposed to each other and relationships begin to form. Much thought should be given to how projects can be done in the most relational manner possible.

EXPERIENCE AND BUILDING CREDIBILITY PHASE ▪ Credibility in the partnership is built over time. The church community demonstrates genuine desire to be WITH the school community and is supportive for a longer period of time. Here, attention is given to ongoing participation, identifying the strengths and gifts present among all parties and deepening relationships.

ENGAGING AND ADDING VALUE PHASE ▪ Once credibility and mutual respect is established, the next step is engaging in a collaborative process of starting new programs and other supportive initiatives. When families, faculty and admin of a school community dream together with church leaders and volunteers, deeply meaningful relationships emerge and beautiful results are seen.

This is the power of service from a WITH approach. Partnerships that are established this way reveal the methodology of Jesus and fulfill His commands to serve others. The true relational nature of the gospel is affirmed and develops the kind of relationships where opportunities to articulate the gospel are abundant. FOR and WITH have their roles. But FOR leading to WITH most accurately represents the Kingdom of God and offers the greatest benefit to our partners.