

Subtleties of Serving (Serving - Chapter 12)

n/a

Ready:

Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

Set

When you are a sports legend like Coach John Wooden, the opportunity to give of your time and resources can be found waiting around every corner. People have been looking to attach his name to charitable causes and have been chasing him down for personal appearances ever since he became synonymous with college basketball greatness.

Wooden, being the servant leader that he is, has graciously accepted many offers over the years. He has visited numerous veterans' hospitals and children's hospitals. In fact, it's organizations that support kids that really get his attention.

"I've always had a particular love and empathy for children," Wooden says. "I have cherished times when I have been able to hold a newborn in my arms. I especially remember holding astronaut Sally Ride and [former] Stanford basketball coach Mike Montgomery when they were babies.

"I was pleased when the organizers of the Wooden Classic Basketball Tournament decided to give a portion of their proceeds to children's hospitals. Now they have money going to the Special Olympics, and that pleases me, too. Needs of children have a special appeal to me. Showing love for these children through these gifts makes me very happy. I know the money doesn't make all of their problems disappear, but it certainly helps make their lives better."

But for Wooden, the act of serving is much more than supporting charities or visiting the sick. In fact, he believes that there are many small, sometimes unnoticeable things that ultimately have a long-lasting impact on others.

"There is always great joy in learning that something you've said or done has been meaningful to another," Wooden says. "Especially when you do it without any thought of receiving anything in return. Your gift doesn't even have to be material. Helping others in any way—with a smile, a nod or a pat on the back—warms the heart."

Wooden transferred that philosophy to his style of coaching. He always strived to help his players understand what it looked like to serve others both on and off the court. "If a player scored off a pass, I wanted him to point to the man giving the assist until they made eye contact in a gesture of thanks and acknowledgement," he says. "I started that with my high

school teams. I also wanted a gesture of thanks done for a good pick, for help on defense or for any other good play. Kindness makes for much better teamwork.”

Wooden also taught his players how to serve others with acts of kindness and consideration. Even when his teams at UCLA were winning a record 10 NCAA men’s basketball National Championships (including another record-setting 7 consecutive titles), he still required his players to think of others first—a rarity in today’s sports world that is often dominated by self-serving high-profile athletes.

“I don’t believe a year ever went by when I didn’t receive a letter from a custodian from one of the arenas where we played, indicating that we left the dressing room cleaner than anybody else,” Wooden recalls. “I wouldn’t allow [the team] to leave until the orange peels, gum wrappers, towels and soap chips were off the floor.”

One of the first subtle acts of serving that Wooden learned was from his father, Joshua Wooden. He instilled many great qualities in his four sons, but it was the spiritual fruit of gentleness that left an indelible mark on Coach Wooden. This is something that he has since learned to appreciate even more through the teaching found in 2 Timothy 2:24-25, which states, “The Lord’s slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance to know the truth.”

“My dad influenced me in many ways,” Wooden says. “He was physically strong, but he wasn’t a huge man. Because he knew how to use his leverage, he could lift and move things around that stronger people could not. He was powerful, but he was also kind and gentle. I never heard him say an unkind word about anyone, nor did I ever hear him utter a word of profanity. I saw my dad’s gentle spirit on display when he worked with fractious horses and with dogs I thought were vicious. There’s nothing stronger than gentleness. My dad was the epitome of this principle.”

Wooden displayed that same gentleness when dealing with his players. Even when correcting his players, he found ways to do so without demeaning or berating them. “Some of my players needed a pat on the back,” Wooden says. “For others, the pat needed to be a little lower and a little firmer.”

That was Wooden’s way. He never shied away from discipline, but he always doled it out in a way that allowed them to “know the truth.” It’s that unique approach that has caused many to refer to Wooden not only as the greatest coach of our time but also as the greatest teacher to grace college athletics—a teacher who daily used the court as his classroom.

Wooden himself says he considers himself to be more of a teacher than a coach. Take, for instance, the times he stood up for racial equality while he was a high school coach in Indiana and head coach at Indiana State. Some may have taken his actions as a way for him to make a socio-political statement, but for Wooden, he was teaching his players and the supporting communities about integrity and respect. “The most important profession in the world is parenting,” Wooden says. “The second is teaching, and everyone is a teacher to someone.”

Coach Wooden has also been a devoted friend to many players, assistant coaches and athletic administrators over the years. The act of friendship is yet another one of those subtleties of serving that has had a significant impact on other people’s lives. Wooden’s basis for this belief can be found in Ecclesiastes 4:12, which says, “If somebody overpowers one

person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.”

“God created us to be interdependent,” Wooden says. “We were not designed to go through life alone. We become so much more when we come alongside others—and we make them better, too. . . . Friends help complete us, and we’ll be better for having taken them along on our journey to becoming all we are capable of becoming.”

Yet none of these subtle aspects of serving—sharing, consideration, gentleness, teaching or friendship—will matter much without the most powerful force known to mankind: love. One of Wooden’s favorite passages, 1 Corinthians 13 (commonly referred to as the “love chapter”), warns that all of the acts of kindness, giving, faith or even prophecy will have no value to God if love is not at the root of one’s motivation.

“Love is the greatest word in our language,” Wooden says. “When we have love, many of our problems disappear. Differences are manageable when love has its way. I’m sure my regard for love comes from my reading of the Bible. . . . We can give without loving, but we can’t love without giving. In fact, love is nothing unless we give it to someone.”

Go

1. John Wooden says, “Helping others in any way—with a smile, a nod or a pat—warms the heart.” Can you recall a time when someone’s simple act of service brightened your day? What are some ways that you have served others through random acts of kindness? How did it make you feel?
2. Wooden talks about how he required his players to be thoughtful by picking up the locker room after road games. How does that match up with the mentality of today’s stereotypical college or pro athlete? How can being considerate of others equate to the act of serving?
3. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-25. What does this passage tell you about the role gentleness plays in the life of a servant? What are some ways that you can exhibit this trait to those around you?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 4:12. Can you describe a situation in which a good friend helped you weather a personal storm? How has your friendship helped that person deal with the inevitable trials of his or her life? In what ways can you serve your friends?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Why do you think love is such a key component in authentic serving? What do you think Wooden meant when he said that “love is nothing unless we give it to someone”? What are some ways that you can give love to someone else?

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Bible Reference:

2 Timothy 2



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