

Getting Your School Year Serve On!

By Barry Shafer

The Backdrop

What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the phrase "back to school"? For most people, that phrase conjures up some negativity: early mornings, homework, lots of reading. We tend to think about all the things we have to give up such as sleep and free time. So here's an idea: Why not think of this upcoming school year in terms of how much you can give, not give up?

The What

As you might expect, God has a lot to say in His Word on the subject of giving. Here are three great passages. You may want to print these and mark every reference to giving or serving with a pen or colored pencil. The marking will help you notice a little more detail.

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he or she should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, he or she should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:9-11).

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free; but do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. Rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:13-14).

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear—and with sincerity of heart just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know the Lord will reward each one for whatever good he or she does, whether slave or free" (Eph. 6:5-8).

After you've read and marked the passage, try this: Look at the things you marked and journal everything these passages teach you about serving and giving.

The So What

Let's park on 1 Peter 4:10 for a moment: It says we are faithful stewards of God's grace when we use whatever gifts we have to serve others. It's a cosmic case of paying it forward! God gives us grace, and we show our appreciation for that grace by serving *others*! Would you like to show your appreciation for God's grace in your life? Write down two or three ways you can serve others this school year. We've given you a few starter ideas:

- Befriend the new student who just moved into the district.
- Tutor someone in a subject that comes easily to you.
- Show hospitality to any new face in your youth group.

Galatians 5:13 tells us to serve one another humbly in love. This is a nice purifier as to why we serve: not to get something in return, not to be praised for serving, but to serve out of love. Take a minute to write out a prayer that reflects a commitment to serve others out of love.

The passage from Ephesians 6 has a striking parallel to the student-teacher relationship in this way (No, you're not a slave!): The teacher is someone who, as a master over a slave, has authority over you. Write down some practical ways you can live out the instructions from this passage with your teachers. You may want to start by making a list of your teachers for this school year if you know who they are (if not, make some good guesses), and apply these instructions to each teacher personally.

The Wrap Up

School years, whether you are in a school setting or homeschool environment, give us an opportunity for a fresh start. Why not dedicate the fresh start of the 2011-2012 school year to serving others? Declare this year to be a school year in which you see how much you can give rather than how much you have to give up!