

Got Faith? Got Purpose? Reach Out!

BY PAT DOUGLAS *and* ANNA MITCHUM
with RUTH GRUBBS

Samuel. Samuel? SAMUEL!

Okay, so maybe not everybody gets awakened in the middle of the night by the voice of God. But God called Samuel, a mere child, to do His will. The scriptures tell us in 1 Samuel 3 that the Lord God called to Samuel, a child who was given to the tabernacle, in the middle of the night. Samuel answers three times to his elderly blind priest, Eli, by saying, “Here I am, for you called me.” Eli finally realized who was really trying to get Samuel’s attention. The next time, Samuel responded by saying, “Speak Lord, for your servant hears,” and Samuel then began to encounter God in a whole new way. It is through his new relationship with God that Samuel eventually became God’s spokesman to all of Israel. Samuel’s

example challenges kids to serve. As a child, he was called to do things on his level and willingly obeyed.

God has called people of all ages and stages in their lives to follow Him through the years. There’s no reason for us to think that He has stopped. He continues to call children to be His workers right now in their own communities through local missions.

Does it seem like God is only calling those who are seasoned Christians to community service? Does He only expect good works from adults? Do adults know best how to serve the poor? Does God only communicate with baptized folks of a certain age to help? Or has community service become such a popular catch phrase for our times—so popular in fact that most colleges are looking for it from their applicants—that sometimes the why of our service is getting lost? Have our lives become so busy that it’s not convenient to fit service to others in our schedule?

How do we begin to build strong young Christians who have a heart for serving?

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Service from a Young Age

Certainly kids are too young to know how to help out. No way! Open children's eyes to the needs in their own community and their inherent desire to help will follow. As leaders and parents, we constantly hear, "I want to help," a desire which seems to come naturally to kids. Service towards others is a natural outpouring of our love for God. Community service projects that are meaningful and authentic give children a strong sense of purpose and self-worth. The time spent "getting outside of themselves" is good practice for minimizing self-centeredness and combating self-absorption. Capturing and nurturing kids' desires to help builds servants for a lifetime.

Service is Living God's Word

When we hear the voice of God ourselves, we can then teach our children how to tune in to His voice, a critical component to prepare them for a lifetime of Christian discipleship. Providing ways for our children to hear their own call and guiding them to recognize God's will for their lives gives them a priceless foundation in faith.

Our behaviors tell the real story of where our priorities lie and will be imitated by the children we lead. What do your children see in you?

Service is Habit Forming

Service to others fulfills Jesus' commandment that we "love one another." Actively serving within their own community is a wonderful way for children (and adults) to feel connected and fulfilled in their own hometown. Plus, when others witness children in action, the entire congregation, parents, and community will be challenged—it's contagious!

Most of us know that a habit (good or bad) is formed over a period of time. A sustained program for serving God helps kids learn the habit of service. Not only do they feel good doing the service activity, but they develop a hunger to be more involved—to do more.

Service from the Heart

The relationship a child has with Christ will most certainly be deepened when they are taught to serve God and see others with the "eyes of their heart." Kids have a way of speaking plainly about what is going on in their hearts. ►



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Local missions also provide a wonderful way to invite non-church goers to become involved. Kids can have a terrific, low-pressure way to invite a friend to come on a local mission trip or activity with a specific purpose of serving.

They are often ready to talk about their faith in language that is beautiful and simple—just like the love they feel for God. Serving affects a child deeply, and Hannah, 10, described it in this way:

“(KWP) serving was a chance to give to those less fortunate than us. The funny thing was that even though we were the ones doing the work, when we were all done, it always felt like we were the ones who got the biggest benefit. When each project was done, I always had a feeling of accomplishment because I had really helped someone. And that is a pretty cool feeling for a kid to have.”

Service is Real

So how do you make serving God real to kids? Children learn by doing, so serve in your own community. There are countless mission opportunities right in your own backyard that they can learn about and then help with those needs. Just like adult mission projects build relationships and community through face-to-face interaction, children’s mission work connects them to the local community and neighborhoods. Through building relationships, children realize that some of those who are in need are children “just like them” but facing different circumstances.

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a local mission trip or activity with a specific purpose of serving. The works become purposeful acts, much like Christ washing the feet of his apostles.

Try this in your community:

- Plant a garden and donate produce to the local food bank
- Plan a karaoke night or sing off at your local retirement home (alternate oldies songs with songs the children know)
- Make animal treats for your local animal shelter

As 1 Peter 5:2-3 states, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God ... with eagerness ... proving to be examples to the flock.”

God is calling. Now’s the time to put your faith in action—REACH OUT! ❧

Pat Douglas and Anna Mitchum are the creators and authors of Kids With Purpose, which they run out of their own faith community in Leesburg, Virginia. Not only do these two amazing women have husbands and four children each, but they inspire their own churches to give back to the community in a myriad of ways.