

Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Service

Plan a service project that the family can do together. This not only allows you to practice serving others, but it gives you a shared experience. A friend is moving, so your family agree to help clean the house after the moving van is gone. A homebound person needs a visit, so all or part of your family goes and invests an hour reminiscing and perhaps laughing together. You learn of a financial need in the life of a friend, and your family discusses the need and agrees to give a certain amount of money as an act of service. A widow needs her gutters cleaned, yard mowed, or house painted. Your family agree that you have the time and ability to serve, and together you meet this need.

I remember the fall day that our daughter, Shelley, then ten years old, joined me and a group of college students from our church as we drove through a nearby neighbourhood looking for a yard filled with leaves. We found one, knocked on the door, and told the elderly lady who came to the door that we had a group of college students who were doing service projects for the elderly and wondered if we could rake her yard. "I beg your pardon?" she said with a question mark both on her face and in her voice. I repeated our offer and she said, "Oh, I will gladly pay you to rake my yard. I have called all over town and cannot find anyone to do it."

"We don't wanted money," I explained. "We just want the joy of serving others." I'm not sure she understood our motivation, but she agreed. The next week, she called the secretary at our church and raved about the wonderful group of students who had raked her yard. She thought maybe they were angels; she called to see if they were real people. Can you imagine the positive impression this has on our ten-year-old daughter? Today, as a physician, her life is characterized by an attitude of service.

Raking the leaves from the lawn of an elderly couple or shoveling snow for a shut-in creates positive memories that linger for a lifetime. These are the kind of experiences that children talk about in adulthood when they reflect upon family. They are also the kind of experiences that create positive feelings in neighborhoods and stimulate others to an attitude of service. Service projects by one family have the potential for changing the social climate in a neighborhood. God uses serving to form us into the image of Christ.

-Gary Chapman in *Five Signs of a Loving Family*