

Summer 2025 Soul Food Series

Week 3: Serve it Up!

Good Morning!! I am Emily Layser, Director of Spiritual Formation and Congregational Care. Welcome to Connection Community Church!

Today is our final message in our series on **Soul Food**! If you've been tracking with us for the past 2 weeks, David has preached on the **Ingredients** in week one, and last week for week two, he talked about the process **of letting it cook**. These are all fun ways to talk about discipleship and the work that you're allowing God to do in your life.

Well, today, I'm excited because I have the pleasure of preaching on the best part of cooking and the culmination of the series- the eating!! Today we are going to be looking at the **Meal, and how we are called to serve it up to those around us**.

Before we dive in, let's pray.

Food is just so good!! So, what is your favorite food?

My favorite food is buffalo chicken and I will eat buffalo chicken anything-pizza, sub, wrap, salad, fries, stromboli-whatever! That is my go-to order almost anywhere.

Around the world, most people cite pizza as a favorite dish and it's globally recognized as being one of the most popular foods.

In America, besides pizza, some of the top contenders are Hamburgers and Cheeseburgers, Mashed Potatoes, French Fries, Fried Chicken, Grilled Cheese...anyone hungry yet?

Food is central to culture and societies. Much research has been done to see how food connects us to our heritage and helps express who we are. Food bonds communities and fosters relationships. Think about the countless family gatherings you've had surrounded by food. The meetings, holidays, parties, planning sessions, basically any time you've had people gathered together and food was served.

I don't know about you, but I'm always looking for ways that I can add food to any meeting or gathering. With my role here and being new at the church, I've been getting together and meeting with so many new people! And I've joked for the past few weeks that I feel as though I am just eating (and drinking coffee) my way through the congregation and the MOT area! And it's honestly been so great!

I was at Hobby Lobby the other week-one of my favorite places- and they always have cute and quirky signs about everything. And I passed a sign that said “Nothing brings people together like good food.” That’s so true, right?

Jean Pierre Poulain is an anthro-sociologist who has studied and written books on food in society. He said:

“It is by the cuisine and the table manners that the most fundamental social training takes place, and by which a society transmits and allows the internalisation of its values. It is by food that social bonds are interwoven and kept.”

Food is a big deal in our lives!

But just as we have done in the past 2 weeks with this soul food series, we’re going to dig just a little deeper. It's not just about the ingredients, it’s about following the recipe that God has for your life. It’s not just about the process of cooking, it’s about letting it simmer and have God do the work in your life.

And so today, it’s not just about the food and eating the meal, it's the service behind it.

Think about the last meal you ate. Who served you this meal? What went into all of the preparation and time it took to get this meal ready. Maybe it was a quick bowl of cereal you made yourself this morning. Maybe it was a dinner you went out for last night that took several different hands several hours to prepare.

What all goes into serving a meal? No matter if you’re talking about eating in a restaurant or at home, there’s plenty that goes into serving a meal. There’s food orders to be made and acquiring the food, the ingredients and food that needs to be cooked, there’s tables and dishes that need to be cleaned, and let’s not forget all of the time and energy spent on making all of this happen.

I love it when I get home from work after a long day and the first thing my kids ask is-“What’s for dinner?!” I look around and realize, oh yeah, that’s for me to figure out for the night, again! And of course, all parents know how much greater the feeling is when you finally answer that question and it’s met with an exasperated “UGHHH” or “AGAIN?!” We see you parents, we know the struggle!

Even the simplest of meals requires (at least a little bit) of preparation.

If preparation is the act of getting ready, then serving is the act of doing something for others. The 2 go hand in hand. What would be the point of preparing a large meal and not serving it? And conversely, how would you be ready to serve a large meal if you hadn’t put in the time and preparation beforehand?

The same is true about our hearts and spiritual lives. **God has called each and everyone of us to serve.** (You've probably heard that a hundred times.) But how? We must be prepared and ready to do so. How do we prepare to serve? And then how do we serve as God has called us to?

Preparing to serve comes from knowing how to serve. That's what we're going to explore more today.

The book we're going to be spending most of our time in today is the book of 1 Peter, so if you have your bibles, turn there now. 1 Peter is a rather short letter, only 5 chapters total, written by Peter to God's chosen people who were living as foreigners in the areas of Asia Minor, known as modern day Turkey today. He tells them in the first part of chapter 1 verse 2-

"God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy."

As Peter is writing to these believers, he is reminding them that they are set apart and holy. That even though they live as outsiders in their land, they are chosen. And they were chosen long before and he knows them deeply.

So it's in this context that he reminds them throughout the letter to live lives of holiness and that in doing so, they will be mistreated. He encourages them to have the same attitude as Jesus in chapter 4: 1 and to be prepared that suffering will come just as suffering came to Jesus. In verse 8, he reminds them that the most important thing to do is to constantly show love toward one another because "love covers a multitude of sins."

And it's out of this love and encouragement that Peter says our main point that we're focusing on today. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says:

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen."

These verses give us great insight into how we can prepare to serve.

1. The gifts God has given you are unique and individual to you and your calling.

The first part of the verse we read today says it right there:

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts." (1 Pet. 4:10)

First, as we are preparing to serve, we need to recognize that the gifts God has given each of us are unique and individual to us all and our calling. He loves us, he knows us. He has set each and everyone of us apart and He gave us the gift that He gave us ON PURPOSE.

Your impact is different from mine. Your sphere of influence and friend group is different from mine. Who you are and how you relate to others is different from me and those around us. The gifts you have are not the gifts I have. Oftentimes we play the comparison game and we can tend to look at others and think, “well I don’t have the gift that he has,” or “Wow, I wish I was gifted like she is.” You have your gift for a reason. And just because you may not have a gift that someone else has doesn’t make you weaker. It’s just simply not your gift.

Now the bible has several different places where it mentions spiritual gifts. Flip with me to **1 Corinthians chapter 12**, where Paul echoes what Peter says about the gifts of the spirit. He says in verses **4-6** that:

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.”

We are the same yet different. We all have the same calling-to spread the love of Jesus (to connect people with Jesus and the new life he offers)- yet we have different ways of doing so. We love and serve the same God, but he has distinctly created us to love and serve Him and those around us.

Now let me be clear on this: because of this central calling we all have as Christians, we can’t use our gifts as a cop-out or as an excuse to avoid challenges or uncomfortability. We can’t say, “well I don’t have the gift of evangelism, so I’m just going to park the cars.” Or “I’m not a teacher, so I’m just going to pass the offering bags.” Those gifts of service are important-don’t get me wrong! But whether your gift is to preach or not, the people you see on stage are not the only ones who are called to be a witness and spread Jesus’ love-we all are!

Now, we could spend an entire sermon series touching on all of the different spiritual gifts and breaking them down, and looking at the many different places in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are laid out. For example, if you continue reading in 1 Corinthians 12 you’ll see some of the gifts laid out like words of wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

Another great place to look is in Ephesians 4 where Paul again states that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The point I’m making here is not how many gifts there actually are or even what they specifically are. But the main point I want you to understand about spiritual gifts here is this:

Your gifts are unique and special to you. **We are all a part of the same body, but we have different parts. No one else can do what you can do for the kingdom.**

So not only are our gifts unique to us, (but our second point today)

2. Use your gifts with all you've got!

1 Peter says in verse 11 that we are to:

"Do it with all the strength and energy..."

We are called to not just use our gifts, but to use them with all of the strength and energy we have, to wholeheartedly serve with our gifts. To build up the body of Christ and to serve the mission. Yet, how many times are we actually doing that? How many times are we giving our all for with our gifts and our calling? A few weeks ago, I preached on our First Love, and how sometimes we love out of a place of duty. Well, the same can be said about serving.

Are we serving because of the joy we find in using the gifts God has given us and being completely sold out for him? Or are we serving because we HAVE to? Because we're supposed to. "Well, no one else is signing up for the hospitality team so I guess I'll do it." or "Gee, I was hoping to not have to volunteer in the nursery every month, but if they need me I guess I'll be there."

And let's be clear, we're not JUST talking about using our gifts within these walls. That's pretty easy, most of the time. But how are you using your gifts out there, in the world? In your home? In your workplace? Do you step back and let others step in and figure- "eh, that's good enough" or "I'm not really paid to do that so..." If you're anything like me, you may tend to give your best everywhere but at home base and get to the end of the day and forget that your gifts even apply in your home.

When we use our gifts to serve, we are not serving from a place of obligation. We are serving from a place of joy in knowing that God created us to serve uniquely in this way. And that takes effort!

That takes energy and strength. And where does this energy and strength to serve come from?

Peter says that God supplies it!

"...the strength and energy that God supplies."

We can't do anything without God. Not only would we not have the gifts we have without Him, but we wouldn't have the strength or energy to use them.

Some of you know what I'm talking about. Some of you have gifts that exhaust you. Some days you wake up and you're not sure that you can do what you know in your heart you've been called to do. Some of you know that the only way the serving happens through you is because the holy spirit is working in and through you to make it happen.

We've all heard the saying, "If you don't use it, you lose it" Right? Although it's not exactly the same with spiritual gifts, we are called to be good stewards of everything that God has given us, including our gifts.

Paul warns Timothy in his first letter:

"Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received..." (1 Tim. 4:14)

And then reminds him again in the second letter when he is mentioning Timothy's faith:

"This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you..." (2 Tim. 1:6)

We need to use our gifts, fully and wholeheartedly. We need to not neglect them. We need to stir up the gift we have been given and use it to our fullest potential and as an act of service to God.

And, really, because that's what it's all about. Our last point about preparing to serve it to remember that

3. It's all for God and bringing Him glory.

All of it. Every last thing we do. From every chair we set up and word of encouragement we say to every person we welcome into our home or practically support or assist. It's all for Jesus.

Peter ends his thoughts on using these gifts by saying:

"Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen." (1 Peter 4:11)

Nothing that we do, no way we serve or use our gifts is about us. None of it. All of it is to be used to bring glory to God. None of it is to be used to self-promote or show others how awesome we are, like "look at me, I'm serving". No. It's all about simply using what God has given us to bring glory back to Him and to direct others back to Him.

It's not a matter of if we want to or we feel like it. We are called to serve no matter what. And we need to be prepared because let's not forget what Peter tells us multiple times-that it's not a matter of IF we are persecuted for it's a matter of WHEN. He encourages the believers in the last chapter, chapter 5 verse 12 that:

"My purpose for writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God's grace for you. Stand firm in this grace."

We are called to serve when it hurts. When it's inconvenient. When we're made fun of. When we're embarrassed. **We serve through and despite the suffering because that's what Jesus did for us.** God served us. He saved us through the gift of his son. Who suffered, and bled and died for us so that we can have eternal life forever with Him. Our suffering is nothing compared to what he suffered for us. And Peter says to stand firm in this grace. And that's what we need to do.

We serve uniquely through our gifts, with all we have, to bring Him glory. Because we're not serving for us, we're serving for Him.

So then, let's finish with this. I think we've prepared the meal pretty well here today. We know what we're serving with (our gifts) and we know we need to serve and even why we serve.

But HOW do we serve? How does this translate to you personally, here, as a part of Connection Community Church and the greater MOT area and community?

You have a unique gift that you are called to use and serve with not just within our walls but within our community as well. Are you using it?

Our culture at CCC and the heart we have of carrying the towel here is GREAT. Just by looking out, I already know that MANY of you are already serving. You know your gift and you've put it into action. This church is FULL of servant-minded people and that is FANTASTIC. People who volunteer regularly in the church office. People who pull weeds and help to beautify our grounds. People who serve on ministry teams. People who assist and encourage others at our countless support groups that meet here throughout the week. People who send care cards and make phone calls to our limited access church members. WOW! So many of you are currently serving and being the hands and feet of Jesus!

I'm not sure everyone here even knows just how much it takes and how many people it takes to have just a regular Sunday morning service here. Think of all of the ways that you've been served here already today. From the moment you parked your car to walking through the doors to grabbing a donut (coffee!) to coming inside the sanctuary. DOZENS of people serve here on any given Sunday morning and many go unnoticed. And that's good, because that's not why they do it.

But how are YOU doing it?

How are you serving?

We'd love to help plug you in and get you using the God-given gifts you have to uniquely serve, in every aspect of your life. We'd love to see you allow God's presence to move through you to serve in ways which maybe you've never thought of before.

That's why as we were preparing for today and praying and discussing how to best help people discern this process in their lives, we came up with something really neat. Great tech servants have been working quickly and tirelessly behind the scenes to create our very own **CCC Spiritual Gifts Assessment, completely online and accessible through our church website!**

What this means is that you can scan here or pick up a flier in the lobby and find out what your gifts are in an effective and efficient way. And we are encouraging EVERYONE to do this for a few reasons: 1-your gifts can change and shift overtime. Maybe you've done this but it's been awhile since you revisited your gifts. Or 2- maybe you've never done this, we want you to be learning and growing in your spiritual journey, and knowing your spiritual gifts is so important in that process. And 3- we want to be able to help you! We want you to get plugged in and active in serving. When you take this new assessment, it's going to send you an email with your gifts but it's also going to

send it to us here too. Many of you may have already done this, but you've never shared your results with us. We want a refresh of our sense of your gifts so that we can better serve together here and beyond our walls!

When you leave here today, you're going to see a table with a "menu" of ways in which you can serve as well. And we're going to make it easy for you to match what you are gifted with to areas of service here, and offer some suggestions of service out there too. There's so many ways to serve it up and so many different gifts to use!

But I want to make sure that this is heard loud and clear: Are we doing this topic this Sunday because we are hurting for volunteers and NEED you to serve. No. I mean a few more volunteers are always nice to have, especially if you ever pop into any of our children or youth ministry areas.

Are we doing this because we want to be disciples of Jesus who are using our full potential to reach those around us the way we have been called to-YES!! If your gifts are used within the church- great! If your gifts take you outside of the church to serve-even better!

What we don't want to see happen is for us to just become a place of complacent and apathetic lukewarm Christians. We want to be passionate in our faith, serving no matter what, and making disciples of Jesus as we love extravagantly, and witness boldly.

Let's pray.

Benediction: What's my purpose?