

## GROW Lesson 4: Sharpening the Ax



**Quick check-in.** How is everyone in your group doing with the assignment? Are people getting connected to serving in the church? How can you encourage one another to follow through? How can you overcome obstacles and address excuses? Who should they talk to about next steps? Serving is an important part of our spiritual growth not just because it strengthens the vision of the Kingdom of God, but it also strengthens our faith and our connection to God. We are created to serve (*John 13:1-17, Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45*).

**Q: There is a phrase on page 25 of the workbook that reads, “Who you are is more important than what you do for the church.” Do you feel that this is true of the church you attend? How do some churches communicate a different message? How can a church communicate that every person is valued for who they are?** There is pressure on a pastor to make a church run efficiently, so it is possible for a pastor to come across as more interested in how you can help the church than how he (or a ministry team leader) can help you. Guilt and shame can come in the form of a desperate plea to serve in a ministry regardless of passion, interest, or giftedness. Hopefully your church does a good job at appreciating everyone who serves, regardless of what role they play. We are the body of Christ, and each member plays an important part. Jesus didn’t come to recruit members, He came to minister to our needs.

**Q: Look at Galatians 5:13. If you are currently serving in the church, do you find it burdensome? How should we feel about the work of ministry?** Ministry certainly is work but it is also a privilege. We are serving the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and bearing fruit that will last for eternity! When our focus gets off we may start to feel a burden from the work we are doing. We may feel alone, unappreciated, unchallenged, overworked, etc. If we keep our focus on God and remember why we serve, He will fill us with His joy and His power to carry out His will. It is an honor to be a part of the work that He is doing and how fulfilling it is to know that we’re being used by Him! How incredibly awesome is that?

**Q: What are you currently doing on a regular basis to keep your spirit healthy (to “sharpen your ax”)?** Consider **James 4:8** and **Luke 5:16**. A while back we talked about spiritual disciplines. Here’s a reminder for the importance of regularly taking time to read, pray, meditate, worship, etc. It’s so important to have a regular habit of tuning our hearts into God’s heart because our hearts are so prone to wander. It sounds cliché, but it’s so true. Take a few minutes to share what methods of drawing near to God have worked well for you and check your own spirit to see if your heart is beating strong for God!

**Q: It’s better to take a regular break to rest than to burn out from ministry. What are some practical ways to take care of our spirit when the need for ministry never ends?** Some ideas might be to serve on a rotation, to serve every other week, or to plan for a break on a routine basis. Work with ministry leaders so that you can be available as much as possible but be sure to set healthy boundaries. If you serve in a ministry outside of the church services, don’t let serving in the church replace your time in a worship/teaching environment. You need to be fed even while you serve. Find a good balance; give your very best and know your limits so that you can serve for the long haul with joy in your heart!

**Q: Have you encountered a season of life where you needed to step down from ministry? How were you treated?** Life happens and sometimes what is most important for us is to take care of ourselves or of those near to us. If it's clear to you that God wants you to take a break, then you don't need to worry what other people think. Unfortunately, it may feel like or seem to others that we are abandoning the faith or our calling to ministry, but there will be times in everyone's life where a transition must take place. With that being said, there is a good way to do this and a bad way. Make sure that you communicate well with those you serve with and let them know when you will be stepping down and why so that there will be no gaps in ministry. Refer to **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**.

**Q: What is one of the biggest trials that you've had to face? Why do you think God allowed you to go through that trial?** Whether our trials come from the flesh, from evil, from the world, or even from God Himself, we can be confident that He is always in control of our future and He knows the beginning from the end. He also promises to never leave us or forsake us and will bring us safely home into His presence. That doesn't mean that in this world we won't have troubles (*Jn. 16:33*), but that He will be with us in the trials. Let's commit ourselves to God regardless of our circumstances and honor Him with our words, our meditations, and our actions! Look at **Job 2:9-10** and **Psalms 19:14**.

**Q: In what ways have you seen evidence of the kingdom of darkness at work around you?** Review **Ephesians 6:12**. It's not something we talk often about but there is a spiritual reality around us that is every bit as real as the physical realm that we can see. The Bible is clear that there are angels and demons, good and evil, and a war against heaven and opposed to anyone that wishes to bring glory to God. We live in a fallen world where evil reigns for a time and we are called to resist it and remain faithful despite the constant attacks. Anything that opposes the will of God comes from the spiritual forces of evil. It is lived out through people, through sickness, disease, disaster, the culture, and the work of Satan and his minions. Fear not, however, the outcome is assured! Jesus has overcome the darkness and Satan has been defeated! Even so, until Jesus returns, we live here on earth, but our citizenship is in heaven (*Php. 3:20*).

**Q: What are some of the signs of burnout? How do you know when you should press through and when you should take a step back?** Read **Mark 6:30-32**. Even those who were with Jesus Himself grew tired and weary at times, so Jesus set the example and had them step away from ministry to get some rest to rejuvenate their body and their spirit. If you cannot serve with joy in your heart, that is a red flag to search your heart. Are you tired? Are you hurting? Do you feel alone? Are there fears? Do you have anger or bitterness? Ideally, we would pray to God for guidance about whether or not we should step back from ministry and He would make it clear. Sometimes the situation may bring clarity, too. If you are experiencing burnout, PLEASE tell someone you trust before it becomes a crisis.

**Progress update on the Class Assignment:** Get connected to a ministry at church.

**Review Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**