

*A Big Youth Ministry Topic  
in a Single Little Book*

# THE SKINNY

ON

# SERVICE

**Tony Myles**  
*with Doug Franklin*

**Group**



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### ***The Skinny on Service***

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### **JESUS- CENTERED**

Guide your entire ministry toward a passionate Jesus-centered focus with this series of innovative resources. Harness the power of these dynamic tools that will help you draw teenagers and leaders into a closer orbit around Jesus.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Somebody serves me beyond what I deserve every day.

This is the section where I as a writer should formally thank them. The reality is that I should actually thank them in person. Assuming I've covered that, I'll let this be the icing on the cake.

My wife, Katie, for example, makes a hot breakfast sandwich for me to eat each week as I head out the door to serve our church. That's after I've put on clothes she's washed, dried, folded, and hung up... after showering in a bathroom she's cleaned in spots I'll never, ever fully notice (even if I really try)...after sleeping in a bed she's made for us to sleep in, and so on. Maybe that's not fantastic enough to mention in a book on serving, or maybe it's perfect.

I'm only skimming the surface of how she's a Proverbs 31 woman and is helping me raise phenomenal kids—Joshua, Daniel, and Johanna—whose faith and willingness to serve overshadows our own.

I wasn't raised a Christian, though. That means I always need to remember I am where I am today because of a volunteer-intensive student ministry I walked into as a teenager who helped me to become a Christ-follower. Taking into account friends, mentors, and more over the years, I owe more than I could ever repay to Roddy

Chiong, Rob Murphy, Dan Webster, Tony Schwartz, Bo Boshers, Bud Bence, Larry Mitchell, Mark Oestreicher, Rick Lawrence, Kami Gilmour, and more—including my good friends at Group Publishing, Simply Youth Ministry, and Group Missions.

Last but not least, thanks to any church that gave me a shot to make a fool of myself serving Jesus. Every pat on the back or paycheck with my name on it meant you had faith in me to help you have faith in God. Even when you drove me inappropriately crazy, you helped me better define what it meant to be appropriately insane for the Lord. May I continue to be one you regard as a servant of Christ, and as one entrusted with the mysterious, plain truths of God.

**—Tony Myles**

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# BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

The book you're holding might be “skinny,” but that's because it's all-muscle. This means that Tony Myles and Doug Franklin have cut away the fat and focused on the “first things” that make service in youth ministry powerful and long-lasting. In our Skinny Books series, we've paired a thought leader (in this case, Tony Myles) with a master practitioner (in this case, Doug Franklin) as a one-two punch. We want you to be challenged and equipped in both your thinking and your doing.

And, as a bonus, we've added an Introduction written by Dave Livermore that explores service through the filter of a Jesus-centered approach to ministry. Jesus-centered is much more than a catchphrase to us—it's a passionate and transformative approach to life and ministry. Dave's Introduction to service first appeared in my book *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*, and we couldn't think of a better way to kick off this little book. It's time to get skinny...

—RICK LAWRENCE

*Executive Editor of Group Magazine*

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# INTRODUCTION

Here's something that sounds obvious: Jesus must be central to how we engage youth in service. But what does that really mean? How is the service done by a Jesus-centered youth ministry different from service done by any group of teenagers? Something ought to clearly set apart our service as Christ-followers. At the heartbeat of Jesus-centered service is a proactive commitment to look at how Jesus himself served and engaged in mission.

To understand how Jesus served, we have to look at the backstory in the Old Testament. Particularly from Exodus onward, it's very clear that God's ears are tuned first and foremost to the cry of the oppressed. We see this most clearly when God rescues his people from the heavy hand of the Egyptian empire (Exodus 3 and following). In turn, God calls his people to do the same on his behalf with other nations by becoming a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19).

Though Israel does a less than stellar job in its "priestly" role, it's through Israel that Jesus comes on the scene. God himself shows up in the flesh to rescue all of humanity. And through Jesus, we get to see how God looks, thinks, acts, and serves. Essentially, we get to see God the Rescuer

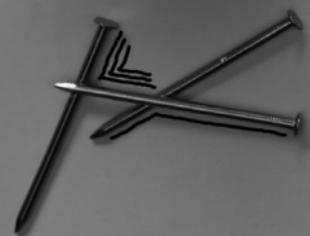
with skin on. Jesus becomes the living expression of the mission God had originally given to Israel.

And as Jesus is resurrected to the Father's right hand, the disciples are left to continue his mission of rescuing. Even though Jesus' earthly ministry is "over," God continues to wear his skin through the body of Christ—the church. God designed us to be his agents of redemption who rescue people personally and from systems of injustice. So what does it look like for our youth ministries to give people living experiences with the rescuing God? More and more youth ministries are incorporating acts of kindness and compassion as central to their service and missions projects. Some groups debate about whether these expressions are true expressions of the gospel. Most of our brothers and sisters in the non-Western church are perplexed that we even waste time arguing about this—the gospel *must* be proclaimed and embodied.

The more we spend time looking at Jesus, both personally and with our youth, the more compelled we will be to get up and extend the rescuing arm of God to the plight of those around us, near and far. Look around you. God has skin!

—Dave Livermore

*President of the Cultural Intelligence Center*



# CHAPTER

# 1

## *The Foundation of Service*



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Some readers are probably just skimming the words of these opening pages.

I wouldn't blame you if you did that. When I was new in ministry, I needed ideas FAST. Like you, I would have considered skipping this foundational section to move on to the “nuts and bolts” later in the book.

Still, while I have your attention, can I use a single word to talk you into staying?

*Huperetes.*

You may not recognize that word, but you've likely read it in the New Testament. It's the original Greek word underneath the word *servants* found in most modern translations of 1 Corinthians 4:1.

*“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed” (NIV).*

That's actually rather fitting. I'll explain as we quickly move through this first section.

## WHO IS SERVING ULTIMATELY FOR?

The word *huperetes* means “under-oarsman.” It refers to the servants on a boat in its hidden galley who pulled huge oars that extended out of the ship into the waters.

The unique thing about an under-oarsman is that from the outside looking in, you never saw these servants. You simply saw the work itself being done and the progress it afforded the ship against the great, sweeping waters. To coordinate these efforts, a drummer would set a tempo for everyone rowing.

As Christ-followers, Jesus sets our pace based on how he lived and taught. His rhythm affirms that impact in the kingdom of God is not attained through status, success, or stability. Rather, it’s as much a conscious act of the will for us as it was for Christ to offer a humble, selfless spirit of serving. Like the under-oarsmen, our work—and not us—should be seen.

Blah, blah, blah.

You know this, right?

But when you give up your time, do you acknowledge that it was God’s time to begin with? Do you know what it means to operate with such submission and humility that you don’t even think about how submissive and humble

you're being? Have you yet mastered what it means to step *into* the spotlight to rally others, in order to quickly step *out of* the spotlight so they don't follow you but follow Jesus?

The under-oarsmen never received any glory. While the red carpet was rolled out for the captain or king, the under-oarsmen stayed hidden on the bottom of the boat.

Chew on that, because Jesus can be hidden by Christians who serve for attention or who demand a red carpet ceremony for their good deeds. Instead of hiding him, we're called to hide ourselves and let every act of genuine Christian service point to Christ's ultimate act of service on the cross. It's his compelling presence that attracts people and transforms the world—not just our actions or words.

- How many serving experiences or mission trips have you seen easily become about someone wanting to experience some sort of spiritual “high”?
- What's the difference between someone who serves without seeking recognition and someone who wants to make sure they get some acknowledgement for it?

Serving is about doing something for someone else without other people finding out about it. It's ultimately

for Jesus Christ, and practically for the person or cause we're attempting to further.

Nod your head at that. And then consider what it means to nod your life and ministry toward it, too.

Then again, it's really not your ministry anyway. It doesn't even belong to your teenagers or your church, but to God himself:

*“For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen” (Romans 11:36).*

## **WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO SERVE?**

The Bible offers various criteria on when someone should take on a position of spiritual leadership. When it comes to simply serving, however, everyone has the capacity to do something at any given time.

Once when the disciples came to Jesus complaining that someone was doing things they thought only their group should do, Jesus replied, “Don't stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:50).

That means there's no limit regarding who can serve or what a servant looks like.

Anyone can serve—anyone.

Anyone can be served—anyone.

It's why you can take a non-Christian kid on a mission trip and watch his heart enlarge for God as he sits in a pile of trash next to an orphan.

It's why you can take a church kid on the same trip and watch her realize she's there to lead her non-Christian friend to Jesus instead of you doing it.

It's also why one of Jesus' most frequently asked questions was a variation of, "What can I do for you?"<sup>1</sup> The Savior seemed to have no issue doing something right then and there for the person who needed something done. Imagine if you made that the question you were known for asking on a regular basis. What would happen next? Would it ever get out of hand?

That's where *your* spiritual leadership and discernment matter.

## **WHERE DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO SERVE FIRST?**

Your students certainly can begin serving by responding to needs in front of them. It's likely that adults are currently doing things in your ministry that teenagers

could do instead. Teenagers can ultimately be entrusted with coordinating groups, organizing activities, running multimedia, overseeing follow-up efforts, leading games, and so much more.

Of course, there is value to processing things internally before serving externally. This is true for teenagers as much as it is for adults, whether serving visibly in upfront roles or doing the “hidden” jobs nobody else wants to do. Set the tone for this, perhaps by using two other biblical concepts from Greek works to offer your students context...

**A WAITER:** *Diakonos* refers to “one who serves,” much like the role of a waiter in a dining experience. That person’s availability, attitude, expressions, and words should ultimately complement the needs of the guests and not distract them. Good waiters do this by using their whole bodies to serve and by employing a solid sense of timing on when to approach or withdraw. The “best of the best” waiters come across as always available yet intentionally unnoticed.

Likewise, true servants in the kingdom of God know how to walk alongside others and quietly take care of whatever is needed. In fact, *diakonos* is the root for the word *deacon*—a concept not about power and authority, but about love dressed in work clothes. When we serve

through our actions and words, it's like we're filling up and passing out cups of cool water that refresh others:

- “I prayed for you this morning. How are you really doing?”
- “Let me get the door for you.”
- “What’s the dirtiest job that needs to be done? Can I do it?”

**A CIVIL SERVANT:** *Leitourgos* (Romans 15:16) biblically refers to someone who serves the needs of their fellow man (and woman). In ancient Greece, people with resources would volunteer to care for certain state duties called “liturgies”—and they did it at their own expense. It wasn’t meant to advance them in status, but to advance the greater good.

We do this when we share the riches we have in Christ with others, or when we come alongside to meet people’s physical needs through the resources God has given us. Perhaps that’s why the word *liturgy* became our reference for what happens in a worship service. The purest meaning of this word is about generously sowing a seed into a culture or group of people with no strings attached. It’s moving from “I scratch your back, you scratch mine” to “I scratch your back.”

- “Someone has to get this going and supply the resources for it to happen. No one else is stepping up. I’ll be that person, if even just for this first season to inspire others.”
- “Those kids won’t make it to youth group unless someone regularly picks them up. Let me find a van and a driver.”
- “We need several things we currently don’t have if we want an effective youth program. Let’s all take part in a door-to-door fundraiser.”

## ➔ A VETERAN LEADER’S PERSPECTIVE *Doug Franklin*

*Teenagers can do a lot more than most people allow them to handle. Many times their “limits” are boundaries that adults and culture have placed on them, instead of the potential that a limitless God has placed inside of them. Churches often view youth ministry as the church’s ministry to students, but it also must involve our students’ ministry to the world. Are they serving Christ, or are they being served? Have they been able to sit in the midst of God’s many teachable moments that come from these opportunities, or have they watched from the sidelines? As Christ-followers we are all servants of the king—no matter how old, how experienced, or how mature. Let’s make sure we don’t hold teenagers back from a critical part of their spiritual formation by restricting their potential to serve.*

**Take a look around at the brokenness in this world and its spiritual poverty.** Jesus wants to change all of that, and he's looking for teenagers who want that change to start in them.

Youth worker, that's where you come in! When your students serve others, they're serving Jesus. Serving helps teenagers draw closer to Jesus and become more like him. And serving creates opportunities to talk about Jesus and share his amazing good news. Ultimately, every act of genuine Christian service points to Jesus' ultimate act of service on the cross.

*The Skinny on Service* unpacks the powerful reasons why it's important for you and your students to serve others, but you'll also get page after page of practical ideas on how to serve. You'll be equipped to help teenagers discover the joy of serving faithfully "before," even if they don't personally get to see the fruit "after."

Teenagers aren't just looking for a great youth worker—they're looking for a Christ-follower who is leaving footsteps they can step into. And when you lead the way by serving, that's exactly what you're doing.



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