

Serving to bless others and facilitate spiritual growth / COB / 09.14.14

Introduction

- † Monday, I went to an ophthalmologist, because for the second time this summer there is blood seeping into my eye. I told the nurse that I brought my wife so she could hear for herself that I was rupturing blood vessels because my life was too stressful, I should return to retirement and play video games all day. The nurse surprised me by replying that unless I was lifting pianos or violently vomiting due to drunkenness, the most likely cause of my problem was stress. So now I have a quandary, because I actually want to be your pastor, yet I do miss playing those strategic war games.
- In Hebrews 12.4, the author says only Jesus resisted sin to the point of bloodshed. I cannot say I have done that, but in trying to lead you by example in following Christ, I can say I am serving you to the point of bloodshed!
- † Today we are going to talk about serving. This is part of our series on spiritual growth otherwise known as progressive sanctification, because God is progressively transforming us to be sanctified, that is, separated out for his purposes.
- Last week, we learned about spiritual gifts and how God has shaped each one of us to be unique and thus uniquely useful for his purposes.
 - Today, I have four contentions to defend with you. First, one reason God saves us is to serve in the ministry. Second, that God designed us uniquely so we could serve uniquely in the ministry. Third, that God uses our serving in ministry as a means to grow us spiritually. And fourth, that the pastor's job is to lead the ministry team while helping each of you to grow in the process.
- † I am going to have you look some verses up in the Bible today. If you want to use a NET Bible, they are stacked on the table, feel free to go grab one; I'll give you a moment to do that.
- It is stressful being a pastor. I wouldn't have thought it was as bad as lifting a piano or violently vomiting. Those could be interesting metaphors for being a pastor, I will have to think about them. Well, if this sermon is successful, that will lessen my stress, so let's see how it goes...

Truth 1: One reason God saves us is to serve in the ministry

- † Truth 1 is that One reason God saves us is to serve in the ministry.
- Turn to Ephesians 2.8-10 NET: "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus [born again] for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them."
 - Before you came to faith in Christ, before you were born again into new spiritual life, God already had prepared good works for you to do! God has a plan for you, and it involves being a part of his ministry team.
 - Titus 2.14 NET: "He [Christ] gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good."
 - Belonging to Christ, being one of God's people means being part of his ministry team.

- † How many of you are football fans? It's football season, so you knew I would break out my football. This will work for any sport: Suppose I told you something has happened with the Eagles recently, that a player – named Re kaf? – said he was not going to bother preparing for the games anymore, would only come to the games when he wanted to, and wasn't sure if he wanted to go in and play even when he was there. How strange is that? Re kaf... Oh, wait, I have it backwards, it's not Re kaf, it's Faker! Someone who said these things would be a faker, not really a teammate, right? Teammates do their part for the team.
- Now relax, I am not thinking of anyone here in particular when I say these things, but what about on our church ministry team? Suppose we had people who refused to get involved in our church community, refused to find ways of serving Christ by helping others, would these be the people you would look up to as spiritual leaders? No. So if you want to become a spiritual leader for Christ then you need to grow increasingly involved on his team.
- † Seriously, did you know that Martin Luther wondered if the book of James was authentic scripture? He thought it spoke against Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace, which we just read in Ephesians 2. I assure you, James and Paul were on the same page about salvation, but James was writing to believers and admonishing them that if they really had saving faith then they would live it out!
- James 2.26 NET: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
 - If you really are saved, then you will respond! And part of that response will be an increasing desire to serve in the ministry for Christ.

Truth 2: God designed us uniquely so we could serve uniquely in the ministry

- † Truth 2 is that God designed us uniquely so we could serve uniquely in the ministry.
- Use your bulletin to mark your place in Ephesians, because we will turn back there, but now turn to 1 Corinthians 12.4-7 NET: "Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person [each believer] the manifestation of the Spirit [a spiritual gift] is given for the benefit of all."
 - So Christ, through the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to each believer, but they are different gifts for different believers. In fact, as we discussed last week, we each have a unique SHAPE, a unique combination of spiritual gifts, heartfelt passions, natural abilities, personality traits, and experiences, such that we each are distinctively unique people.
 - In vv.8-11, Paul goes on to emphasize the variety of gifts people get.
- † Now, look at v.12. 1 Corinthians 12.12-19 NET: "For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body– though many– are one body, so too is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. For in fact the body is not a single member, but many. If the foot says, 'Since I am not a hand, I am not part of the body,' it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. And if the ear says, 'Since I am not an eye, I am not part of the body,' it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. If the whole body were an eye, what part would do the hearing? If the whole were an ear, what part would exercise the sense of smell? But as a

matter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided. If they were all the same member, where would the body be?"

- One thought we get from this is that while we are each designed to be unique, God has put us all into one church body. Thus we should work cooperatively together, not each trying to do our own thing. We should value the church community, the ministry team, not just our own part.
 - Also, we should value our diversity. We seek to have unity in purpose and identity as Christians, but we seek to exploit the diverse ways God has designed us, SHAPed us, for ministry. If you were all like me, we would have a very limited functionality as a church community and limited effectiveness as a ministry. But if you do the part you were made to do and I do the part I was made to do and the others do the parts they were made to do, then we can truly be blessed both as recipients of the work of God and as the team doing the work of God.
 - Which team wins the Super Bowl, the one with great players at every position who don't work together? No, they're not going to win many games, right? So we should value working together. What if all the players were similar to each other, like they were all 350 pound offensive linemen, would that team win many games? Why not? They could accomplish very little. So we should value diversity in ourselves even though we are unified in purpose.
 - What if Colby is the receiver and I am the quarterback, but he runs one way and I throw the other? Not so good, right? What if we both want to be quarterback and fight over the football? That's not working. What if one of us refuses to show up and play? Can't complete many passes like that. No what works is if we each come and work together to do our parts.
- † Even when we are doing the same work, our diversity is valuable. One receiver can run deep, one cuts across in the slot, another makes a key block or draws away two defenders.
- It would be a terrible mistake to all try to do evangelism the same way, to all teach the same way, to all lead ministry teams the same way. God has made each of us to be unique because he wants to use our unique design to reach and affect different types of people.
 - You will reach lost people, inspire fellow believers, and otherwise minister in ways that I cannot. So please play your part on our team. We need you.
- † Let's continue reading with 1 Corinthians 12.20-27: "So now there are many members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor in turn can the head say to the foot, 'I do not need you.' On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential, and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity, but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another. If one member suffers, everyone suffers with it. If a member is honored, all rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it."
- Again, multiple thoughts here. First, we need each other. If you are not a committed member of the church, a committed member of the ministry team, then you are missing out.
 - But so are we! If you need us, it is also true that we need you. You might only be the navel of the church body, but without you, who would collect the lint? No, seriously, every role in the church is important. If nobody cleans the bathrooms or mows the lawn what happens? Either the place gets so disgusting and shabby looking that we cannot attract visitors or the pastor has

to invest his time doing that work to the detriment of the work he is supposed to be doing. Without you, the ministry suffers, the community suffers, so please fulfill your part on our team!

- A related thought is that we have to value every one. It is a mistake to glorify the pastor, to overly rely on the administrator, and then think less important the volunteer who sets up the children's room, watches the babies during the service, or pays the bills. Every one of us is integral to the body, and thus we all succeed or fail together.
- I'll tell you right now, if this church fails to glorify Christ, it will not be because I wasn't trying hard! After all, I have been shedding blood for this. So join me, maybe not to the point of shedding blood, but join me on this team and let's get some work done for Christ.

Truth 3: God uses our ministry serving as a means to grow us spiritually

- † Truth 3 is that serving in ministry is one means God uses to grow us spiritually.
 - Turn back to Ephesians 4.15-16 NET [and keep your bookmark there, because we will visit it one more time]: "But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love."
 - As each of us does our part, the community, the church body grows in love. But also, practicing the truth in love, we all grow to be like Christ. We had an earlier sermon in this series that showed that spiritual growth of the individual in the New Testament always is in the context of being immersed in church community, and that the growth of the community and the growth of the individuals are integrally related.
- † The act of serving in itself is not sanctifying. However, when believers obediently and passionately serve in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they will experience the supernatural work of God through their efforts and experience the work of God in their hearts as they learn to love those whom they help. Both of these experiences can be transformational.
 - For example, if we participate in evangelism, all we do is accurately share the gospel message and enthusiastically witness for its truth, and it is God who must instill saving faith through his grace, but when God does lead someone to salvation through our efforts, we get the faith-inspiring thrill of experiencing that supernatural work of God through us, we gain a greater maturity from the experience, and we develop a greater abundance of love instilled in us for our new brother or sister in Christ. That's transformational.
- † I'll tell you, I think there is a disconnect in many of your minds between what we get out of church and what we give to the church, like it's two different things, but not only is that disconnect false, the reality is totally the opposite: these two ideas are integrally linked together.
 - As you grow to be more like Christ, you will do what he did, care about what he cared about. So you will be ministering to people all the time, just as a natural course of life.
 - In order to grow to be more like Christ, you learn to do what he did and care about what he cared about. As you share the gospel, as you prepare and then teach, as you bring meals to a shut-in, as you sacrifice your Friday night to mow the lawn at the church, you will experience God working in you and through you to bless others. And you will grow spiritually.

- † I told you last week that over a nine year period during my thirties, starting when I was young in faith, I was involved in almost every ministry at my church.
 - I volunteered in the nursery, to help set up the church, to help clean up the church after the service, to greet and usher, to give announcements.
 - I was on the drama team, the evangelism team, the missions team, the communications team, and the strategic planning team. And I helped out at special events.
 - I taught in the children’s program, the middle school program, the high school program, and the young adults group. I taught adult classes and eventually began to preach.
 - I led and taught in a small group, then became a small group trainer and coach. I developed small group curriculum and created devotions.
 - I mentored other men and teenage boys. I was an assistant for two pastors.
 - Do you think those experiences helped me grow? Do you think doing all that ministry helped me become more effective in ministry, better able to serve God? Do you think learning to sacrifice, to put others first, to communicate effectively, to lead effectively, to inspire, encourage, comfort, rebuke, exhort, and love others helped me to become more like Christ?

- † God not only saved you to serve, not only shaped you to serve, not only commands you to serve, he wants to bless you as you serve! Trust me, if you want to grow to be more like Christ, then you have to be involved in the ministry at church and learn to make serving others your way of life.

Truth 4: The pastor leads the ministry team while helping each of you to grow in the process

- † Truth 4 is that the pastor leads the ministry team while helping each of you to grow in the process. It is my responsibility to ensure that the church functions as a ministry, as a team, that things get done if they need to get done. But it also is my job to ensure that each of you are growing by taking part in the ministry of the church.

- † Why did Christ put pastor types here anyway? Ephesians 4.11-13 NET: “It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors [shepherds] and [other] teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God— a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.”
 - One point here is that God has provided gifted leaders for the church to equip everyone else for the work of the ministry. So either you are a leader training others or you are the others being trained to do the ministry. Nobody is supposed to be a pew sitter, becoming that sponge Josh talked about two months ago, that sits and soaks, but never gets wrung out. You are supposed to come here to learn and grow so you can serve, which is part of how you will learn and grow. My job is to help you, to empower you, definitely not to do it for you and leave you idle.
 - Paul’s second point is that we all work together for the goal of developing the church by developing each person, so that every person here grows to be a mature believer, and the church enjoys unity and an environment that reflects the character of Christ.
 - So every one of us helps in the ministry to raise up disciples and keep the church functioning, and the spiritual leaders among us work to empower us to be successful, and in the process, every one of us grows spiritually as the church strengthens and grows too.

- † So don't be surprised if I ask you to try something new or to do something differently. That's part of my dual role: to help you help the church and to help you take a growth step.
 - The goal is that you all become mature enough to be willing and able to run all the ministries of the church. One of you might even begin to preach. My role is to get us there and then to continue empowering you and guiding you as you do the work of Christ.
 - On the worship team, the singers and the instrumentalists are the performers. The worship leader is the director, leading the others on the team, coaching them, encouraging them, holding them accountable. I am the producer. My job is to ensure they have working equipment, sheet music, anything else they need, to ensure they are motivated, skilled, and enthusiastic enough to give it their best shot. I cannot be the one playing guitar; I don't have the time or skill. And that is true for the many other ministries of the church too. I also cannot be the worship leader. We need people to rise up and take responsibility for all the ministries of the church. I cannot do my job if I have to do yours.

- † God's vision is for you to become mature in faith, and that includes acting mature, taking on the responsibilities of the mature. What do you think of adults in society who act immature, who neglect their kids, don't hold down a job, and sit around drinking and playing cards all day?
 - Paul said, 1 Corinthians 13.11 NET: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became an adult, I set aside childish ways."
 - Paul was saying that on the New Earth we would no longer need the spiritual gifts we need now, but earlier in this chapter he admonished the Corinthians for being infants in faith, so I think there is meaning also about acting maturely with our gifts. If you consider yourself a grown man or woman, if you want to be known as a man or woman of Christ, then it is time to take your responsibilities seriously. Join the team, get off the bench, out of the pew, and play your part.

Response

- † We need to obey scripture by living out the "one another" verses with each other in the church community. Love one another, encourage one another, teach one another, serve one another. Even if your spiritual gifts, abilities, or personality do not fit some of those activities, bring glory to God through your obedience by living his way in community with each other.

- † We also need to obey scripture by helping make disciples. You might not have the gifts of evangelism or teaching, but you can live out the Great Commandment of Matthew 28, because God will use your unique SHAPE to empower you to make disciples of Christ in your unique way.

- † A third way we need to obey scripture is by finding ways to serve that gospel mission through the ministries of the church.
 - 1 Peter 4.10 NET: "Just as each one [in the church] has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God."

- † Now, you might wonder what are the opportunities for serving here in the church, so I have provided you with this handout. Come on, there's something for everyone here right? Even new

believers can help out. We have strictly task oriented behind the scenes stuff, activities that are tasks but with people, and then plenty of opportunities for those who are ready to teach and lead.

- And please note in the title that these are just some of the ways you could serve. We are only limited by your imagination! I have friends who walk through bad neighborhoods on Saturday mornings, picking up trash and praying for people. I would like to work with the Point and PCCO to start a micro-lending program for people running businesses in Parkesburg.
- I suggested in my first sermon here that we start doing amazing acts of love for each other. So, the young men of the Christian Service Brigade might pick up the rocks that litter Trish's lawn. Donna is not supposed to be up on ladders or bending over, so we could all go to her house and prepare her grounds for winter. Last year, several men reroofed Celia's house. We might reach out to our unchurched neighbors and do these things for them when they are needed.
- But even if you don't want to dream big yet, you can find something here to do. And the thing is, much of this is on our list to get done, even if you don't help. That means a lot of my time is used inefficiently, because I am doing non-pastoral things instead of the job you hired me to do. And even the jobs that are mine could be made easier with some help from you.

† Now look at the box on the handout. It gives five steps. The first is simply to get involved here, but please notice something: it says to commit to being part of a ministry team, not a free agent. If you come in one day and notice something needs to get done, so you do it, that is marvelous. But we need you to also commit to being a part of the team. We need to know we can count on you and can count on getting done what we need to get done.

- As you grow, you will progress through the other steps, which means you will become more involved in the community of the church and eventually in being a spiritual leader. I understand that teaching and leading is harder for you if you are shy or an introvert. I do not believe that God values extroverts more than you. He made it easier for us, but probably that means he trusts in you more and knows you will depend on him more completely. Even shy introverts can find a way to teach and lead. It might be one-on-one mentoring instead of preaching, behind the scenes administrating instead of rallying, but that's ok, we need those things too.

† I know many of you have a good reason for not committing to serve. You're busy, old, tired or sick. The problem is we end up with one paid pastor and forty-nine people with good excuses.

- Listen, Hilma and Jack have been in an out of physical rehab facilities the whole time I have known them. Both are limited in what they can do. But Hilma served on the search committee and now is on our prayer team. And Jack learning to play the organ. Ok, probably not, but I did pitch it to him! The point is that you can find some way to serve in the church, God expects it, we need it, and you will be blessed by it.

† I have been emphatic today. This is an exhortation sermon. I am not trying to put any of you down; what I want to emphasize is how much I value you and need your help to make this church a success. So if you feel any conviction from this message, let that inspire you to take a step toward me, deeper into the community of this church; don't let it tear you down or away from us.

- When we left the ophthalmologist on Monday, LeeAnn tongue-in-cheek asked me whether I would want to remain at Church of the Open Bible once I was retired. I said, I would. This is my church, my community, you are my friends, it is with you that I want to serve. I hope you feel the same. Let's pray...