

A New Kind of Community: Why Serving Is Not Optional

There is a moment most of us have experienced at some point. We look around at the world, at the headlines, at our own lives, and we feel it -- that deep, unsettling sense that something is missing. We throw ourselves into pursuits that seem worthwhile. We strategize, we strive, we climb. And even when things go exactly as planned, the satisfaction fades faster than we expected. Then we are already on to the next thing, running the same exhausting wheel all over again.

The ancient wisdom of Scripture would tell us that this is not a modern problem. It has always been this way. The world has always been full of brokenness and futility. People have always been reaching for something more, something better, something that actually lasts. And yet, tucked into the pages of the New Testament, there is a picture of something so compelling, so radically different from the rat race of ordinary life, that it has the power to stop us in our tracks and make us ask a question we may have stopped asking a long time ago: what if there is actually a better way to live?

The Picture That Changes Everything

In Acts chapter 2, beginning at verse 42, we get a snapshot of the earliest followers of Jesus. They devoted themselves to teaching, to fellowship, to shared meals, and to prayer. A deep sense of awe settled over the entire community. They shared what they had with remarkable generosity, selling property and possessions to make sure that those in need were cared for. They worshiped together, ate together, and did life together with what the text describes as great joy and generosity. And the result? Each day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This was not a program. It was not a marketing strategy. It was a community of people who had been genuinely transformed by an encounter with Jesus Christ, and that transformation was visible in the way they treated one another. The world around them looked in and saw something different. Something better. Something they desperately wanted to be a part of.

What Made Them Different

To understand just how radical this community was, you have to understand the world they lived in. The divides between Jews and Gentiles were fierce. Men and women occupied entirely different social spheres. Masters and slaves did not share a table as equals. The social order was rigid, and everyone knew their place in it.

And then along came these followers of Jesus, sitting at the same table, calling one another brothers and sisters regardless of where they had come from or where they stood in the

eyes of society. Paul captured this beautifully in Galatians chapter 3, beginning at verse 27, where he describes how those united with Christ have put on Christ like new clothing, and that in him there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female -- all are one in Christ Jesus.

This did not mean the differences ceased to exist. It meant something more profound. It meant that at the foot of Jesus, the ground is level. The CEO and the entry-level employee, the master and the servant, the powerful and the powerless -- all of them arrive equally desperate for grace, equally in need of something they cannot manufacture on their own. And when people begin to see each other through that lens, something extraordinary happens. Community becomes possible in a way it simply is not when everyone is still playing the game of me and mine.

The Role Serving Plays

Here is where it gets practical, and where many of us tend to quietly check out. Because serving sounds like one more thing to add to an already overwhelming life. It sounds like obligation, like duty, like showing up out of guilt.

But that is not what the picture in Acts 2 shows us. The sharing, the generosity, the sacrifice -- it was happening with great joy. Not reluctantly. Not out of compulsion. But out of the overflow of lives that had been genuinely changed by Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul describes this transformation. Because Christ died for all, those who live are no longer to live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. The old way of living, the exhausting pursuit of self-advancement at whatever cost, leads to a kind of death. Jesus came to offer something entirely different -- a new life, a new way of seeing people, a new way of moving through the world.

Serving is not a program layered on top of that new life. It is an expression of it. When you take serving out of the picture of Acts 2, what you are left with is a gathering with a meal, a show, and a pep talk. The thing that made that early community so winsome, so magnetic, so genuinely different from everything else the world had to offer -- it was the way they gave themselves to one another.

The Transformation Is Real

There is something that happens in a person when they stop waiting to feel ready and simply step into serving. Stories abound of people who were standing at the edge of despair, whose lives began to turn when they shifted their focus outward. Not because serving is a magic cure, but because it is the environment where Jesus tends to show up

and do what only he can do. Dry bones come to life. Purpose replaces aimlessness. Joy replaces the hollow feeling that follows every self-directed pursuit.

The early church grew not because of a clever outreach strategy, but because a community of transformed people began to live differently, together. The world noticed. People were drawn in. And day by day, the Lord added to their number.

An Invitation

The same picture is still possible today. The same Jesus is still in the business of making new creations out of worn-out people. The same Spirit that empowered those first believers is available now. The question is simply whether we are willing to step off the bleachers and onto the field, to trade the exhausting pursuit of me and mine for something infinitely more worthwhile.

There is still room at the table. The new kind of community is still being built. And serving is how we build it together.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES FROM THE SERMON

Directly Cited or Quoted

John 13:15-17 -- Jesus instructs his disciples to follow his example of service, with a promise of blessing for those who act on this knowledge.

Acts 2:42-47 -- The early church community devoted itself to teaching, fellowship, shared meals, prayer, generosity, and worship, resulting in daily growth.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17 -- Because Christ died for all, believers die to self and live for him, becoming new creations with a transformed way of seeing others.

Philemon 1:16 -- Paul urges Philemon to receive the returning Onesimus no longer merely as a slave but as a beloved brother in Christ.

Galatians 3:27-28 -- All who are united with Christ through baptism are clothed in him, and the dividing distinctions of ethnicity, social status, and gender are transcended in him.

Thematically Alluded To

Ezekiel 37:1-14 -- The dry bones vision, referenced when the pastor describes lives coming to life through serving.

Isaiah 40:31 -- Mounting up on wings like eagles, directly quoted in the closing prayer over those already serving.

Galatians 6:10 -- Doing good especially to those of the household of faith, referenced when describing serving opportunities.