

I. Intro

A. I do not need to tell you that there are a lot of things going on right now, nor that not all of them are good. Some are good. Many things getting better. Globally speaking, life expectancy is going up, pollution is dropping down, extreme poverty is being reduced. Many things are getting better. But a lot of things appear to be headed in the other direction. In the last month, we've had extreme weather in Texas and Florida, a major earthquake in Mexico, a massive security breach in the US and a bombing in London. On top of this, North Korean seems determined to start something, our national politics grows more toxic and racial tension rises. We have spent untold trillions of dollars trying to stop many of these problems, but all that seems to have done is increased our debt levels.

B. Underneath the national and international news, we have problems at the state and local levels and there are challenging events going on in our neighborhoods. The couple down the street is getting a divorce. The child on the next block just attempted suicide. Mark lost his job. Janet has breast cancer.

C. It can be too much. It can be overwhelming. What are we supposed to do? As Christ-followers, we cannot ignore problems. More to the point, we cannot turn our backs on people in need. What are we supposed to do?

D. I remember the first time I was really overwhelmed with other people's problems. It was 1986. I was about 9 months into my first job at a church. And I was overwhelmed. I was realizing that the parade of problems was not going to slow down. I was coming to grips with the reality that no matter how hard I worked, there was still going to be more to do. In fact, as we did more to help people, the number of people who showed up for help, grew.

E. I was exhausted, disillusioned and having a bit of a career crisis. And so I went to the senior pastor and asked, "What's the point? This is an impossible task. I'm not sure I care anymore. And by the way, there are lots of needy people that I don't even like."

F. And he smiled and made some passing comment about how discouraged I must be, after all, I'd worked hard for 9 months and hadn't fixed the world's problems. And then he said, "Galatians 6:9." And I looked at him and he repeated it. "Sometimes," it's the only thing that keeps me going. I looked it up. And there Paul says: Do not grow weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

II. This is the third week of a series called, "Discovering Life with God."

A. I kicked things off by arguing that we (that you) were made for a relationship with God and that Jesus is the key to that relationship.

1. Jesus is God's Son. Has existed forever as God. Two thousand years ago – in line with the promises unfolding throughout the Old Testament – He became a man. That is, he added humanity to divinity. While remaining fully God he became fully man. He did this in order to live among us – to love us, teach us, set an example, and ultimately to die in our place.

2. Jesus claimed to be God on a rescue mission. And His offer was, if we follow him – accepting him as Savior and then following him as Lord – we would find an abundant life now and eternal life to follow.

B. Last week I suggested that a helpful way to frame this is: love God, serve others and reach one. We then focused on loving God. Today I want to look at serving others.

III. Let me start by stating a few things:

A. I believe that we are called to help whoever we can. That our default response when we get asked for help should be to help. This is complicated because: 1) sometimes we need to move upstream, focusing less on the crises events and more of the causes; 2) and there are some who milk the system – who we need to address (Paul says if you don't work you don't eat); 3) furthermore, the Bible prioritizing some things for us. We get special call outs to serve our families; to care for the poor, widows and orphans, aliens and other Christ followers. But generally, we are expected to serve whenever and wherever we can.

B. Second, many of you already are serving. Good job. Great work. Thanks. Keep going. Nothing I say today is meant to suggest otherwise.

C. Third, be forewarned that I have an agenda. My goal isn't just to talk about serving. My goal is to get you in the game. I do not really care where. Sure, we have jobs to fill.

1. The church needs musicians, small group leaders, greeters, receptionists. We need Sunday School teachers, elders and deacons. We need people to run programs, make phone calls and change diapers. We have hundreds of spots to fill every week.

2. And on top of that we want to fuel a movement that goes out – that reaches people with the Gospel and renews communities. Our goal is 100,000 hours of serving outside the church walls – tutoring in the public schools, caring for single Moms, attending to the needs of shut ins with HOGS; staffing the Justice Center

and CARS program. Helping build Matthew Homes and more. And this weekend we have a local ministry fair where you can learn about those options.

D. So, we have needs and I'll be disappointed if we don't see people step up on lots of fronts. But my goal today is a lot bigger than that. It's not to fill up a signup sheet for any specific thing. It's to push all of us towards the heart and attitude of a servant.

E. And I'm quite motivated to that end. For starters, I believe everyone wins when you serve, starting with you. And secondly, this is my job.

1. I'm not sure what you think my job is. But in Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul says that God made some to be apostles and some to be prophets and some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers (that's me) – some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

2. As I read it, a big part of my job is to get you to do your job.

IV. Why would I suggest that alongside loving God, the way for you to discover the life you are after is to serve others? I have ten reasons.

V. One: Because people need help. Everywhere you look, people need help. We need to stop moving so fast we can't see this. Our society is breaking down on this front. We tend to buy help now.

VI. Second: We should serve because we have been served...by God. This is what Jesus did. In Phil 2, Paul explains that even though Jesus existed as God in Heaven, He didn't hold on to that privileged position. He stepped down from heaven to serve.

A. He set aside the glory and power that was rightfully His to serve. No one ever started higher or ended lower than he did.

B. Phil 2 is one of the most remarkable passages in the entire book. And it is made all the more remarkable because Paul is not simply telling us how amazing Jesus is how amazing his service was, he is telling us this in order to say, "Be like that!" Serve others.¹

C. If He can serve, you can do. In fact, if he can serve how can we not? If we are serious about being a Christ follower – of identifying with the ultimate servant – we must serve.

¹ This passage opens, have this attitude among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who although he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God something to be clutched, but he humbled himself, stepped down and down and down, serving all the way.

VII. Third: We should serve because we were created to serve. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes that, “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”²³

VIII. Fourth: We are not only created to serve, we are gifted to serve.

A. Paul writes about this in I Cor. 12 and 14, and Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. Sometimes these passages are overplayed. But sometimes they are ignored. God gives gifts (they range from leadership and administration to hospitality and giving). We are giving their abilities in order to help others. If you are not using your gifts, we are all poorer for it.

B. We need to find the place where our passions and the world’s needs intersect and get to work.⁴

IX. Fifth: We should serve others because by doing this we honor God.

A. We honor God by doing whatever we do for him.⁵ By doing all we do for the Lord. This is true in the sense that we should do a good job in whatever because we are ultimately serving God – Colossians 3:17. But it is also true in that when we serve others we serve him. In Matthew 25, there is some sort of mystical link between serving Others and serving God. Jesus says, “What you have done for the humblest of My brothers you have done for Me. If you feed and clothe others, then you feed and clothe Me. If you haven’t fed and clothed others, you haven’t fed and clothed Me.”

X. Sixth: We should serve because this is the way we grow.

A. At some point, the last thing we need is more information. The last thing some of us need is attend another Bible study. We need to get our hands dirty. Spiritual maturity is

² God never wastes anything. He would not give you abilities, interests, talents, gifts, personality, and life experiences unless he intended to use them for his glory. By identifying and understanding these factors you can discover God’s will for your life. The Bible says you are “wonderfully complex.” You’re a combination of many different factors.

³ A similar point is made when Jesus is asked to summarize the law. And he says: Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbor - which implies helping them, serving them. This is what God tells us to do.

⁴ This doesn’t mean serving is always fun and life-giving. It’s not. Sometimes it’s hard and thankless – and great for us to do. But we should know what we are good at and look for opportunities to use those gifts.

⁵ Colossians 3:23-24 Paul says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men. It is the Lord you are serving.” In other words, no matter what we’re doing, there is a sense that we are doing it for God.

never an end to itself; maturity is for ministry. We serve so we can grow and we grow so we can serve.⁶

XI. Seven: We should serve because the way up is down.

A. In Matthew 20, Jesus said, “If you want to be a leader, serve. If you want to be first, be last.” Jesus argues that we need to approach life like He did. And what he said was, “I did not come to be served, but to serve.” By the way, serving is never acting against our own best interest. We are never expected to do that. It means that the best thing we can do for ourselves is serve others.

XII. Eight: We should serve because it fills us up.

A. On a couple of occasions, I’ve asked people whose service was an encouragement to me, why they served. I’ve saved some of their answers. And here is what I see when I read over all of them.

B. Their principle reason for serving differs. Some serve because they feel blessed. Others out of obedience. Some because it was what was modeled in their home. But almost all of them add a second point: they find real joy in serving.

C. A trader, wrote:

1. I used to think I was too busy to serve. Only people who don’t have a life have time for that. Then I started to serving in the nursery. It was safe and not too demanding. (Spoken from a guy who probably didn’t change any diapers).

2. Then I was asked to usher, and that was fun. Then I got involved in men’s ministry and found that I was able to be helpful.

3. But the most rewarding thing I have been able to do is serve as a leader in junior high and high school. I turned my back on God when I was 15. If I can help even one kid turn his life over to Jesus how awesome is that! He goes on to write, “the blessing I’ve received through serving cannot be measured.”

4. A journalist wrote: “Investing in people’s lives has paid far greater dividends than my 401K ever will. The rewards of serving have always exceeded the cost.”

⁶ The old comparison between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is perfect here: Galilee is a lake full of life because it takes in water but also gives it out; in contrast, nothing lives in the Dead Sea because, with no outflow, the lake has stagnated. If you want greater spiritual maturity and wisdom, you need to be pouring what you already know into the lives of others! Why would God pour more maturity and wisdom into a stagnate reservoir?

5. A mom wrote: God fulfilling His purposes through me makes life worth living. What a privilege it is to be his earthly hands and feet. I have learned how awesome it is to take one of God's nudges and step out in faith, leaving my human frailties and limitations behind.

6. Another woman wrote: I come with my cup of something to pour out in service. Having served I realize that my cup now runs over. What a joy. What a blessing. What a deal.

7. A CEO, writes: Why do my wife and I serve? It is the most fulfilling part of our life—more so than anything the world of business can provide.

D. I have lots more like this.⁷ Let me share just one more: A young professional wrote: When I first moved to this area and started attending Christ Church, I knew no one. I was intensely lonely, and spent my time at home alone, watching TV and feeling sorry for myself. I eventually realized I could continue this way, or I could take steps to get involved. So, I volunteered to help with children's ministry, music, and Bible studies. These activities have become some of the most truly fulfilling and satisfying parts of my life. Through them, I have developed intimate friendships, built on my skills, and felt the joy of doing something eternally worthwhile.

XIII. Nine: We should serve because it will keep us real. Few things are worse than hearing someone with an easy life complain about their first-world problems.

XIV. Ten: We should serve because it will be rewarded for eternity.

A. Do not store up your treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Instead, store up your treasurer in heaven.

XV. Those are ten reasons. I could go on.⁸ There are other advantages to serving. But let me start to land the plane. First by answering your objections

⁷ Anne Janeckie: I want to briefly share what I am doing these days, not to brag, not to be prideful (such a slippery slope) but to tell you the message is being heard. And it is from this service that my happiness and joy is coming. I deliver meals weekly to shut ins and monthly serve at a PADS shelter. Each of those experiences teach humility and allow for service of others. I can't explain exactly the positive feeling in doing these activities but it is certainly there. One of the greatest gifts of doing this is learning about and coming to understand and respect worlds of people I would never run into in my daily life-I'm growing out of these experiences.

⁸ Studies show that retired men who volunteer live two and a half times longer than those who do not. Allan Luks, the author of *The Healing Power of Doing Good*, has lists of practical physical benefits for those who serve others. He claims serving others is as good for you as having a membership at a health club. (That may be because having a club membership and using the club are two very different things).

A. Some of you think, God doesn't need me. You're right, He doesn't. He never will. He will accomplish his plans with or without us. As Mordecai says to Esther in the Old Testament book of Esther, "do not be confused. God will accomplish his plans – with you or without. But who knows but that you have been placed in this position for just such a time as this." God does not need us. But we have the chance to be part of his work.

B. Second: God can't use me because I'm too much of a mess. You're a mess? Welcome to the club. The world is not made up of people who are messes and people who are not. It's made up of people who get that they are mess – a bundle of greed, lust, and those who think they are god's gift to others. The first group can be helpful. The second group, not so much.⁹ By the way, no HR department would let their company hire the kind of people God pressed into service: Moses, Abraham, David, Peter and Paul. This is a collection of known liars, murders, agitators and sexual harrassers. Every one of them is a law suit waiting to happen. And yet, God did quite a bit with them.

1. God uses people who are willing and available. He often works best in our weakness. He used a young school boy to feed 5,000. It's not too late to figure out how and jump in.

C. Objection three: I'm too busy. This is a problem. Now, perhaps this is a season of life thing – such as when you have a new born child or are caring for an elderly parent. There are times when I say to people, "Enough already. Go home." But most of the people I hear saying this are talking about the fact that their life is full of work, sport's leagues and Netflix. And I think they will regret that at some point.

XVI. I started by noting that we are often overwhelmed by life – and that the needs are never ending. Let me leave you with a story.

⁹ Skye Jethani writes: Surely there were better, more qualified people than Moses to lead God's people out of Egypt. By his own admission, Moses was poor at public speaking. He didn't have the rhetorical power to confront the mightiest ruler on Earth. He also lacked respect among his own people. The Hebrews knew of Moses' posh upbringing in Pharaoh's household, as well as his status as a murderer. Finally, Moses was an 80-year-old shepherd exiled in a desolate land and married to a foreigner. All of these qualities were significant barriers to accomplishing his calling. So, why did the Lord choose him? It is a well-established pattern in Scripture that the Lord frequently chooses the weak, the small, the insignificant, and the untalented to achieve his purposes. He even declared that he did not choose the people of Israel because they were mighty or great in number, but because they were the smallest of nations (Deuteronomy 7:7). God uses weak vessels because no one will misidentify the true source of their power. If Moses had been a young, powerful, dynamic leader with charisma and status, some might incorrectly assume he was the deliverer of Israel from slavery rather than the Lord. For this reason, we should not be ashamed of our weaknesses and shortcomings or conclude that they will prevent us from divine usefulness. They are, in fact, opportunities for God to reveal his power through us and glorify himself. As he said to the Apostle Paul, "My power is made perfect in weakness."

A. I want you to hear that the life you want comes through Jesus. That it includes loving God and now that it includes serving others. What I want to share at the end is, you can do this. Do not think you have to do everything for everyone. Look for God to direct you and then jump in and do for one what you wished you could do for everyone. But get in the game.

B. Over the summer, I was back in Washington, and I was looking around at the time things I had been involved in. One stands out.

1. HFH. Hard. Ended up in charge b/c others were fighting and it was clear that they all thought they could control me.
2. Family with 12 kids. Need bigger house. Then she is pg again. Then a child dies and he stops working.
3. So frustrated.
4. So this year they will build ten houses. And they have a store. And that family is doing well.

C. Many of you have stories like that of things you've done.

XVII. Let me wrap this up by thanking those of you who are serving, and by encouraging those of you who are not to take a next step. We have a local ministries fair going on at all of the campuses today.

XVIII. Campus Pastor

A. You were given ten reasons to serve. Let me put a human fact on this. Can you imagine what the world would look like, if everyone adopted an attitude of serving?

B. Can you imagine what the world would look like if those who claimed to love God served? Can you imagine how many more problems we could solve? How many more hurting people we could help? This is not easy. But everyone wins when you serve, starting with you.

C. If you want to serve – if you want to get in the game – here are some next steps.

1. You can take an inventory about your spiritual gifts
2. You can meet with someone to explore things to do
3. You can sign up for one of the Bus Tours