

## FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

### Serving in the Church

***Galatians 6 v10 'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.'***

What does it mean to serve in the church?

There is sometimes a polarisation amongst Christians of:-

- those who get out there and serve the community preaching the gospel to the 'world' and

- those who mainly minister inside the church and build up believers

and sometimes we put ourselves into one or other of those categories, but God is quite clear - calls us to do both.

Next week Andy is speaking about serving in the community but today we are looking at serving in the church. Paul encourages us to 'especially' do good to those who are believers, to those we are closely connected to. He doesn't exclude others because he also says 'do good to all people' earlier on – but in our desire to appear to be a missional, outreaching, take-the-world-for-Jesus church we must not lose sight of those who are closest to us.

I've been to 2 catholic masses recently of head-teachers who have retired after many years serving in schools in Leyland and on both occasions they have made speeches in which they have apologised to their own children for not spending time with them due to the pressure and time taken up looking after everybody else's children! – it so easily happens and it can happen in the church too. We can be so missional about reaching out to those who are far away that we can sometimes neglect the mission we have to those we are closest to who also have immense needs and who have not yet finished their journey into healing, serving and growing.

So what does it mean to serve in the church?

It means so many things and looks like so many things that I haven't got time to go through every possible way of serving in the church. Because actually there are as many different ways of serving in the church as there are people in the church.

The reason I love the church is because it is so diverse. It is made up of so many different kinds of people. I hate cults because they try to make everyone the same. Not so the church.

Using the play-doh in front of you make something! (while music playing)

Look at what you've all made – some of them are similar but none of them are exactly the same. They are all unique. Same play-doh, different hands, minds, hearts and skills. Some have made pancakes, some have made life!

In the same way God calls you to serve in the church – to bring the unique gifts, skills, resources and love to the church and to have an impact.

***Ephesians 4 v16 'From Him (Jesus) the whole body (the church), joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work'***

the church here in Paul's picture is not described as lots of people coming together whenever they feel like and doing what they are told but rather a unit in which each part is crucial.

The church builds **itself** (not 'themselves') up in love 'as each part does its work' – we are not separate but one body. That is why one leader, one pastor cannot do everything and why at OCF we believe very strongly in the ministry and priesthood of all believers – we all do our bit and everything we do is of equal value to the church.

What that 'work' is depends on who we are.

Serving in the church can be defined as this:-

***Doing the thing you love to do, with the skills and resources that God gives you, having an impact on those around you.***

Let's take each of those in turn:-

1. **Doing the thing you love to do** – we have been rescued from living in a way that God never intended for you and rescued INTO being and doing everything God created you for. Into a freedom to live an amazing life being and doing that which you were designed to be and do.

In Matthew 8 v14 we read a brilliant story of Jesus going to the house of Peter's mother-in-law who is ill in bed with a fever. 'He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.'

No mention of recuperation or a day off or someone else helping out – she was rescued from her illness and instantly she is serving. We are rescued into being what God has called us to be and do – He placed something in our DNA which gives us a joy in doing certain things.

For me I love to encourage people. When I do it I get a buzz when I see that someone has been encouraged to step up or to do something they were worried about. We are all called to encourage but I get a buzz from it.

For others it's administration and typing information into spread-sheets (!).

For some it's prophesying to the church. Others may hate getting up in front of people but you just can't help it and sometimes you think – let someone else do it this week – I'll keep quiet – but then you're up again doing it!

I was watching someone pack the cupboard the other week and they had an exact order and by the time they had finished everything was symmetrical and I thought to myself 'you're enjoying that!'

So the question is = What do you love to do? – that doesn't mean that you don't do the things that you don't want to do – some things just need doing. But it does mean you should definitely find out what you love to do and then doing it.

Sometimes asking others what they think you love to do helps.

Ask: when do you see a spark in my eyes and when do I smile the most?

What do you think I get most passionate about and what lights me up? (we can assume everyone else gets excited about it to – not always!)

2. Let's look at the second part of the statement of what it means to serve in the church = **'using the skills and resources God has given you'**.

For me this is quite complex but boils down to 3 things:

- i) the skills God put into you at the very beginning when he formed you (Psalm 139);
- ii) the skills you have learnt over time (school, college, church, work, friendships, mentors, watching others) and
- iii) the money, time, possessions that God has blessed you with.

The question here is – what do you have in your hands?

My favourite story in the whole of scripture is the story of Zaccheus who had taken so much out of selfishness and out of not being accepted by others. He had no sense of responsibility to anyone because he thought why should I? they hate me any way – and then Jesus turns up and chooses to come to HIS house for tea.

He feels acceptance and, after time spent with Jesus, Zaccheus steps out of his house and is a changed man and gives out of what he has in his hands.

I am giving out a letter to regular members of OCF calling for us to give what we have in our hands so that ministry in OCF can continue. To increase our financial giving so we can have an increase in the impact on those who need to know the love of the Father. No-one in this church gets paid – we are all volunteers. All money goes to ministry for others and the privilege of serving the church and the community.

This world needs a saviour who rescues, a spirit who leads, a father who loves them in their time of need.

When we are serving then we need to know it is a partnership with God through God the Holy Spirit working in us – the privilege is in allowing the Holy Spirit to **anoint** the skills and resources you have to make an impact on others.

The Fisherman's Revival of 1921 happened in Lowestoft in Suffolk (yes!). Douglas Brown, a preacher from London, was invited to come and speak. He was a great speaker and the presence of God was there but he made no call for anyone to give their lives to Jesus. Every morning there was a prayer meeting but on the Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 1921 the prayer meeting was described as 'wonderful' by the minister of the church in Lowestoft (Hugh Ferguson) That evening Brown preached from John 5 when the man is healed at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus said to the man 'Get up, pick up your mat and walk!'

'Prepare for Revival' by Michael Marcel

Page 60:-

"When our brother had delivered his message, he told the people he was going into the vestry and would be glad to see any who wanted help or desired to surrender themselves to Jesus Christ. I shall never forget that night as long as I live." One by one they came to the vestry until there were queues going down the aisles. Because of the numbers they opened the school-room and the people poured in. Those who had made a definite commitment to Christ were taken to one side, and those who were experiencing difficulties were taken to classrooms where experienced Christians helped them. Sixty to seventy young people came to Christ that night.'

Ordinary prayers, preachers, congregation – anointed by the Holy Spirit.

3. The last thing that defines what serving in the church is perhaps the most important one: ***'to have an impact on those around us'***

Look closely at your play-doh. Can you see your fingerprint? Your thumb or palm mark? - We leave a fingerprint just like in the play-doh – a legacy, an impact through the small things and the big things we make a difference to

those around us and through that people around us are drawn to what they need more than anything else = the love of the Father.

And the wonderful and amazing thing is that fingerprint that we leave now is not the fingerprint that we used to leave.

***2 Corinthians 5 v17 if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..... we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.'***

The fingerprint we leave is that of a new creation and it has within it the mark of God – we leave an eternal mark on the people we influence and impact with the love of the Father.

I've said it several times now but the reason I am here is because other people spent time when I was younger telling me about Jesus. When they could have been enjoying the sermon and being fed themselves they chose to feed me so now I can stand here and I know the Word of God and it has sustained me and I pray I can pass it on to sustain others.

When Lois walked in the other week and revealed Joseph's coat and we all clapped her and she took a bow – that has impact on her and it had an impact on us – she has a Father who loves her.

***John 17 v23 – v26*** = Jesus, at the end of his ministry on earth knowing that the end was near prays for all believers and what he prays for is the impact of the Father's love. The reason we serve is the same reason Jesus served – to show to everyone that Father God loves them and His prayer was simply this – that we would all know how much Father God loves us – that is the impact.

What excites you? What do you love to do?

What special gifts or resources or skills or possessions do you have that you could use to serve others?

Who has impacted you and who have you impacted? Who do you want to impact in the church?

