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## Learning to serve is as easy as... 12.27.9

When I learned to ride a bike...

- This was in Manchester, Ohio, a suburb of Akron – pre-farm
- It was a very unnatural act
- When my Mom and Dad tried to teach me, they would shout things like: Keep pedaling! Keep the front wheel straight! Don't stop! These were not helpful! Riding a bike was an unnatural act back then, and until you learn the FEEL of it, even the right information doesn't help.
- But eventually I started to get the hang of it, and I could ride...but I still had to think through the mechanics of it, and I started to realize the need to do all those things my parents would say. I'd think: Hold the wheel steady. Keep pedaling. Where are the brakes? Oh, right, here they are!
- And then finally I got the feel of it, and those mechanics of riding came to mind less and less and until finally they disappeared from conscious thought all together, and riding became second nature. We call it muscle memory, but of course the muscles don't store the information. Instead, part of our brain gets trained and riding a bike goes from being an unnatural act to being the most natural thing in the world – second nature.

Jesus teaches us that we should hope and pray and work for the goal that our every act of service would become like that. When you serve, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (from **Matthew 6**). And he talks about those people who say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you something to drink, needing clothes and clothe you?" (from **Matthew 25**). To those people, serving was second nature, it was like riding a bike. They served and then they forgot it because they served the next day and the next and they didn't give any thought to who would remember or what they got out of it.

Maybe it wasn't like that at first. Maybe at first, every time they saw a hungry person, they wanted to cross the street and pass by on the other side, but they heard the words of the Law in their ears telling them to have compassion, and so they walked up to the hungry person and made a fumbling effort at helping. Maybe they went down to the mission to serve because they knew that the Bible said they should do such things, but they weren't excited about it and when they got there, they never felt more out of place, and when it was over, they weren't sure if they actually helped more than they got in the way of those who knew what they were doing.

But eventually, as they did it more, it became more natural and then it became second nature, and pretty soon they forgot they were doing it at all. It became second nature. Their right hand lost track of what their left hand was doing and they had no recollection of seeing the Lord hungry or thirsty.

Awhile back, we decided that today the staff would try to do every essential Sunday morning act of service that we could do to keep the church running. Here's what we found out even before this day arrived.

- There isn't nearly enough of us to pull it off, especially when we disqualify our spouses from serving as we have done today. We can't do this service and Jr. Church at the same time. We can't teach every class that meets – 17 of them, I think – but that was okay because part of the plan was that two days after Christmas would be a good time to make Sunday a day of rest (novel idea!) at least as far as our church schedule is concerned. So we decided to not have Sunday School or Sunday night activities, as valuable as those are. But even at that, we started to see that there wasn't enough of us to provide security like Doyte Hay and the guys who are stationed at various places around the campus do every Sunday. In fact, we'd have to sprint around from place to place just to cover for the Moores at the front door and Doyte at the side door and the Mowers and McDonalds at the sanctuary doors (we replaced them with a table) and the women who work the Welcome Center and the ushers and the praise band and the people who work the sound, and Nicki, Anita, Mona and Mary who cover video for us every Sunday. I'm afraid to even mention the coffee and hot chocolate that the rotating couples prepare, because we're going to see after this service whether we have a clue there or not. Then I began to find out all the things Frank Hill does every week, and I realized it would be easier for me to go cut hair for him at his shop than cover all those things!
- We don't have the expertise to do all the things that need doing. Our finance ministry team doesn't let just any dofus count the money, which disqualifies me. And then there's the praise band. How many of you are blessed here because of the quality of their music? Now, John Pryor notwithstanding, would you be blessed as much if the rest of us took the stage every Sunday? The church here works only if every member uses his or her gifts.
- Most importantly, I came to realize that by taking your ministries today, we were taking something from you that is very important to you. This is true even if you were glad to get a break. Everybody needs a break, which was one of the most important reasons for doing things this way today. But everybody needs to serve too. God made us that way. I have a feeling that if we said: "Let's do it this way every week", we would start losing people pretty fast, and not just because of the poor quality of some of the work. People would start to say: "I need to serve. I need to go where I can serve". I just finished attending one of Kathy Young's classes on Equipped to Serve, and as the title indicates, it isn't a question of finding out IF God has equipped you to serve, but how.

Listen to what Jesus says about serving in **Matthew 6: 1** "**Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.**

**2**"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **3**But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4**so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

A couple of things to notice: First, the term “acts of righteousness” – these are the things Christians do naturally because they are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Acts of righteousness are the outward things we do to help us connect to God and learn to know him better as our Father and our Lord. They are things like prayer, giving, serving, praying, fasting. Second, it isn't IF you do your acts of righteousness, but when. Jesus assumes that people who say they want to live the Jesus way are going to do Jesus things, so the acts of righteousness themselves become a way to measure our own health against his expectations. That means that my mind can make a shift from “I didn't pray, and now I feel guilty” or “I didn't pray but because of grace it is no big deal” to “I didn't pray, and I missed out, I cheated myself, I didn't connect with the Love and Power of my life, the life that is truly life.”

Third, reward. If you do your acts of righteousness to be seen by men, you have received your reward in full. This does NOT mean that if anyone finds out the good you have done, you have lost your reward, although I find benefit in doing good things and not telling anyone. Very often when you serve someone, they will know you did it, others may see it too, and that doesn't kill it. What Jesus says is that when you serve to be seen by people, and people see you, mission accomplished! You got what you were after. Did you expect God to reward you too? But you weren't doing it for him, were you?

What Jesus is saying is “Serve God by helping others, and let him take care of the rewards.”

Now the reward God gives is relationship, fellowship with him. We tend to think in terms of a new house. Why would the creator and owner of all the universe give you something that you have to insure against moth and rust and fire and that you'd have to lock against thieves who wanted to break in and steal? God will give you himself.

Now think about serving like this: Some very crucial things happen inside the church building, and some of us need to devote ourselves to service here. And some very crucial things need to happen outside the church building and even outside the church programs, and some of us need to devote ourselves to service out there.

The church is partly a training school. Our mission is Helping People Become Fully Devoted and Equipped Followers of Jesus Christ, and one thing we do here is train people to live the Jesus life everywhere and every day, and if you can help with that, we need you.

But the church is also a mission outpost from another world, a colony of the Kingdom of God, and the idea behind growing fully-equipped followers of Jesus Christ is so we can use what we've trained for and go out and live like Jesus in the schools and factories and research centers and hospitals and banks and nursing homes and neighborhoods and actually show people a different kind of life, and serve them in a way that they cannot explain apart from Jesus.

That's why I'm delighted to hear that one of our members, for example, is among the group working to start The Blessing House (which we heard about a few Sunday nights ago), and that people from our church volunteer to work with Knox Area Rescue Ministries apart from anything the church has planned. That's why it pleases me to hear someone come back from some surgery or loss and hear them say, “The brothers and sisters here really reached out to me”.

And it's why it grieves me to hear them say, "No one really bothered". Because I know that we're better than that, and I know that the road to hell doesn't need any more of the pavement of our good intentions.

Rate yourself on that one for a minute. Think about who you haven't been there for, maybe someone who used to be here. Then don't waste time feeling awful; go do something about it today.

Here's the key about service (need a kid volunteer for this): This kid is a good kid and sometimes a lot of fun to be around. But he can be messy and uncouth, and if you want to relate to him, you have to get dirty.

And we have this God who says, "Do you want to find me? You find me by getting down in the dirt with my young ones, and by mixing up with the mess of my old ones. You find me by forgetting your squeamishness and going to the nursing homes and the jails and the projects, and even though you'll find a lot going on in those places and in those lives that I abhor, you'll find people I'm crazy about who need me and who can see me through you." If you want to find God, this is where he is.

If you've been seeking God through your intellect alone, maybe you need to look for him among the poor and the young and the old. One of my great passions is that Christians learn to think and serve the Lord with all their MIND and not say and do and believe things that make no sense, and it would be hard for me to be a Christian if I couldn't have a reasonable faith. But if you're waiting for the evidence to add up to 100% and for the science to be in, know that God hasn't chosen to meet us in the science or the math that indeed testify to his glory in the same way that he meets us in the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, the cursed-upon, and the prisoner, and if you want to meet him, close your books for a while and get your hands dirty.

**<sup>25</sup>Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28**

That's the One we follow.