

Fingerprint - Outreach

October 27, 2013

I want to begin with a question. This past week, did you serve your community? I am not talking about serving at church. Did you take time to give back to the community? Did you coach a youth sport, volunteer at the school, visit someone in the nursing home you are not related to. This week, did you have a chance to serve your community?

My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at Faith Church. It is good to have you with us for worship. I want to say a special, “Hello” to everyone at the new Spencer campus and pastor Jordan. This morning, the Spencer campus is meeting for the first time at the Seasons Center in Spencer. It is great to have you connected by video.

We are in a series called, “Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique?” In this series, we are studying the core values of Faith Church. These are values we want to reinforce on the Spirit Lake campus and replicate in the new Spencer campus. Each of our core values are built off a key word. We already looked at the core values of *Bible*, *Community* and the *Gospel*. This morning, we look at our fourth core value. It is built off the key word, *outreach*. Outreach is an important part of Faith Church. There is a particular way we structure outreach in our community.

Outreach — We believe in reaching our community by serving our community.

This is not the way churches typically try to reach their community. When I was young, outreach involved Gospel tracts. Does anybody remember those

days? Thinking we were great evangelists, we left them in public rest rooms and at restaurants with our tip for the waitress. In the 80's and 90's, outreach moved into the video age. I remember the church I grew up in blanketing



the community with Jesus videos. Does anybody remember the Jesus video? The next wave of outreach was called the attractional church. That means you hosted a big event at the church with a famous speaker to make the church attractive to the community. The hope was that once people came, they would stick.

None of those ways of reaching a community are wrong. There are many good things we can learn from them. I don't believe they are as affective in our culture as they used to be.

Today, pushing information through gospel tracts or video, apart from a relationship, is usually a turn-off. If you live in the same world I live in, I get more information every day than I know what to do with through the Internet. I quickly delete anything that looks strange.

How do we share the good news of the Gospel in our information saturated world city so it doesn't get mentally marked as spam and sent to the intellectual junk mail folder? How do we share the Gospel in a way that people know what God has done for us through Christ is a different kind of information? It is something that can change their life.

The answer is we don't just share words; we share our life. We sacrifice our time and money to build a relationship with people in our community. We find and meet the needs of people in our community and serve our community.

We often look at the Christian faith as something we know in our head versus something we live with our lives. The Bible tells us that it is as we live our faith serving others that hard hearts are softened to hear the gospel like a gentle rain softens hard soil.

This week, as I studied, I was struck by how important serving is to the Christian life and the history of the church. Let me give you the outline of what we will cover.

First, we will look at what the Bible says about Christians serving the community. Second, we will look at a brief history of how Christians reached their community through service. Third, we will look at how Faith Church is reaching our community.

Serving the community is part of the Christian life.

God saved us from religious works to serve others.

When people come to Christ at Faith Church, they occasionally ask me what they must do to live as a Christian. In their mind, they have trusted in Christ by faith, but they are looking for a list of things they must do to follow their new religion.

I understand where they are coming from. The Muslims have five pillars they must do to live as a Muslim. These include praying towards Mecca five

times a day. The Mormons have a mandatory two year mission trip for their sons that involves door to door ministry in a new community.

When you turn to the Old Testament, you find long lists of rules and regulations the Jews were to keep. They had mandatory holidays, multiple offerings for sin and extensive lists of commandments. The average Jew had a hard time keeping everything straight. About the only thing that sounds more complicated is the new 11,000 page Obama health care plan.

When we think of religion, we think of lists of lists we must do to get in good with God. The gospel is different.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

God saved us completely and totally by his grace through Jesus Christ. We don't have long lists of Old Testament rules and regulations we need to obey. God saved us completely from our sin all through Jesus. All God wants us to do is enjoy the gift he gave us in Christ.

Think of this like a father giving his daughter the gift of a beautiful doll house on Christmas morning. Dad saved and sacrificed to buy this doll house. On Christmas morning, the huge doll house is wrapped in paper on the living room floor almost dwarfing the tree. What does he want his daughter to do with the gift on Christmas morning? Ask for a list of things she needs to do to buy it? No! Ask for a list of things she need to do to keep it? Of course not! He simply wants her to enjoy it. The more she enjoys



the gift, the happier it makes her father. It is the same with us. The gift our father gave us was his own son. He died for all our sins. We don't have a list of things we need to do to earn it or to keep it. He simply asks us to enjoy it. We don't come to worship on the weekend as part of a checklist to keep ourselves in good standing with God but to enjoy Christ and celebrate what God has done for us through him.

There is more to the story. There is something God wants us to do with all the free time we have now that we are free of religious duties to save ourselves. Pour our energy into serving others. We are set free to serve others.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

Here is the same freedom. We are free from the law. That freedom isn't so we can spend our time serving ourselves but to spend our freedom in service to others. We find the same pattern in the book of Titus.

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 3:8 (ESV)

We read these verses and think they are only apply to church life. They are not just referring to church life. They are referring to community life. We are free from lists of religious works so we can devote ourselves to good works. That is not just good works in the church. It is good works in the community where we live.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

The picture of the church is not a group of people who gather on Sunday to try and pacify God and stay in his good graces. We gather on Sunday to enjoy God and thank him for what he gave us in Jesus. Out of that joy spills service to others in the church and the community. That is when people start to take notice of the Gospel. It is different message. Christians serve others and love others.

This is where it gets interesting. The church shouldn't just be about Bible teaching and worship. *The church should help Christians use their freedom in Christ serve the church family and the community.* The church must help us do good works in the community.

A church that preaches the gospel and serves the community, is a church that changes the community. Church historians estimate the early church grew by 40 percent every ten years.¹ What made that kind of growth possible? It came from Christians serving their community.

One great example I found came from the early church in A.D. 165 and 251. Two great plagues swept the Roman Empire killing a third of the population each time. While the worshippers of the roman gods cast their sick into the gutters, many of them while they were still living, Christians cared for their own sick and many of the sick in their communities.² Christians were so visible in the natural and social disasters of the roman empire that the roman emperor Julian said of them,

¹ Rodney Stark, as quoted in Shaunti Feldham, *Y2K: The Millennium Bug* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1998), 14.

² Rodney Stark, "Live Longer, Healthier, and Better," *Christian History* (online), no. 57, www2.Christianity.net.

“For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Christians support both their own poor and ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.” Julian, Roman Emperor.

the roman emperor complained the Christians were making him look because because they wee doing a better job of helping the poor than he was. In that kind of atmosphere, is it any wonder the church grew?

A life of good works on the outside is the evidence of living faith on the inside.

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18 (ESV)

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. James 2:26 (ESV)

James writes to people in the church who don’t see serving one another as an important part of the Christian life. As a church, we recently studied the book of James. We learned the financially comfortable and the poor went to the same church. Everyone enjoyed celebrating what God did for them in Christ but the poor left church hungry while the rich left church needing to lose a few pounds. The freedom of the gospel was not translating into the freedom to serve one another.

James says evidence of true faith is your faith is accompanied by works. There is a faith that doesn’t have works. That isn’t saving faith. It is a fake faith. True faith is a faith that means we sacrifice ourself to meet the needs of others.

One way God is working on me in this area is joyfully letting my schedule get ruined. If you know me, you know I love to structure my day so I get maximum productivity. God keeps reminding me that my schedule is not so

important that it can't be changed to help others. When I am busy studying my faith, don't get so focused on it that I forget to live my faith and help others with their needs. Maybe others of you have the same struggles.

As Galatians 6:10 says, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith. I am freed from religious works to serve others. A faith that doesn't serve others is fake faith. Christian faith and good works are that tightly connected.

God rewards our serving.

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17–19 (ESV)

If God has blessed you with financial comfort, don't be proud of your money. Don't find your identity in your money. It is good to enjoy what God gives you and give God the credit for every good gift. Don't neglect to be generous and willing to share. When we are rich in good works, amazing things happen.

When we give to the needs of others, that money is not lost. It is invested with a great rate of return. The Bible says it is deposited in heaven and given to us in the form of eternal reward from God in eternity. This is amazing. When we give away our money and our time serving the needs of others, we don't lose what we give. We invest what we give because we get it back with interest in heaven.

God doesn't just bless us in eternity, many times, he chooses to bless us here and now when we give so we can continue to be generous and give.

...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.... He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 2 Corinthians 9:10–11 (ESV)

First, we free from needing to jump through hoops to be saved because we are saved completely by the grace of God so we are free to serve in the church and community. Second, true faith and serving others are so tightly connected at the hip that if you have true faith, you can't help but serve others in the church and community. Third, when we serve, none of the money and time we give in service to others is lost. It is invested. It is all given back to us in the form of eternal reward by God in heaven. This is a win-win situation. Serving others is a win no matter which way you look at it

Serving the community changed history.

We live in a culture where there is a hard distinction between church on Sunday and the way we live the rest of the week. It wasn't always this way. Christians serving their community changed history.

Compassion for the poor began as Christians serving their community.

St. Laurence was a Christian that lived in the third century. He was arrested and brought before the Roman emperor who ordered him to hand over the treasures of the church. Instead of gold and silver, he brought the poor, the homeless and the blind saying these are the treasures of the church. For that, he was roasted alive on a gridiron.

While poverty has always been a part of life on earth, the church has done more — and often still does more — than any other institution in history to alleviate it. Prior to Christ's coming and the church meeting the needs of the poor in the community, the ancient world was like the Russian tundra — cold and inhospitable.³ One scholar concluded that after an exhaustive search of ancient documents that antiquity left no trace of any organized charitable effort. When Christ and the church broke onto the world scene, for the first time in history, benevolence flourished.⁴

In the ancient world, after a child was born, it was only accepted as part of the family if the father chose to lift the child up as his own and recognize it as part of the family. It was common practice for newborn children either on account of deformity, gender or inconvenience to be rejected by their family. After birth, they were placed in the woods to die of exposure or be eaten by animals. Christians were known for finding these children, saving them and adopting them as their own.⁵ the way you recognized the Christian families in town is because they had lots of kids and they all had different hair color.

In the ancient world, there were corn doles the Roman emperors used to feed the population in times of famine. The corn was only given to those who were well-off or those who served in the army. Constantine, the first Christian emperor, was the first emperor to widen the scope of government charity beyond those who had money food to those who needed food.

³ Kennedy and Newcombe, *What is Jesus had never been born?*, Thomas Nelson, 1994, p. 29.

⁴ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, p. 667.

⁵ Kennedy and Newcombe, p. 10-11.

Accelerate to today and we find many famous charities came from Christians living out their faith and serving their community. For example, the Salvation Army began in 1887 by William Booth who decided to practice his faith and do something about the homeless men sleeping outdoors in England.

A Religion and Public Interest report published in 1990 showed that today churches and synagogues contribute to America's social services more than any other non-governmental institution, including corporations.⁶

Education for all began as Christians serving their community.

The development of alphabets and the codifying of many languages around the world took place primarily by missionaries trying to translate the Bible into a language people could understand. The invention of the printing press took place when Gutenberg found a way to convert an old wine press to press letters on a page. He did this so he could print the Bible.

If you are in school, you need to know that public education in America began as Christians serving their community by meeting the need of illiteracy.

When the Pilgrims and the Puritans came to America, education was a high priority. In 1642 they passed an act that offered education to everyone. In 1647 they passed another act called the "Old Deluder Satan Act," establishing public schools for everyone. The Old Deluder Satan Act referred to the way Satan works. That is, he gets a foothold in people's lives because of their ignorance of the Bible. This act offered education in America to all children so they could learn to read God's Word. For 217 years, from 1620 until 1837,

⁶ *The Washington Times*, March 30, 1990.

virtually all education in America was privately run and Christian. Christians served the community by educating their community on how to read and write. Was private Christian education successful? John Quincy Adams said in the early 1800's that only four out of a thousand Americans were illiterate. Illiteracy was at 4/10th of 1 percent in the 1800's because of Christians serving their community through education.

It wasn't just elementary education that Christians provided for the community, it was also higher education. Almost every one of the first 123 colleges and universities in American were Christian in origin. American public education began as an effort by Christians to serve their community by helping everyone know how to read and write so they could read the Bible.

Hospitals began as Christians serving their community.

Most hospitals in America began as Christians serving their community. The names of many hospitals still reflect their Christian origin. Baptist hospital, St. Luke's hospital, just to name a few.

Christians serving their community by taking care of the sick is not a recent novelty. In 325 A.D., at the Council of Nicea, in addition to recognizing the Trinity as taught in Scripture, the council declared that a hospital was to be established wherever a church was begun because the Christian faith and caring for the sick were woven so tightly together.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a Christian named Henry Durant, a wealthy Swiss banker, started the Red Cross to care for those in need. He also helped

establish the first YMCA in the 1850's in Geneva as a way of serving his community.

The Christian church has a long history of serving their community and it was through meeting the needs of the community that hard hearts were softened and the gospel was heard, like a gentle rain falling on hard soil making it receptive to the good news of God.

It is only in recent years that the government has taken over care for the poor in the community and the government has taken over education in the community. Most recently, the government has taken over health care. Many of the practical ways Christians have historically served the communities have gone away. When Christians don't serve the community, nobody in the community knows the gospel is a different message that changes your life.

As a church, reaching back into our community involves creatively building bridges back by finding and serving new needs right around us. It is when the world sees Christians living their faith they will want to hear about our faith.

This is why serving our community is such an important part of outreach at Faith Church. It is the way God softened hearts in the past to hear the gospel message, it is the way he still works today.

How does Faith Church serve our community?

1. **Serving Sunday** — These are Sundays we take off of church to clean the school, clean the bike trails and show acts of kindness to others in our community.

2. **Backpack program** — We are working with other churches to give away backpacks of food to kids in our community who go home to empty refrigerators on the weekend. I encourage you to get involved. Moms, there are shopping lists at the Connection Desk and in your bulletin. Buy a few items when the grocery store and drop it off Sundays at the Connection desk. We will make sure it gets home to hungry kids.
3. **Fall Clean Up** — On November 16, we encourage everyone to help their neighbor by offering to clean up their leaves and prep their yard for winter. When they ask you why, the answer is that God freed us from religion so we can serve.
4. **Love Spencer** — Our Spencer campus will be involved in the Love Spencer program this spring giving back to the community.

How do I make serving a part of my Christian life?

If you are like me, while you agree with everything we talked about this morning, the hard part is making it a regular part of your life. I have two challenges for us.

1. **Find one place to serve in the church and one place to serve in the community.** Each of us should be serving in two spheres, the church and the community. Some of us need to begin by serving at the church. If that is you, we have plenty of openings starting with simple things like being an usher, greeting or helping at the coffee bar. The other challenge is that each of us need to find someplace in the community where we can give back. It might be helping coach a kids sports team. It might be offering to be a greeter at

the hospital, volunteering at the Garage Sale, offering to cook at the Discovery House on Monday nights, volunteering to patrol the trails. Find one way to serve the community in the name of Christ and do it.

2. **This Christmas, give away as much money outside of your family as you do inside of your family.** I know we are a little early for Christmas, but I wanted to share this challenge before we hit the Christmas season. At Christmas, we typically spend excessive amounts of money on stuff we don't need with money we don't have. This year, let's be an externally focused church. Set a Christmas budget, then give away half just as much money to needs outside your family as you spend for gifts inside your family.

Where should your money go? There are a number of good ministries we support in town like Cherish House and Discovery House. We have missionaries we can send Christmas gifts and our unreached people group where we are planting a church in India. Another option is the Spencer campus. As many of you know, the Spencer campus began today in the Seasons Center. Our hope is to provide the funds necessary to buy approximately \$80,000 in equipment to have all the equipment needed to open the campus publicly in the old Spencer Middle School Auditorium this winter or spring. The Sit n' Sip ladies of the church are taking the equipment lists and breaking it down into smaller pieces so this Christmas, as a family, you can give money to fund parts of the campus. One family might buy the video projector, another the lights, another one a speaker for the audio system, while another can give parts of the children's area. My family is looking forward to the specific parts we can play in getting that campus off the

ground. As people come to Christ and families are healed and lives are changed by Jesus, we will have the joy of knowing we had a part to play God changing their lives.

Conclusion

I began by asking a question. Last week, did you have a chance to serve the community? As Christians, we serve our community because we are freed from religious rules to serve others, true faith is always a faith that serves others, we are even rewarded by God for serving others. Serving our community, is the way we reach our community by softening hard hearts to the gospel. Last week, we many of us neglected to serve our community, but this week, and the weeks that follow, can be different. As we serve our community, people will be softened to hear about Jesus.



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