



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### 40 DAYS OF COMMUNITY, Week #5. . .

#### SERVING TOGETHER

~ Scripture: Philippians 2:1-2 [NLT] ~

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#### INTRODUCTION

Over the past 4 weeks, we've looked at how God says, "*I created you for a purpose, but you are not meant to fulfill that purpose by yourself.*" You & I need other people in our lives to do it.

And so, we've looked at how we belong together, fellowship together, grow together. Today I want us to look at *servng together*.

God did not put you on earth to live a self-centered life. He put you on earth to make a difference. All of us have *received* abundantly and beyond measure (e.g.: material & relational blessings, answers to prayer, gift of salvation). I believe it is in God's plan that we *give back*.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Step in Alcoholics Anonymous says: "*Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps. . .we carry this message to alcoholics, and practice these principles in all our affairs.*"

We receive! We give back! Whenever you use your talents, abilities, background, experience, time, and energy to help somebody else and you do it in Jesus' name, the Bible has a word for that: It's called *MINISTRY*.

And contrary to popular belief, everybody is a minister. That's one of the foundation stones of Methodism! Not everybody is an ordained pastor or a commissioned missionary, but everybody is called to serve using the abilities we've got. And, here's the bigger idea this morning: All of us are called to *serve in community, in relationship to others*. Let's look at our Scripture, from Philippians 2:1-2. . .

*Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.*

God is saying here: "I want to use you in ways you never dreamed of, but I want to do it in relationship to other people. I want you to be on a team—serving with others."

You probably have memories of being on a TEAM of some sort. Maybe it was a sports team, debate team, choir, cheerleading squad, some club at school, a special unit in the Army or Navy—a team you really enjoyed working on—to complete some project, accomplish some goal. Remember how it made you feel (e.g.: fully alive, useful). When you're on a team doing something together serving together, you get closer, you get more done, you have more fun. That's what made last Sunday so successful—in spite of the lousy weather.

We're on all sorts of teams when you think about it. There's the family, the office, a recreational sport, your small group. The church is structured for ministry to be done not by "lone rangers", but by "teams". So we're going to talk today about what it takes to build a team. You can apply this in so many ways. If you want to transform your office or where you work so that there is a real team spirit, you do four things. If you want your small group to be more effective and you want to feel drawn closer, you do these four things. Moms & Dads, if you want to be an effective parent, you need these four things. They're in an acrostic, and you can follow the pattern in the message notes.

## I. IT TAKES TRUST

Trust is the emotional glue that binds people together. You don't have a team or teamwork unless you've got trust.

One of the guys on Paul's team was a young man named TIMOTHY. Paul says to Timothy in I Timothy 6:20 – *“Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.”*

Paul had evidently placed some responsibility in Timothy's hands, and he wanted him to carry it out. If you want to build a team, you've got to trust people with some RESPONSIBILITY. You can't do it all yourself. The quarterback can't do it all himself (e.g.: passing, tackling, running). The quarterback rarely scores; most of the time he is handing off the ball to somebody else.

Now, look at your small groups. What do you need to hand off or pass around. If you're part of a ministry team, who do you need to find to take on some of the responsibility. *There is so much hidden talent in this church. If the lid came off, we'd win the world hands down!* So, if you're part of a ministry team, that makes you a "talent scout". Part of your job is to help discover those hidden talents. . .empower those with talents. . .release them into ministry.

Parents, that's how you do it in your families. As your kids grow up, they are capable of taking on more & more responsibility. You know their gifts better than anyone, and part of your job is to make sure they have every opportunity possible to develop those talents.

But now, let's turn the coin around for a minute. Instead of focusing on trusting other people, how can you be found to be trustworthy? If you want people to trust you / to have confidence in you, you must do a couple things. . . . .

### A. BE CONSISTENT

People don't like people who are always jumping around to this, then that; they're just too unpre-dictable. They want people who are consistent, dependable, and can be counted on.

In one of His parables, Jesus has one of his characters say – *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.”* [Luke 16:10] We all want to do the “big thing” in life. Jesus is saying that it is in the little things in life (not the big ones) that you prove your character.

I know this can be a challenge for some of you spending all your time raising children. At times it seems thankless, pointless, insignificant (almost like you're wasting time). But it's in the little day-to-day routines that the real work is being done. You may think, I can't wait till those kids grow up so I can get on to something that's really important. Let me tell you, you're there now! And believe me, I can tell you from experience, it won't last long!

So be consistent in the little things, the little inconveniences of life. Hidden down in the ground where no one can see—that's where the seed grows. That's where character is developing. That's where you're making an impact. That's where your most significant contribution is being made.

### B. BE CLOSE

Proverbs 17:17 says: *“Friends love through all kinds of weather and families stick together in all kinds of trouble.”* ‘Stick together’ implies proximity, closeness. You don't trust people you don't know.

If you're going to be a trustworthy person, you've got to stay close to people. You've got to spend time together. Trust takes time. Trust can be lost in a moment; but it takes time (lots of it) to build between people. You've got to be together in all kinds of situations for it to grow.

Here's what that means for us today: Many of you joined a small group 4 weeks ago when we started the *40 Days of Community*. For some, it's your first experience. I hope it has been a good one. I know it has been in ours. You're just starting to know each other and feel comfortable around each other. Maybe you've even begun praying together and find yourself praying for one another during the week. I want to urge you—no, beg you—not to disband your groups in 3 weeks. Keep it going. You're just learning to trust each other. If you stop now, you may cut short what God wants to do in your life and in our life together. I urge you to keep it going—to give trust the time it takes to produce deeper fellowship and deeper intimacy. You won't be disappointed.

## II. THE SECOND KEY TO BUILDING A TEAM IS EMPATHY

Empathy is the "E" in TEAM. 1 Peter 3:8 says: *"Live in harmony with one another. Be sympathetic."* Similar word, *sympathy*. You can't have the first part of that verse (harmony) until you have the second part (empathy). You're never going to have harmony with your friends, your wife, your husband, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, the people you work with, the people you go to school with—till you've got empathy.

Empathy meets two very fundamental needs in our lives:

1. The need to be understood. How good it feels to have someone say, "I understand; I get where you're coming from." Yesterday, the 8<sup>th</sup> political caller in 2 hours caught a little of my irritation. He replied, "I'll bet you're really tired of all these calls". That literally broke it up inside me, and I felt myself becoming willing to take his poll.
2. The need to have our feelings validated. Don't we at times just need someone to say, "You're not weird. You're OK. I've been there. I've had that. You're not going crazy." How good it is to have someone who validates (legitimizes) your frustrations, feelings, fears, fatigue, failures. That's empathy.

How do you become a more empathetic person? Try this. . . . .

### A. SLOW DOWN

We all need to slow down a little. Speed destroys empathy; it causes us to miss too much in each other. Life is happening so fast. Why, it was only a minute ago we were in this sanctuary last week. The weeks come and go so fast.

Back in August, I went with a group of 6 guys on a backpacking trip up to Isle Royale. There was a bit of "friendly back-n-forth" between two of us who wanted to go faster and get those heavy packs off our backs AND Frank & Darcel who wanted to go a little slower (in order to see more).

They were right! The faster we move, the more details we miss. We're caught in a culture that's moving fast. We don't see the details in the lives of those we care about the most (e.g.: our friends, kids, spouse). You have to slow down and stop skimming relationally.

There's a bit of good advice in James 1:19 – *"Be quick to listen and slow to speak."* But we don't do this, do we? We're not very good listeners. ILLUSTRATION> You've got small group on a given week night. . .you rush home. . .grab a couple things. . .you're on the cell phone. . .shoving down a Macho Combo Burrito from Taco Bell. . .rush in the front door and go, "How's everybody?". . ."Yeah- -good- -cool" as you sit down. You're not really listening.

So, we've got to slow down, or we'll miss the signals of people who really need a listening, empathetic ear. The other things we need to do to become more empathetic is. . .

## B. ASK QUESTIONS

Proverbs 5:20 says: *“A person’s thoughts are like water in a deep well, but someone with insight can draw them out.”* Most people won’t come out with it without a little prompting, without knowing it’s safe and you really want to hear what they have to say. Moms & Dads with teen-agers, am I right? You have to be wise and skillful to draw out your kids. When they are 4, you can’t stop them from talking. When they are 16, you can hardly drag a word out of them.

So, how do you do this? How do you draw a person out? You do it by asking the question twice. Examples:

- “How are you doing?” “I’m fine.” *“No really, how are you doing?”* Then wait.
- “What’s going on in your life?” “Well, things are busy.” *“Tell me more.”*

That’s a great line to remember: *“Tell me more.”* You can use it often.

Then be willing to linger. Be willing to handle the silence. Stay in the present. Stay right there.

[What you’re getting here this morning is a little training in STEPHEN MINISTRY.]

## III. BUILDING A TEAM TAKES ACCOMODATION

When you travel, you like to have “accommodations” == a room, place to stay, personal space. We all like to have that, don’t we? We want people to give us space. . .room to grow, room to try out an idea or something, room to be ourselves (even if we blow it).

Teamwork takes *accommodation*—because we’re all different, we’re all unique. God made us that way because He’s a God of infinite variety. And so:

[A. We need to accommodate each other’s NEEDS.]

[B. We need to accommodate each other’s IDEAS.]

C. We need to accommodate each other’s PERSONALITIES.

The Bible says in I Peter 4:10 – *“Each of you has been blessed with one of God’s many wonder-ful gifts to be used in the service of others.”*

Notice first that it’s “each of you”. Nobody is excluded. *Are we using the gifts God has given us in His service, in the service of others?* The church is the one choir you’ll never have to try out to get into. You’re “in” by virtue of just being here. The question is, do you sing Soprano, Alto, Tenor, or Base?

We have different gifts, skills, strengths, abilities, ways of thinking & approaching problems. . . different personalities.

This is true in our families as well. Isn’t it amazing how kids who grow up with the same parents in the same house can be SO different from each other. [I have 4 kids...] There is no cookie cutter formula for raising kids. A wise parent raises each child according to their personality and nature.

Why has God made us different? *Because He wants to use our differences to make a difference!*

He wants to work through our differences in order to make a difference in this world that we could never make on our own.

D. We need to accommodate each other’s FAULTS.

None of us is perfect. We all have faults, blind spots, quirks. That’s why Paul says in Ephesians 4:2 – *“Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.”*

You get into a new group and at first you think, “Wow, this is great. Everybody here is neat.” It doesn’t take long and you’re going, “These people have faults—some of them San Andreas-type faults.”

What then? Well, basically, you've got three choices:

1. You can fake it (i.e.: pretend it doesn't matter and put on a smile).
2. You can run the other way (i.e.: quit, and go look for a perfect group).
3. You can accept it (i.e.: you know what, no one's perfect around here and that's alright).

Do you know the relief in that? How much less stress when we just acknowledge that none of us is perfect. . .all of us have faults. . .and we want to stay together anyhow.

Here's the incredible thing about accommodation: It sounds like a word that would weaken us, but in the end it doesn't. It makes us stronger because now it's not just me, it's us. Now it's us functioning as a team to make it work.

#### IV. THE FOURTH THING THAT MAKES A TEAM A TEAM IS MISSION

Teams are never formed just to exist for themselves. They have to have a purpose. They have to have a cause. They have to have a mission. They are going after something together. That's what makes a team a team. It's not just a get-together to pass the time of day. It's for a purpose.

What we do in our homes, our work, in our small groups and ministry teams here at DUMC needs to be purpose-driven.

Philippians 2:2 (our text) says: *“Be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”*

During these *40 Days of Community*, we are looking and studying about how to carry out the purpose God put us here for—and how to do it together. How to *reach out* together. How to *fellowship* together. How to *grow* together. Next week, it'll be how to *worship* together. This week, it's how to *serve* together.

Philippians 1:27 says: *“Live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ. . .standing strong with one purpose, working together—that's serving together—as one for the faith of the Good News.”*

#### CONCLUSION

I believe every strong Christian needs three things. . .

1. You need to be in a growth group of some sort (i.e.: you can't do this alone);
2. You need to be on the receiving end (i.e.: being nurtured, soaking up, taking in);
3. You need to be on the giving end (i.e.: serving in a ministry).

It's this last one you have a chance to explore today in our MINISTRY FAIR.

Speaking of serving alongside others in a ministry, I want to give you an example. . .

Last week, Matt mentioned that it takes quite a number of people to put together a Sunday morning experience, including all of our youth & children's programming. I got to thinking about that this week and made a list. Here's what I came up with:

#### WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO PUT TOGETHER A SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE?\*

2 Pastors

4 Audio-Visual Technicians

2 Musicians

A 20-member Choir

A 6-member Praise Team

2 to lead in Congregational Prayer

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\* PPT: List will come up one line at a time.

8 Ushers  
4 Door Greeters  
2 Welcome Center Greeters  
28 Sunday School Teachers / Helpers  
8 Youth Sunday School Teachers  
2 Youth Choir Directors  
3 Junior Church Personnel  
4 Nursery Workers  
Narthex Team  
Chancel Team  
Worship Planning Team  
Secretary + Office Help

That's over 100 people (with very few overlaps)—not to mention all those who put together today's special events (i.e.: Ministry Fair & Race Fest).

As you can see, there are many people working behind-the-scenes. And that's just the WORSHIP and EDUCATION functions of our church. There are many other ministries we're involved with (e.g.: DISCIPLING YOUTH & ADULTS / CARING / MISSION & SOCIAL ACTION).

We're better at it together than we are alone. That's why we have "cells" and "ministry teams". They're like special teams on a football squad. No one is "out there" alone. That would be lonely—like riding alone in the Make-a-Wish century bicycle tour.

So we've organized a MINISTRY FAIR today. [It has been my prayer as this has come together that more and more of you would be attracted into ministry. If God speaks to your heart today, will you respond?](#)