

FAMILY MATTERS 7 **“SERVING TOGETHER”**

We believe in family here at First UMC. All kinds of families; extended families, nuclear families, childless families, single parent families, single member families, parents with kids families, and of course spiritual families. Over the course of this year we are going to be focusing our ministries on family...because Family Matters.

Today's message will end the first of many preaching series dealing with Family Matters. Over the past 6 weeks we've discussed a variety of subjects related to growing and becoming healthy families. Today I have one more subject: Healthy families SERVE together. I re-discovered a familiar scripture this week from The Message. I think it fits with our discussion about family. I know it is written to describe the behavior of a “church family”, but I think it speaks loudly to what makes a “natural family” work, see if you don't agree:

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Phil. 2:1-4 (The Message)

This message from the Apostle Paul reminds us that one characteristic of a healthy Church or Spiritual family is serving one another. Why is this the case? Today I'll offer 3 answers to this question.

1. SERVING GOD BY SERVING OTHERS IS AN ANSWER FOR SELFISHNESS

*“You know that Stephanas and his household were the first of the harvest of believers in Greece, and they are spending their lives in **service** to God's people. I urge you, dear brothers and sisters, to submit to them and others like them who **serve** with such devotion... They have been a wonderful encouragement to me, as they have been to you. You must show your appreciation to all who **serve** so well.” I Cor. 16:15-18*

In discussing the role of children last week I mentioned that “Mine” is a word that none of us had to teach our children...or be taught by our parents!

Born within the heart of all human beings is this internal value of selfishness. It was at the core (pardon the pun) of what got Adam and Eve into trouble with the apple! Their selfishness made them think that they could and should be their own gods; replacing their perfect existence with one of clothes, guilt, shame and labor. I have another answer for this inbred human selfishness: Serving.

Would to God that each family might discover the joy of learning to serve one another, and in an even more altruistic sense...serving other people. One of the ways to combat the apparent selfishness in human beings...especially young ones...is to help them learn to serve one another.

It is not just a matter of getting the chores done around the house; (as important as that is), it is a matter of addressing that inborn selfishness. Children take to it quite easily when young and given the chance. It begins initially within the family unit; teaching that what one does to better the whole; benefits the whole and ought to be considered an act of service. It grows outward from their; into the natural realms that each family member occupies. For example: doing (and teaching your children to do) nice things for their teachers, or SS leaders, or classmates, or teammates, is a great way to start. Then let it grow to helping out at church in various capacities. But don't ever let it stop there; taking your service to your community; especially to those who are poor, or need special assistance. It's all part of serving to deal with our internal, natural selfishness. Number 2:

2. SERVING GOD BY SERVING OTHERS IS AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.” Deut. 10:12

Maybe we don't often enough remind ourselves that God requires...did you notice that? God requires of us that we fear God, live to please God, Love God and Serve God with all our hearts and souls.

In other words...if we are not serving God by selflessly serving other people... then we are living in direct disobedience, and outside the realm of God's will and God's blessing! Strong statement...but time it be said.

We have way too many "Christians" who are so in name only. Their lives no more reflect their namesake than if they called themselves 'fish' while walking upright on this earth! Jesus came to serve, and expects us to do the same...and if we are not serving...then we are being disobedient! It strikes me as one of the greatest moral contradictions that sincere "Christian" people can claim to follow Jesus, attend churches that bear his name...and not be engaged in the things that he was passionate about!

Maybe serving as a way to model obedience is an improper motivation...but I doubt the needy recipient really cares! I don't think God does either. If we want to have a healthy family, then we need to be obedient to God's calling, expectation, and REQUIREMENTS for us...we need to be serving one another, and thus be serving God.

3. SERVING GOD BY SERVING OTHERS IS AN ANTIDOTE FOR MATERIALISM

*"For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to **serve** one another in love." Gal. 5:13*

I'm not sure we've covered this adequately, so will attempt it again. Families today exist in a vortex of rampant materialism, and unbridled consumerism, where we are pressured from every side to buy, buy, buy. Though we pridefully claim our great upper Midwestern values keep us immune from much of this... I think that's bunk!

It makes me wonder to watch families place \$5 mittens on the Christmas mitten tree, then buy \$150 iPods for their pre-teen children, all the while thinking they are serving the poor!

I know my buying habits are not above reproach, I'm as guilty as the next guy and the rest of us; but we need to find some antidote for this crass commercialism and maddening materialism...and I think I've found it! Actually it was unveiled a couple thousand years ago...*use your freedom to serve one another.*

Maybe we need to be reminded of some other words from God's good book about this important subject:

*Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with **money**, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life. I Tim. 6:17*

My friends, making you feel guilty is not part of my agenda today. If God is, then deal with God, but I want to motivate all of us to become better servants, to give more of our resources to God, to model good selfless servant hood for our children and grandchildren. I have 4 suggestions how to do that within the family system. Here they are, they are in somewhat of a chronological order:

Create an Ethic of Service

Creating an "attitude of service" or a "value" of service or an "ethic" of service is far more than simply getting the work done. In a healthy family, members have the sense that as I do something for the benefit of other family members, I am doing something genuinely good. Individuals have an internal desire to serve and an emotional sense of satisfaction with a job done for others. In a highly functional family, there develops the sense that service to others is one of life's highest callings.

Create an Environment of Service

Service should be a natural part of the fabric of our families. Parents can create an environment where service is expected, affirmed, exalted even.

Create an Example of Service

Again, parents serve as the supreme model. If children can see moms and dads serving each other, and then observe mom and dad serving within the church and community; how much more natural will Jr. want to be part of that, and come to learn the merits of being a good servant?

Create an Experience of Service

We have tried today to model one way to create an experience of serving today. By bringing our tithes, gifts, offerings and food items to be dedicated to God, we are modeling for our young children; one example of serving. Maybe instead of blowing a years worth of vacation savings on the “ultimate” vacation...go work on a habitat house, or clean up in New Orleans, or serve a week in a National Park, or volunteer at one of the many agencies within our own community each day for a week. Again I challenge you families to find a way to experience a third world mission opportunity sometime in the lifetime of your child.

Service to others is the highest pinnacle humanity ever scales. Most people who have studied His life closely agree that Jesus Christ stood on the pinnacle of greatness ...when He took a washbasin and towel and performed a lowly act of washing his disciples' feet. He removed all doubt as to His intent when He said, *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*

It's the ultimate Family Matter. Amen

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“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” Jn 13:14