



Serving Together

I want to welcome you to '40 Days of Community, Day 35. Now you know for the past four weeks, we've been looking at the fact that God has a purpose for your life. And we've looked at how God says, "I created you for a purpose, but those purposes cannot be fulfilled on your own." You have to have other people in your life to do it.

And so, we've looked at how we worship together, how we fellowship together. We've looked at growing together. We've looked at reaching out together. And today, I want us to look at serving together.

God did not put you on earth to live a self-centered life. He put you on earth to make a difference. He wants you to make a contribution with your life. He wants you to give something back.

Whenever you use your talents, your abilities, your background, your experience, your time, your energy to help somebody else and you do it in God's name; the Bible has a word for that -- it's called 'ministry.' And contrary to popular opinion, everybody is a minister. Not everybody is a pastor, but everybody is to serve, using the abilities that they've got.

And one of the things you're going to do in heaven is you're going to serve God, and how do you do that here on earth? How do you serve God? Well, you can't, directly. **The only way you can serve God is by serving other people.** You can't serve God directly. It is in serving the people around you.

But God didn't just call us to serve as individuals, he also calls us to serve in community, in relationship to others."

Look at what we have been accomplishing together on our mission project...

Look at the first verse on your outline from the Bible, from the book of Philippians 2:2. Let's read it aloud together, *"Agree with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose."* Now that's what we want to talk about today, *"Working together with one heart and purpose."*

The fact is, WE GET MORE DONE together. We all know this. It's not news. Teamwork multiplies effort. And the Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 4:9** *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. (KJV)* "It's teamwork."

Serving together in your group will draw you closer than anything else. Not socializing together, not studying together, but actually serving together. Doing something together that draws you closer.

So what does it take to build a TEAM? Well, that's what we're going to look at today.

You can apply this in so many ways. If you got a group of friends and you want to turn them into a team of friends, you do four things. If you want to turn your office or where you work into a real team spirit, you do four things. If you want to take your **small group** and you want to make it more effective and draw everybody closer, you do four things.

And we're going to look at those four things; and just for fun, I put them in an acrostic 'TEAM'. What does it take to build a team?

I. FIRST IT TAKES TRUST.

Trust is the emotional glue that binds people together. You don't have a team unless you've got trust. And without trust, you have no teamwork at all. So the 'T' in 'TEAM' stands for 'trust.'

One of the guys who was in Paul's team was a young man named Timothy; and in the Bible, it says

this, he said to Timothy, in **1 Timothy 6:20**, "*Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.*" Circle that word 'entrusted.' Teamwork starts with trust.

Now what am I saying here? In order to build a team, you've got to trust people with some responsibility. You can't do it all yourself. You have to spread the responsibility around.

If you go home today and you watch a game on TV, you know that a quarterback cannot pass to himself. And if the team is going to win, the quarterback has to pass the ball to somebody else, or he has to hand it off to somebody else. The number of times that the quarterback actually gets to score himself are very, very few. Most of the time, he is simply handing it off to somebody else.

Now my question is, those of you who are in small groups: What do you need to hand off in your group? What do you need to pass around? Well maybe you need to pass around who leads the discussion? Maybe you need to pass around who *dominates* the discussion?

And the goal is that everybody in your group will have some job, some role, some responsibility, and you pass around the responsibility, and that's how we grow. Not by one person doing it all, but by passing it around.

Now the Bible says this about trust **Proverbs 20:6** *"Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?"* (NIV) That's interesting. That was written thousands of years ago, and it's still human dilemma today. It's tough to find people that you can trust.

But today I'm not talking about how you can find *other people* you trust. **My question is how can YOU be trustworthy?** If you want people to learn to trust:

1) **First, you will learn to be trusted by BEING CONSISTENT.** People don't like people who are always jumping around from this and are unpredictable, who are always surprising. They want people who are consistent, who are dependable, who you can count. And the more consistent, the more people are going to trust you.

The Bible says this in **Luke 16:10**, "*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.*" (NIV) That's consistency. With first the little things. You know, everybody wants to do

the big thing in life. They want to do the showy thing, the spectacular thing.

It is in the little things in life, not the big things in life, that you prove your character; the stuff that nobody else is ever going to see, the stuff when nobody's looking.

We gain trust by being consistent, #2: **By BEING CLOSE;**

You've got to be close. Let's face it, you don't trust people you don't know.

So the only way to gain trust in people and have people gain trust in you is you've got to get close to them. Distance creates distrust. And so, you have to spend time together.

Would you write this down? ***'Trust takes time.'*** Trust takes time. It takes time to build trust in you, and for you to build trust in other people.

The problem is in a couple weeks, '40 Days of Community' is over; and I want to urge you. *Don't disband from your group in 2 weeks.* Keep going. Don't cut it short because it takes time to build trust.

What does it take to build teams to reach out and do those things? It takes trustworthy people who say, "Hey, we'll do it together. I'll be the hands and feet of the body of Christ."

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

Empathy... 'E' is the empathy in 'TEAM.' It takes not only trust but it takes empathy to build a team and **1 Peter 3:8** from the Bible says this, "*Live in harmony with one another. Be sympathetic...*" Now you can't have the first part until you've got the second. You're never going to have *harmony* with your friends, with your wife, your husband, the people you work with, the people you go to school with. You're never going to have harmony until you've got the second thing, *empathy*.

Now everybody needs empathy for two reasons. **First, everybody has a need to be understood.** You want somebody in your life who goes, "I get you. I understand you. I know where you're coming from." You have a deep need to be understood.

And second, you have a deep need to have your feelings validated. You need somebody in your life who goes, "You're not weird. You're okay.

I've been there. I've had that. You're not going crazy."

We need empathy. How do we become more empathetic? Here's two ways:

#1. First, SLOW DOWN Slow down. Speed destroys empathy because you miss the details in life when you're going fast. You have to slow down.

For instance, if I were to get on a jet plane from Bradley and fly coast to coast to California, I would not see any details of the nation or very few because I'm going so fast. I'd only see the big things. But, if I got in a car and drove to California, then I would see so much more, because I'm going slower.

Here's the point: The faster I move, the more details I miss. And many of you, all of us actually, are in a culture where it is moving so fast. We are "relationally skimming." That is you are only seeing the big things. You are not seeing the details in the lives of the people you care about most: Your friends, your kids, your spouse or whoever. You see, you're going so fast, you can't see it. You have to slow down, and stop *relationally skimming*.

Let's read what the Bible says in **James 1**, read it with me, *"Be quick to listen and slow to speak."* Quick to listen, slow to speak. That's great advice for all of our small groups.

Did you know that the human being can listen to about 650 words a minute? But the average human being only speaks about 150 words a minute? That leaves a 500-words-per-minute boredom factor.

And some of you husbands are going, "Now see this I can read the paper and listen to my wife" or "I can watch TV and listen to my kids." No, no, that is not empathetic. Empathy is slowing down and listening even though it's at a speed shorter than you can comprehend.

#2 Here's the second thing that'll make you more empathetic: **ASK QUESTIONS.**

Proverbs 20:5 *⁵Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out. (KJV)*

I like the Good News: *"A person's thoughts are like water in a deep well, but someone with insight can draw them out."* Now why do you have to draw it out of people? Well it's because most people don't blurt out their emotions.

So how do you draw it out? Here's the way you do it: Ask questions - don't just give answers and opinions.

And **ask the question twice.** "How are you doing?" "I'm fine." "No really, how are you doing?"

Ask the question twice, "Tell me what's going on in your life." "Well, things are busy." "Tell me more." Say that, "Tell me more." It's the second question that shows the empathy, not the first. It's the second question that you say to your friend, you say to your boss, you say to your child, you say to anybody, "Tell me more." That is the empathy question, not the first one. So you ask, you pause and you ask again.

III. HERE'S THE THIRD KEY. IT TAKES ACCEPTANCE.

That's the 'A' in 'TEAM.' It takes Acceptance. This has to do with our differences. Why? Because we're all different.

Romans 15:7 *⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (NIV)*

Have you figured out God likes variety? He does. (God loves a church of all races, varieties...)

And so, God has made us all different, and so we have to **ACCEPT** each others' differences.

In another translation it uses the word **accommodation**? I like that. When you *make accommodation* for somebody - you *get them a room*. You might get it at a hotel or motel, or you might get it at your house.

But when you *give* someone accommodation, you *GIVE them room*. You are giving them space. You are giving them room: Room to grow or room to whatever.

The Bible says in **Romans 12:18** *¹⁸If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (KJV)* Boy, I'm so glad for that middle part. Now notice it again, it says, *"...as much as lieth in you,"* that means obviously there are two parts in a relationship, you've got to do your part and everybody else has got to do their part. And so it says *you be responsible for your part*. You don't be cranky, critical, fearful, paranoid or what... Just you do your part to get along with everybody as much as possible.

Aren't you glad God gave that first part too? *¹⁸If it be possible...* Even God realizes that some people

are impossible. No matter how nice you treat them, they don't get it. They're just unpleasable.

You see in your outline a couple of ways we can accommodate each other.

- We need to **ACCEPT EACH OTHER'S PERSONALITIES.**
- We also have to **ACCEPT EACH OTHER'S FAULTS.** We have to accommodate the fact that none of us are perfect. We all have faults.

The very first thing God said when he created man, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* That's not only about marriage. It has everything to do with you need people in your life. You need people in your life that you trust, that you empathize with, who accept you and you accept them because life is about relationships. And God wants to use you on a team.

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

Teams aren't created just to exist for themselves. They have to have a purpose. They have to have a cause a MISSION. They are trying to accomplish something together. That's what makes a team a team. It's not just a little get together bless me clique where we contemplate the lint in our navel. No. It's for a purpose.

The Bible says in **Philippians 2:2** *"make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."* (NASB95)

At FBCM we have many groups and ministries and they all have a mission (or need one). And during '40 Days of Community,' we're looking and studying about how do we do this together? And how do we worship together, grow together, fellowship together, reach out together? And how do we serve together?

Notice it says, *'maintaining.'* Here's the question I have for you: How are you going to *maintain* God's purposes in your life after '40 Days of Community?' How are you going to maintain it? Well, there's only one way. It's the next verse.

Heb. 10:25 says, *"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together but let us encourage one another."*

We need each other to *keep on keeping on* what God wants us to do."

Did you know that the giant redwoods are the largest living things on the planet? They are enormous. They can grow hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, 400, 500 feet tall; they are enormous. They have trunks that are so big they dug out the middle and you can drive a car through them. They are the biggest things on the planet. Most people know that.

What most people don't know about redwoods is they have incredibly shallow roots. And they would fall over in a storm or a wind or a fire very easily. So how do they stay standing strong? Redwoods always grow in groves, and they intertwine their roots, and they hold each other up in the storm.

They have to hold each other up, and that is the perfect picture of community. That is a perfect picture of fellowship, or teamwork, of what God wants the church to be, or what God wants your small group to be. We are a network. This church is a network of small groups that hold each other up. And no matter what happens, there is that intertwining.

Now you're going to have storms in your life, relational storms, financial storms, health storms. You're going to have all kinds of problems in your life that will knock you over if you're on your own. You need a group. You need a group of people who are walking together with you through life.

Today we want to give you the opportunity learn more about doing that. I hope you are more convinced than ever that God wants you to serve and he wants you to serve with a team.

Let's bow our heads. God says his church will be unstoppable. And I believe with all my heart that as we continue building these small group teams within our church family, where people find trust, and they find empathy, and they find their gifts valued and accepted and their ideas, and where they have a common clear mission - that with God's help, nothing will be impossible.

I invite you to pray this prayer with me in your heart. *Dear God, I don't know you very well. But I want to know you, and I want you to use my life, and I want you to use it not by itself but with other people in community, in a team. Dear Jesus Christ, as much as I know how, help me to understand it more. I open up my life to you, and I want you to use me. In your name, I pray. Amen.*