

Improving your serve... with your family. "A Father's Heart"

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We are in the middle of a series entitled "Improving Your Serve". Why? Well, the Pareto principle holds very true in churches. I'm sure you've heard of it. It's also called the 80:20 principle. 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. That is so true in churches. But it should not be so.

I stand before you today, because amongst the pastoral staff I have raised the most kids. Apparently, that makes me the biggest expert on this subject. What it really means is that I was on vacation, missed two Sundays, and Jeff and Kevin wanted to get back at me. "Let's get Mikey" He'll teach on serving your family, he'll teach anything! Hey Mikey!" That's about how I figure it went.

So, let's talk about serving your family

Jesus – by word and his own example – made serving one of the great spiritual laws. And in so doing he showed us the father's heart. There are a lot of examples and lessons related to serving in the scriptures. So we can look at it from a lot of angles. Today we want to look at it by looking at "the father's heart". In other words, using scripture and illustrations that show how a father relates to – and serves – his children.

I want to show you that a true father's heart is the heart of a servant. Because THE FATHER'S heart is the heart of a servant.

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I'm not saying that God is a servant. Because God is the ultimate MASTER and no servant is greater than his master.

[show (John 13:16 niv)]

But Jesus said quite clearly that to be the master of all, you must be the servant of all.

[show (Mark 9:35 niv) ]

What a contradiction to the human mind. But really it is all about the heart and the motives.

Now I realize that this concept might be a stretch to a lot of us. Certainly to those of you who may have grown up with the image of God as the guy with the baseball bat, ready to pounce when we mess up. THAT God certainly isn't the "servant God" that Jesus revealed to us. I know a lot of people who have had to work a long time on their relationship with God to realize that he's not that guy.

But I would submit that those of us who pride ourselves in recognizing that God is our daddy, the greek word in the bible is "Abba", who wants to to have a relationship with us and would never swing a bat – we also strain at seeing God as the Servant Father. As a worship leader, I have been in the middle of this dilemma for a long time. We are called and commanded to worship God. So we do. We begin singing praises because we want to and because we are supposed to. And somewhere we lose the 'want to' and just hold on to the 'supposed to' and all of a sudden God becomes this powerful being who is demanding our worship. We see God as a narcissist. Not the servant God. It reminds me of this science fiction TV show that just ended its run on cable. Stargate. The story line in the last couple of seasons revolved around these alien beings who had ascended into spirit beings and fed on the 'energy' created by having their subjects 'worship' them. If you wouldn't worship, you were killed. Kind of the same idea as the Disney movie Monster's Inc getting 'energy' from 'screams' and storing it.

That is not our God. He doesn't need our worship, any more than he needs our money. He tells us to worship, and to give, because of the deeper truths behind them. Among other things, giving activates the law of sowing and reaping.

[Show Scripture Matthew 6:33 niv]

Worshipping God puts into motion the “seek ye first” principle in Matthew 6:33 that results in “all these things will be given”, because God knows that every one of us will worship something – we will “seek” first ‘something’, and the results aren't always so good. He is completely about OUR good.

So what does all this mean? We could dig into those principles for hours but that is a different message. What I want you to see is that in these examples of worship and giving, God is instructing us to an end that we don't always see or understand. For our own good. Just like an earthly father. Get it now. I believe that is the essence to the father's heart. And the essence of serving your family. Doing things that are for THEIR good.

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And they won't always be recognized as such. But you do it anyway. And eventually – hopefully – they get it!

Lets read Ephesians 5:1-2 from ‘the message’

[Show scripture EPH 5:1-2 from the message]

**1-2** Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

I believe it would be totally accurate to replace the word 'love' with 'serve'. It's the same thing. To love your family is to serve. If you have read the book "The Five Love Languages", you will recognize that serving is one of the "love languages".

This is the spiritual insight that I wanted to make sure you get. To love is to serve. To serve is to love. God never does anything out of a selfish interest or motive. We just don't think of God that way. We may see Jesus that way. But not the Father. So we develop a different idea of what constitutes "Fatherhood".

Now let's get practical for a moment. What kind of things can we do to convey the father's heart. And you notice I am saying "THE" father's heart, because this is not a 'father's only' thing. Anyone and everyone should have THE father's heart when it comes to SERVING their FAMILY whoever that might be. So I'm sorry, no one has permission to tune any of this out!

First, I believe we need to be role models of service in our families. That is how we can provide a moral compass to our kids.

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Like Jesus said after he washed his disciples' feet

[show scripture John 13: 14-15 NIV]

**14**Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **15**I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

This idea of being a 'role model' is full of challenges to having a serving heart. So let's look at the things we can do - through the lens of the challenges that we face.

Biggest challenge: WORK

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Wait a second! If I heard someone say that, I would want to shout, but “Working IS serving your family”. I agree! WORK COUNTS. Lean over to the person you are with and tell them WORK COUNTS. Just getting to hear that and say that was probably worth the price of admission to half of you. I guess we can go home now! But wait! You knew there was a BUT coming didn’t you. And it is all about balance. When you ride a bike, if you shift your weight even a little bit you will turn – a little too much and you will tip – or fall. There is a line to how much you can work before other things suffer. You have to MAKE TIME for your family.

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If you work too much then you can’t...

1. Serve your kids with your presence/support at their events. Go to their activities/games/sports. No one can take your place, parent, in your kid’s life. Be there.
2. Serve your kids spiritually: do devotional studies with them. There are many good ones available.
3. Serve them dinner. In other words, spend time around the dinner table. If you are always working late this is the first thing to suffer. Family time around meals.

We just got back from vacation. And while we were at my uncle’s cabin by the lake, I did most of the cooking. It was an opportunity to serve my family. And it was quite shocking to my dad’s wife who is from Costa Rica.

Show video of Argi. (or tell the story if it isn’t available)

I didn’t realize I was doing anything that special. But this points out our next challenge.

Our Culture. And the family roles that we come to believe are appropriate.

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In the culture that Argi is from. Men don't serve their families at home. To be honest, that is more or less true in American culture as well. We work all day, we deserve to come home and plop on the couch and be served. Oops. Self serving – is built into American culture. And it is now so deeply ingrained in the ME generation that our children expect to 'have it your way' and NOW.

Acts7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

We have no choice but to work extra hard to OVERCOME that mindset and tendency in our homes.

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We have to find ways to serve that go beyond 'work' and other 'traditional' roles. We model that by serving our families and by serving others in front of them, so that they develop the value for themselves. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, AND he also fed, taught and healed the multitudes IN FRONT of the disciples – that they might do likewise.

Let me quickly touch on a couple of other challenges. Which I'll just throw out there and fly right by because now I'll be meddling.

Adult friendships.

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Our friendships can come between us and serving our family. This is where how you PRIORITIZE comes into play.

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Do you remember the young girl in the video who was estranged from her father. She mentioned that even when she did get to see him, he was likely to run off with his friends and forget about her. Ouch. We need to analyze our priorities and take a good look at how much TIME is left over. If our friends come before our families we're in trouble.

And then the ouchiest one...

Needy People

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The worst example of this can even be – your spouse. This is kind of the flip side of last week on 'serving your spouse'. It is possible to take the priority of 'God first', then SPOUSE - and not have any time left to go beyond that because your spouse demands it all. And then you don't get to have that positive serving influence on your kids – and instead you actually become the model of just the opposite of what you want. You don't have time for them and they blame the parent that is demanding all the attention. Talk about unintended consequences. You've got to establish BOUNDARIES.

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Even if your time together is good. Too much of a good thing can make you sick. This can also apply to dating relationships. You want to be with them all the time. So much so that there is no time to 'serve' other relationships in your life. What's wrong with that? One relationship may be the most important, but trust me there will be

times when we need other people, other influences. We are not meant to be isolated. If we burn those bridges, our outlook on life will become twisted. This can also be a needy parent. Which reminds me of another movie “waterboy”. Bobby Boucher’s momma didn’t want him to spend time with anyone else, so his understanding of the world came completely from her. So that in college classes, his responses were always “my momma said...” and they were always off the wall. Good comedy. Bad reality.

There are plenty of other challenges I’m sure. Those are the ones that I felt led to deal with.

The second thing we need to do is serve our families by training our children to serve

[show slide with point and scripture]

Prov 22:6 Train a child in the **way** he **should** go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

The best way to serve someone is to teach them to serve.

As parents of seven kids we have tried a lot of different ways to get our kids to WANT to do the right things. Not just to do them. And that is hard. When it’s all said and done the proof is always in the pudding. What kind of adults do they become. Are they givers, servers, and lovers. Or are they selfish, self serving and egocentric?

We have used and created a variety of incentive programs to require and reward service in the home. After this much time, I would have to say that the results are mixed. For the most part, the chores have ended up getting done, but it hasn’t always resulted in the heart attitude that we really want. And instead it sometimes has created an expectation of reward for things that should be done out of a desire to



bless someone. That is why I'm convinced that incentives alone are not enough. That's where teaching comes in. And especially teaching the biblical concepts of serving that we are talking about over these five weeks. Putting all of these principles together is the best. Incentives with teaching - all the while modeling the proper behavior. Teach them what Jesus would do. Don't let them be helpless, lazy and dependant. Don't wait on them hand and foot. Don't make them wait on you either. And reward the proper behavior. Simple huh? I wish. I'm not here to give you a magic formula. Do what you know. Mix it with faith and prayer and patience. That's where I go back to the thought – they may not seem to get it right away, but eventually...

The final way that we can improve our serve with our family is to

**PROVIDE THEM OPPORTUNITIES to serve**

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We've already talked about opportunities in the home as part of teaching them to serve. That's the training ground. There are two other places. I'm not going to spend much time on them because each is a topic of its own.

Church.

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Find ways for the whole family to serve in church. There are so many ways that everyone can participate. Even the youngest kids can serve some way. There are young children who love to help hand out bulletins. It's not only cute. It's serving. It doesn't have to be a big deal, it doesn't have to be formal. It can be. We use junior high helpers in the nursery, etc. We need help in so many areas. I can speak for the worship arts ministry. We need help. There is something for everyone to do if you just make yourself – and your family – available.

Community.

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I've talked about not being self serving. It is just as important for us as a church not to become self serving, or we contradict everything that Jesus taught us about loving and serving. We need to serve the community. You can do that here through the church, or simply in your neighborhood, or at work. Or wherever you are. You can serve. And in so doing you will show the love of Jesus and the heart of the father far more effectively than anything you can say. Or in the words attributed to Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary ...use words".

So, as we close, let's search our hearts for those self serving tendencies, and say, "God, create a clean heart in me, take away my selfish desires, give me the heart and the mind of Christ, who came and gave – for me"