

**What's Next?  
Serving**

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Good morning everyone! Great to be with you. Today is a big day in the world of sports. This afternoon, the Pacers are hosting the Utah Jazz at Bankers Life field house...

Though that is happening, that is not the BIG thing that is happening. Today is Super Bowl Sunday! For us, that means we get to watch what we hope turns out to be a fantastic football game. But for the professional football players, this is the one day they have been dreaming about their entire lives. Except for Tom Brady, for him it's kind of like taking another trip to Walmart. This is just what he does all the time. But for most of them, this is the most important game they will play in their entire lives, and there are hundreds of millions of people watching from around the world. Now I want you to think about this: how many of those football players are thinking to themselves, "I sure hope I get to sit on the bench the entire game. It would just be incredible if my number never gets called, my jersey never gets dirty, and I don't have to break a sweat."

Of course, none of them are thinking along those lines. Because everyone who is a part of a team wants to contribute to the team and wants to play a valuable role in the organization they are a part of. And that is what we are going to be talking about in our message today as we continue our series called What's Next. In this series we've been saying that no matter where you are at in your faith, no matter where you are at in life, God is always calling you to take another step with him. He's always calling you to something more. We've talked about the step of baptism, of overcoming strongholds in our lives, forgiveness, and commitment to a church, today we get to talk about serving. And just like everyone playing on the Bucs and Chiefs today wants to be a significant contributor to their team, God has called you to be a part of his kingdom, he has placed you in his church, and he is calling you to be significant contributors to his team. And one of the most important ways we do that is through serving.

Now often, when we hear the word *servicing*, we would rather be the recipient of the service rather than the provider of it. We go to a restaurant; we expect to be served. We go to a hotel; we expect to be served. We ride on an airplane; we expect to be served. And though of course when we are paying money, we expect great service, Jesus says that as we go about our lives, we should have the exact *opposite* mentality. Instead of looking to be served, we should look for ways that we can serve others.

Jesus modeled this perfectly for us in his own life. In Mark 10:45 he said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." If we are going to be followers of Jesus, we have to embrace the exact same mindset and paradigm. To live a life of service. Today, I want to walk you through several passages of Scripture and talk about three very compelling reasons to serve.

First: *Serving strengthens your relationship with Jesus*. Every single Christian I know wants to get closer to Jesus, they want to strengthen their relationship with him, and serving is one of the most helpful paths you can take to get there. Jesus' entire earthly life was about serving the needs of others. When Jesus' incarnation is described in Philippians 2:7 we are told, "Jesus took the

very nature of a servant.” Serving wasn’t an isolated activity for Jesus. It wasn’t something he did a few hours a week in his spare time. His entire *life* was about service.

We see a great example of this on the last night of his life. When he’s with his disciples, they all have dirty, filthy feet from walking through the city streets of Jerusalem all day long, and Jesus himself gets down on his hands and knees to wash their feet. And after he did this, after he embraced the role of a servant, he said this in John 13:14-15: “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.”

Serving connects us to Jesus because it is literally how we walk in his footsteps. A couple of weeks ago when Darnell was preaching on forgiveness he said: “Sometimes we are reluctant to forgive because we fear that forgiving others makes us look weak. But in reality, forgiving others makes us look more like Jesus.” How true is that when it comes to serving? We might be reluctant to serve for a variety of reasons, but when we serve, we look like Jesus.

Serving not only strengthens your relationship with Jesus because you are following in his footsteps, but also because, in the act of serving, you are actually accessing his power and his strength. In the book of 1 Peter, God’s people are instructed to use whatever gifts they have to serve other people. And then we read this in 4:11: “If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” What does that tell us? When we serve, God meets us in that service, makes his power available to us, and works dynamically in and through our lives.

I have on stage with me two types of watches. I like them both. One is an apple watch, and one is a chromatic watch. They both tell time, but they are powered in very different ways. My apple watch is powered by being set on its charger every night after I wear it. It is connected to a cord for several hours and then has power for another day. This watch is powered by motion. It doesn’t need to be plugged into a wall to have its battery charged up, it needs to be on a wrist that is moving. It’s called a kinetic watch. When I move my wrist, there is a small little pendulum in here that can rotate up to 100,000x per minute, all that energy charges a capacitor which is then released over time. When God created us, he didn’t design us to be like just like this watch or that watch, he created us to be like both. There are times that in order to draw strength we need direct connection to God through the Word, through being in church, through songs of praise, through communion. There are also times when in order to draw strength, we need to be put into motion, we need to work, we need to roll up our sleeves and serve. It’s in serving that we access his power.

Some of you have been wondering why you haven’t been growing in your faith. You love God, you’ve been coming to church, you’ve been reading the Bible, you’ve tried to avoid intentional sin, but you’ve been kind of stuck. You feel like your spiritual growth is stagnant and you can’t figure out why. It might be because serving is the next step God is calling you to take, and it’s only when you follow him down that path that your growth and vitality are really going to accelerate.

Why should we serve? *Serving strengthens your relationship with Jesus*, and that is a really great reason. But there's another reason I want to unpack: *Serving connects others to Jesus*. Now if you are a part of our church you know this is what we are about. Our vision as a church is to connect people to Jesus. And if we are going to accomplish that vision, it's going to take everyone who is a part of our church family serving in the ways that God has gifted them.

Listen to what we read in 2 Corinthians 9:12-13, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God." Look at that last sentence again. "*Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God.*" Service doesn't just connect you to Jesus, when you serve, you help connect other people to Jesus!

There are so many ways you could serve at The Creek to help connect people to Jesus. You could serve in our children's ministry to help invest into the lives and faith of the most precious commodity God has entrusted to us – our kids! We also get to bless their parents as they are able to worship and learn without distraction in service. You could greet people at a door, or pour a cup of coffee, or connect with someone at our information kiosks and talk to them about how to get plugged in around here.

Our hope is that our church becomes the most hospitable environment in the entire city of Indianapolis. But not hospitality for hospitality sake, we're not trying to be a 5-star hotel. Hospitality for the sake of connecting people to Jesus! We want everyone in our town to know this is a place where they are welcomed, where they belong, and where they can learn about the love of God, and where they can be equipped to live their lives for his glory. And every person plays a part in that.

My life was radically transformed because someone in my church growing up was willing to serve. Many of you know that my parents split up several times when I was young. My dad first moved out when I was in elementary school, but I was a little too young to process all the emotions of it. He moved back in, my parents tried to make it work, but when I was in middle school, they split up again. I was a little bit older, I was understanding it more, it was hurting more. But the church I went to had a great youth program. There was an adult sponsor who led a small group of 6 grade boys. He was present in my life every single week. We'd meet at his apartment complex, we'd play football in the grassy area for a while, then we would huddle up in his living room, read a chapter or two of the bible, talk about our weeks, and pray. One week, after our small group was over, everyone else was already picked up, my mom had four other kids to drive around town so she was a few minutes late, it was just him and me. And I was able to open up to him about what was happening at home, and how hurt and confused I was. He was present, he cared, he prayed. He reminded me that God was good and was going to be with me and be with my family through this. And that night, when I was driving home, I felt God speak to me and say, "The very thing he just did for you, that's what you are going to do for others. Help them know that I am real, that I love them, and that I am active in their lives." I was 12 years old and was called into ministry because there was an adult sponsor who was willing to invite a bunch of rowdy, stinky kids into his apartment living room every week. That man serving strengthened my relationship with Jesus in ways that I will never be able to express sufficient gratitude for.

Let me ask you: whose life might be changed, who might grow in their connection to Jesus, by the serving that you will do?

*Serving strengthens your relationship with Jesus, and serving connects others to Jesus, and here's one final reason to serve: serving builds up the body of Jesus.* Throughout the New Testament, the church is the body of Christ, it is the physical expression of Jesus on the earth. And when you serve, the body of Jesus is built up. We see this in Ephesians 4:11-12: "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." What we see here is that God has given the church leaders, but the job of these leaders isn't to do all the serving themselves, but to equip the people for works of service, to train and prepare and empower the people in the church to serve. When all the people in the church are serving, what is the outcome? The body of Christ may be built up.

For so long the thinking in church was, "The pastor does the ministry." But what is the biblical model? "The pastor trains and equips *me* to do the ministry." When it's just the pastor or the pastors doing the work, it's like going to the gym 6 days a week, but only ever working out your biceps. Your biceps will be nice and strong, but the rest of your body will be weak, atrophied, and disproportionate. If you go to the gym and work all your muscle groups, your entire body grows strong. When everyone does their part, take a look at what we see later in the same passage in verse 16: "From Christ, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Did you see that? "The body grows and builds itself up in love...as each part does its work." Everybody has a role to play.

When you serve, the end goal is that the entire body gets stronger. Last week we talked about commitment to a church. One of the greatest ways to show your commitment to a church is to say: what are the greatest needs of the church and how can I be used by God to help meet those needs so the body can become stronger and grow? And I want you to recognize how different this set of questions is that we can ask: "what are the greatest needs in the church right now and how can I be used to meet those needs?" – instead of saying: "here's what I'm great at, here's what I'd like to do, use me." The second approach to serving almost makes serving more about fulfilling your personal needs, looking for an outlet for your passions. The first makes serving all about the needs of the church.

Let's just play this out to its fullest possible extent: imagine a church with 4,000 people saying: "I'm willing to serve, as long as it is in a way, and a time, and an area that fits my passions and interests." And now imagine a church with 4,000 people saying, "I'm willing to serve however you need. Whatever the greatest needs are, I'm here to serve." Which church do you want to be a part of? In 10 years, which church is healthier? It's a subtle shift, but do you see how drastic the difference is?

There is a group of teenagers who are living this out in a beautiful way. Many of you know Miss Alison and her husband Justin. They have been a part of our church for many years now. Miss Alison leads our children's ministry and has loved on and told many of your kids about Jesus.

Two years ago, they lost a child to miscarriage. And last year, around this time, after nine months of pregnancy they went to the hospital to deliver their baby boy. And after an emergency C-section they learned that he had a rare genetic disorder, and they were only able to hold him for 6 hours before he passed away. The size of the hole in their heart can't begin to be put into words. Over this last year God has met them in some beautiful ways. They continue to remember the son they lost. God has been good to them, and their wounds are beginning to heal, in part because of all the ways they have been loved and supported by people at this church who have served them. In the days following Benjamin's death, 40 people from our church went over to their home, and for 10 minutes made a circle around the entire home, asking for God's mercy and peace to surround them. And then over the summer, this group of seventh grade life group girls, who came up through the children's ministry where they were with Miss Alison every Sunday at church, decided to put together an initiative to support parents who suffer through the loss of an infant. They did a lemonade stand to raise money for the work, and then they put together these baskets of hope which are delivered to people in a moment of crisis and heartache, to help them know they are not alone. I am so grateful to be a part of a church where even 12- and 13-year-old students are learning to serve.

And can I share some good news with you? Justin and Alison are expecting a baby girl June 29th.

I hope that, as you listen to this, many of you will hear God confirm in your heart: the next step that God is calling me to take is to serve. I want to serve so that I can strengthen my relationship with Jesus, I want to help connect others to Jesus, and I want to build up the body of Jesus.

On that front – we did this last week – let me ask you to take out your phones. Let's all go to [www.thecreek.org/serve](http://www.thecreek.org/serve). When you do that, you'll see a list of all the areas for service. These are areas that all of our different teams have identified as key areas where we need people to serve. I'd encourage you to look through that, and if you aren't already serving somewhere, reach out and make yourself available. Not every need is urgent right now. Some will pick up when the spring comes around, some will pick up when more ministries are able to be open with social distancing requirements going away. So don't think that if you sign up you are going to be roped into 10 hours of serving next Saturday. It's more about beginning a conversation with leaders of different ministry areas around the church, seeing where there are opportunities where you might be able to step in and serve.

This series is called What's Next. Maybe this is the next step for you. If you serve, you will strengthen your relationship with Jesus, help connect others to Jesus, and build up the body of Jesus.