

“Serving Together”

Mark 10:35-45



Rev. Tom Campbell-Schmitt
February 25, 2007

Well, good morning everybody! We're glad you're here. If you've missed the past few weeks, I want to welcome you to '40 Days of Community.' Over the past four weeks, 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. Because simply put: we're better together.

So far, we've looked at how we worship better together, how we fellowship better together. We've looked at how we grow and reach out better together. Today, I want us to look at serving together.

God did not put you on earth to live a self-centered life. God put you on earth to make a difference. God wants you to make a contribution with your life; 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; 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. We're all ministers serving in community, in relationship to others.

Look at the first verse on your outline from the Bible, from the book of Philippians, chapter 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. This is not news. Teamwork multiplies effort. In Ecclesiastes, chapter 4, we read, "Two are better off than one because together they can work more effectively." It's all about teamwork.

Now you probably have some fond memories of being on some team. I know I do. I even dug out my high school letter sweater, but guess what, it doesn't fit anymore! But I still have some great memories. Maybe you were on a sports team or a debate team or a music team or cheerleading team or a chess club, maybe you were in the service and were part of a unit. You know, a lot of people

go back to reunions for the primary reason that it was the one time in their life they were part of a team. It was where they were most fully alive, on a team.

And you can probably think about some team that you really enjoyed working on a goal or a project or a desire or an ambition, and that made you feel fully alive. Why? Because on a team, you get closer, you get more done and you have more fun. 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 draws you closer. So what does it take to build a team? Well, that's what we're going to look at today. What does it take to build a team? And you can apply this. I'm so excited because 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 work place 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. I put them in an acrostic 'TEAM' to make it easier to remember:

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 it, you have no teamwork at all. So the 'T' in 'TEAM' stands for 'trust.' One of the guys on Paul's team was a young man named Timothy; and in the Bible, it says this, he said to Timothy, in verse Timothy 6, "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care." Circle that word 'entrusted.' Teamwork starts with trust. What I'm saying is that 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. You know that a quarterback cannot pass the football to himself. 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 to those of you who are in small groups is this: 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?

I would encourage you to rotate the group, and that the same person doesn't lead the discussion every week; that you pass around responsibility. And the goal is that everybody in your group will have some job, some role, some responsibility, and you pass it around, that's how we grow. Not by one person doing it all, but by passing it around.

You know in every small group, there is hidden talent. Would you agree with that? There is hidden talent; and part of your job in your small group is to help uncover and discover it, help release and empower it. That's how you build a team. Maybe you've never lead a discussion or prayed out loud or read scripture out loud. But maybe you say, I'm willing to try it." And come to find out people in your group go, "Hey you're good at this." You don't know you're good at something until you try it.

Proverbs 20 has this to say about trust, "Many people claim to be loyal, but it's hard to find a trustworthy person." 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.

Now I'm not here to talk about how you can find other people you trust. My question is how can you be trustworthy? And there are three ways, you might write this down. If you want people to learn to trust you, you must do two things.

First, you will learn to be trusted by BEING CONSISTENT. People don't like people who are always jumping around from this to that, coming and going without letting anyone know. They want people who are dependable; people who you can count on. And the more consistent you are, the more people are going to trust you. Look at what Jesus said in Luke 16:10, "Whoever can be trusted with

very little can also be trusted with much." You know, lots of people want to do the big thing in life; the showy thing; the spectacular thing. They want to serve God in big ways. But few people want to serve God in a little way. Jesus says, "I don't care about the size of what you're doing. I care about the heart behind it. I want to know, are you consistent in the little things?" It is in the little things in life, not the big things, that you prove your character; the stuff that nobody else is ever going to see, the things you do when nobody's looking. Jesus says, "If you are faithful in little responsibilities, I will give you greater ones and greater ones and greater ones and greater ones." And so you learn to be consistent, even in the little inconveniences of life. That's where character is developing.

We gain trust by being consistent, and second by BEING CLOSE. Let's read this verse together, "Friends love through all kinds of weather and families stick together in all kinds of trouble." Circle the words 'stick together.' 'Stick together' implies proximity. It says you've got to be close. You don't trust people you don't know. So the only way to gain trust in people and have others gain trust in you is to get close to them. Distance creates distrust. And so, you have to spend time together. Notice the passage says, "Through all kinds of weather" and "In all kinds of trouble." Trust takes time. It takes time to build trust in other people.

Some of you, for the first time in your life, got into a small group 4 weeks ago when we started '40 Days of Community.' You're just starting to get to know the people in your small group, and that's good. You're starting to learn to trust them, and they're starting to learn to trust you.

The problem is in a couple weeks, '40 Days of Community' is over; and I want to urge you not to disband your group in 2 or 3 weeks. Keep it going. You're just learning to trust each other. If you stop it now, you're going to cut short what God wants to do in your life, in those relationships that will make you a better person, help you fulfill his plan for your lives.

Don't cut it short because it takes time to build trust. You see when you spend time with people, you start to learn to love them. And when you start to learn to love them, then you start to trust them. And when you start to trust them, deeper levels of sharing open up; deeper fellowship or intimacy. There is no truth without trust; and there is no trust without time.

Now the second key to building a team is EMPATHY. Empathy is the 'E' in 'TEAM.' The dictionary definition of empathy is "the identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another." It not only takes trust but it takes empathy to build a team. First Peter 3:8 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, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, the people you work with, the people you go to school with, until you've got the second thing, empathy.

Empathy is walking in somebody else's shoes. If we had more time I'd ask you to take off your shoes, then find another person to pair off with, and put their shoes on your feet. Then I'd ask you to share the highs and lows of your week with that person. Empathy is walking in someone else's shoes.

Everybody needs empathy for two reasons. First, everybody has a need to be understood. You need someone in your life who says, "I understand you. I know where you're coming from." We all have a deep need to be understood. And second reason we need empathy is that we have a deep need to have our feelings validated. You need somebody in your life who goes, "I can see that you're angry, you're upset, you're hurting." We need somebody who validates the frustrations, the feelings, the fears, the fatigue, the failures that you experience in life, and that's what empathy does.

So if you're going to build a team, at work, at home, at school, wherever, how do you become a more empathetic person? Well let me suggest three ways:

#1. The first way to build empathy is to: SLOW DOWN. Speed kills. It destroys empathy because you miss the details in life when you're going fast. You have to slow down.

For instance, think about how different the experience of walking through your neighborhood is as opposed to riding through it. When you walk instead of drive, you experience things on a completely different level. You see things up close; you notice the faces of people, see the plants, trees, and animals you hadn't paid any attention to before. It's a richer experience.

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 chapter 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, "See honey, it is possible to read the paper and listen to you." Yes, it's possible but that is not empathy. Empathy is slowing down and listening even though it's at a speed farther or shorter than you can comprehend.

So when it comes to your small group, you need to shut off your cell phone, sit down, make eye contact, and have a real conversation. When you're speeding along, preoccupied with what just happen before and what will happen next, you're not in the moment; you miss the details and you're going to miss the signals of people who need empathy.

Here's the second thing that'll make you more empathetic: ASK QUESTIONS. Don't just slow down, ask questions. If you want to be more empathetic to your children, ask them questions. Proverbs 20 verse 5 says that, "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. For you moms and dads, who have teenagers, you know this to be true. You have to wise and skillful to draw out your kids. When they are four you can't stop them from talking... but when they are sixteen, you sometimes can't drag a word out of them. Likewise, many adults also kind of keep their emotions close to the vest, and they don't really let them out.

So how do you draw it out? Here's something to try: Ask the question twice. That's how you draw it out. Ask the question twice. "How are you doing?" "I'm fine." "No really, how are you doing?" and wait. "Tell me what's going on in your life." "Well, things are crazy." "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, your husband, your wife, or whoever. "Tell me more." That is the empathy question, not the first one. So you ask, you pause and you ask again.

Let me just tell you from personal experience, those of us with ADD, this is excruciating. Every corpuscle in my blood wants to say, "Let's get on to something else." You know, my RPMs are pretty fast but you have to... If you're going to be mature, you have to learn to go against sometimes your own internal nature and you slow down, you're willing to linger, you stay in the present, you don't be afraid of silence.

Here's the third key for building a team. It takes ACCOMMODATION. That's the 'A' in 'TEAM.' The dictionary defines accommodation as "Adjusting to circumstances." Why is accommodation important? Because we're all different so we have to make room for each others' differences. That's the literal meaning of

accommodation. When somebody comes to visit you, you make space for them; you give them room.

If you were to come to our house, you'd find that the nicest room in our house is not the living room and it's not even the master bedroom. The nicest room in our house is the guest room. Once in a while I walk in there and think, "Hey, why don't we live in the guest room?" And Patty says to me, "Because the guest gets the best." That's her rule. The guest gets the best. It's a pretty good principle for life. And we need to do that in our groups because we're all different.

Notice what Paul says in 2nd Timothy 2:22, "Be faithful, loving and," read it with me, "easy to get along with." Now there's a verse for your refrigerator this week. "Be faithful, loving and easy to get along with." So my question for you is not: Are you easy to get along with? My question is: Would the people closest to you say you're easy to get along with? That's the real test. Paul tells the Romans, "Do your part to live in peace with everyone as much as possible." I'm relieved that he said, "do your part...as much as possible." Obviously there are two parts to any relationship, you've got to do your part and everybody else has got to do their part. Paul is saying, "you just do your part to get along with everybody as much as possible. You can't control what other people do. But you can be responsible for yourself.

Another thing we need to accommodate is EACH OTHER'S PERSONALITIES. We all have 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. There is no cookie cutter formula for raising kids. A wise parent raises each child according to their personality and nature. You can see these different personalities and temperaments at work in a classroom at school or in a small group at church. Let's say in your group decides they want to go out for lunch or dinner at one of restaurants that are donating their profits to SW Hope: Feed the Hungry. Somebody in your group says, "Hey let's go eat at the Mexican place." That's the type A, take charge personality. The task person is going to say, "But first, let's be sure to make a reservation. How many plan to go and who can drive? When should we go? The fun-loving personality will say, Why don't we dress up in sombreros?" The deep thinker is going to say, "I wonder if it would be better for us just to fast that day and give all of the money we would have spent directly to SW Hope." The peacemaker or placatory in the group might say, "Let's make sure we all agree. I don't want anyone's feelings to get hurt." We just think so differently. God has made all of us to think differently. We can all see that.

Now why has God made us different? Here's why: God wants us to use our differences to make a difference; to make an impact in this world that we could never make on our own. You see, I can't change this world on my own, and you cannot change this world on your own. But working together, through our differences, our gifts and abilities and personality, God can use us to change this world. Just think about this: SW Hope began with one church that had a dream and it grew to over forty different organizations that are now collaborating to fulfill that dream.

Look at this passage from 1st Peter 4:10, "Each of you have been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others." God made us different so that we could serve and make a difference together. And we're seeing all kinds of evidence that that's happening.

The second thing we have to accommodate, if we are open and honest, is EACH OTHER'S FAULTS. We have to accommodate the fact that none of us are perfect. We all have faults. Paul says to the Ephesians, let's read this together, "Be patient with each other. Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." You know, you get into a new group and at the beginning you think, "Wow, this group is working out so perfect. These people are so great." But it

doesn't take long to figure out, "These people have faults, I mean San Andreas-type faults. Just like I do."

What do you do when you figure that out? Well, you've got three choices: You can fake it. You can start pretending we're all perfect and put a smile on. There's a lot of stress in that. Or you can beat it, you can say, "I'm getting out of this group. I'm going to go find a perfect group." But, of course, there is no such thing. Or you can just accept each other's faults. You can just say, "You know what? None of us are perfect around here, let's just adjust as best we can." Here's the incredible thing about accommodation. It sounds like a word that would somehow make us weaker, but it does not. It makes us stronger because now it's not just about me, it's about us. Now we're working together as a team.

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. They have to have a mission. They are trying to accomplish something together. That's what makes a team great.

Paul says to the Philippians, "Be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Notice he says, 'maintaining the same love.' 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?

Last summer Patty and I took our tent trailer down to the southern Oregon coast and we spent a day walking through the giant redwood forest. Redwoods are the largest and oldest living things on the planet. They are enormous. They can grow hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, 400, 500 feet tall. I have seen trunks that are so big they actually dug out the middle and you can drive a car through them. They are enormous. What most people don't know about redwoods is they have incredibly shallow roots. They would fall over in a storm or a wind or a fire very, very easily. So how have they managed to stand so tall and strong for so long? Redwoods always grow in groves, and they intertwine their roots, and they hold each other up in the storm.

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, of what God wants your small group to be. We are a network. There are around fifteen small groups meeting weekly during this 40 Days of Community campaign, but we are part of a network that holds each other up. And no matter what happens, we are intertwined, we are in this together.

Now you're going to have storms in your life, relational storms, financial storms, health storms, if you're alone, those storms are likely to knock you over. You need a group of people who are walking together with you through life. So if you're not in a small group, it's not too late to join one.

So here's the last passage I want you to look at, "Live in a way that brings honor to the good news of Christ. Standing strong," there's that phrase, "Standing strong with one purpose, working together," that's serving together, "as one for the faith of the Good News."

You know when I look around at the world, and I see all of the problems in this world like war and poverty, and disease, and illiteracy, these problems can seem overwhelming. It would be very easy to get discouraged and to say, "The problems are too big." And when we look at those kinds of things, we're tempted to say, "God, why don't you do something about this?" And do you know what God says? "I'm asking you the same question. Why don't you do something about this? Why doesn't your group do something? You're the one on earth. Why don't you do something about this?" And friends, that's exactly the reason we're engaged in this campaign. We're saying, "Here we are, Lord. We are your servants. We accept your commission. We are committed to use our differences to make a difference in the lives of other people, because you have made a difference in our lives. We are "standing strong with one purpose, working together."