

“The Serving Approach” – Acts 9

Philippians chapter four is one of the most powerful, practical and useful chapters in the Bible. There is so much packed into that one chapter that is helpful for almost anything you are going through. Are you worried? You can find help in Philippians 4. Are you addicted? Philippians 4. Do you have a need? Are you blessed? Do you lack strength? Read that chapter. It's so good. One of my favorite verses is **verse 8**. *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.”*

I was thinking about this verse this week and thinking about what it says to think about. I have this bookmark in my Bible that helps me sometimes. It is the 8th verse printed out and I have written on it some examples of things that are true and pure and lovely, etc. It helps in the heat of battle to have it written out when you need to think of something besides what Satan wants you to think about. Most of them are pretty easy to find examples for but I have always sort of struggled with the word “noble.” It's not a word we use very often. We all kind of know what it means but what is a good example of something noble that we can really relate to? But as I thought about it this week, I was reminded of and started to thank God for all the people in our church that do noble things. These people do these things, not because they are on the church staff or because they have to or they are expected to but because they love this church.

I think about Ben who leads the music and teaches Bible study and does a great job. I think of Morris who runs the audio / visual stuff and has spent so much time getting our camera and sound up and running. Many of you give and prepare Samaritan's Purse shoeboxes. You prepare the bulletins and take up the offering. You pay the bills. You clean and cook and prepare and plan. You make visits to other members in the hospital. You give generously to the food pantry. You pray for and love on those members that need it. All of that is very noble and while I see some of it, God sees all that you do and there will be treasures in Heaven for you for doing it.

Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* **Colossians 1:10** says, *“so that you may live a life worthy of the LORD and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”* For some of you, that is just how God wired you. That is your personality and is how God has gifted you. You enjoy doing good things for other people and by using your gifts, the church is able to minister especially to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. That is very noble. But did you ever stop to think that God can use those gifts of service and your personality that enjoys serving other people to actually lead people to have a life-changing relationship with the Lord?

We are continuing our sermon series on the different approaches to evangelism. There are as many different approaches you might take as there are personality types and God-given gifts but today let's look at the serving approach. Evangelism is a churchy word that just means to tell other people about Jesus. It is witnessing. It is telling what God has done for you because you want others to have what you have. Some people enjoy street preaching or knocking on doors and asking people if they know Jesus. They don't mind that kind of blunt, in-your-face style but other people are not as vocal and out-going and that's okay too. In fact, it takes all kinds to make a church work and work well.

In **Acts chapter 9**, we meet a lady named Tabitha. Actually, it says her name was Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas. So, I was talking to Billy about it earlier this week and he thinks Dorcas was like her biker name. 😊 You know? I'm not sure but it doesn't matter. Anyway, Dorcas is more fun to say so we'll call her Dorcas. Dorcas was

known by the people around her for one thing. So, let's jump right in there and meet Dorcas for ourselves and see what happens. **Acts 9:36-42** says, *"In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. 40Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes and seeing Peter she sat up. 41He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. 42This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the LORD."* Let me read that last verse again. *42This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the LORD."*

Now, we all have good intentions, don't we? We all want to do good things, memorable things, meaningful things. We all want God to be glorified. We want people to be helped. We want revival. We want lives changed. That's good. But there is a world of difference between good intentions and good works. Bruce Morgan said, *"Your good intentions will never overshadow your deeds."* I've heard it said that *"One kind deed is more beautiful than a thousand good intentions."* (Matshona Dhlwayo) So, how do we go from having good intentions to, as **Acts 9:42** says, having many people believe in the Lord?

We don't know much about Dorcas. We don't know where she was born or how she died or even how she died the second time. We don't even know what kind of motorcycle she rode. But we know she was known for doing good deeds. She obviously made clothes for her friends but we don't know what else she did and we don't have to. She had more than good intentions. She actually did good things. But even that is not enough to lead people to having a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

I want you to think of this as a recipe. Some of you like to cook. I'm an awful cook. It's probably because I rarely follow the recipe. But if you want a dish to turn out well, you generally need to follow a recipe. To use **the serving approach** to evangelism we have a recipe. You need to have the right ingredients. Just having good works isn't enough. There's nothing wrong with good works on their own but to really change people's lives, you have to add faith to the mix. Then add a liberal dose of prayer then allow the Holy Spirit to season it and cook it and then you can taste and see that the Lord is good. (Psalm 34:8)

Look first at the faith of the friends of Dorcas. Did you see that in **verse 38**? *"...when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"* Why were they sending for Peter? Dorcas was stone dead at this point. They had probably heard of Jesus raising Lazarus and they had probably heard of Peter doing some pretty miraculous things in His name but Dorcas was room temperature. She was passed on and passed the point of no return. Why call for Peter? I'll tell you why they called for Peter. They called for Peter exactly because they had heard of the miracles of Jesus and Peter and they knew that if Peter could do a small miracle in the name of Jesus that Peter could do a huge miracle in the name of Jesus. Is there a difference? If something is a little bit impossible, is that any different from being a lot impossible? If Jesus could heal the blind, is it any more difficult to raise the dead? If God can bring this church from Runaway Bay to Lake Bridgeport to Chico to minister to our community in His name, can He not use your good works to bring others to Jesus? If God can bring you out of sin deserving death and into a full and abundant life with the promise of Heaven, can He not use your good works to bring others to Jesus? If God can heal Belinda's legs, bring Morris and Lois out of cancer, deliver

half a dozen of you from drug addiction, keep several of you married and forgive the sins of this wretched man, can He not use your good works to bring others to Jesus?

I hear people says sometimes that the reason we don't see more miracles like they had in the Bible is because we lack faith. But Jesus said, *"if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move."* It doesn't take a lot of faith. When you do your good works, you do them in the name of Jesus and for the sake of God's Kingdom and to make God look good and then have faith that God will use those works to bring others to Jesus. That's what the friends of Dorcas did. The same God that used a burning bush in the Old Testament and the same God that raised the dead in the New Testament is the same God that protects and provides for you and your family and is the same God that will use your servant heart to bring others to Jesus. You know He can and you know He will. Now act like it! If you are going to use the service approach then you first have to be a servant. That's the first ingredient in the recipe. A servant does good things for his master. Then you add your little bit of faith in the God that does big things.

Then the next ingredient is prayer. Look at **verse 40**. *"Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed."* As he had seen Jesus do when Jesus healed Jairus's daughter in **Mark 5:40**, Peter sent them all out of the room. He didn't want to "perform" for a crowd and bring attention to himself so he made that room his prayer closet. Now, this was not Peter's first miracle. He had seen and done many miraculous things and you might think he would just assume that since Dorcas had the good works and her friends had the faith that all he had to do was just do what he had done before. Just use the right combination to unlock God's power. Just rub the Genie lamp the way he had done before. Check off all the boxes and then God has to work because He did it before, right? How many of you know that is not how God works? Just because God has done something one way before does not mean if you replicate all the actions that you did before that God will do it again. Pre-Pentecost, before Peter had the Holy Spirit living inside of him, he might have tried to do it that way but now Peter knows the source of his power and he presumed nothing about the will of God. (McArthur, Acts 1-12, pg. 284) So, he got on his knees and approached the King of kings.

Hebrews 4:16 (one of my favorites) says, *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* Every evangelistic approach you will ever use has to be bathed in prayer and when you do that you can rest assured that, as **Ephesians 3:20** says, God is *"able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us."* So, there are at least two mistakes you can use in using the serving approach. The first is to think that your little bit of service is not worthy of God to even notice. The second mistake is to think that you have done this kind of thing so many times, that you know what God's will is and how to do this and what to say and how to say it. You have good intentions and with the right motives, you know God will bless it. It would be a mistake not to go to God in prayer and ask for His wisdom on this and His blessing on this so that He looks good in the end. Because what if it isn't God's will that you do this this time? What if it had not been God's will to heal Dorcas? Peter would have looked pretty stupid if he had just gone in there and said, *"Rise, Dorcas!"* and Dorcas just laid there dead as a post. Peter would have looked stupid and God wouldn't look good either. Then what would have become of those people that were in the house? Their eternities were at stake with what Peter did so he started with prayer.

Years ago, I went with my friend Jody Kennedy and some others from church to Mexico to do some work on a church down there. And we had sort of a revival kind of service every night out front of the church literally in the wide median of the street. They blocked off the ends of the street and we set up lights and sound and Jody even let me preach one night. I had not done much preaching before and never with an interpreter and never in Mexico and never in the middle of the street. So, I was kind of nervous.

But when it came time for me to preach it was just getting dark and they turned this flood light right in my face and I couldn't see anybody in the crowd. That didn't help. Then the wind came up and literally blew all my notes down the street. That sure didn't help. But I tried to go on but just about the time I started to kind of hit my stride, three Mariachi singers came down the road with their guitars, singing and playing very loud. I couldn't see them but I heard them hollering and playing and singing and I tried to say a few more things but I just gave up and sat down. And I started praying. *"Lord, I tried but what am I supposed to do? I can't compete with those guys but there are people here who have come for miles around to hear your word. Lord, please help!"* So, then the pastor of the church got up and he started preaching. He didn't need notes or lights or anything and he just preached and preached. Finally the guys in the band got quiet. Everybody got still. Everybody was listening. I didn't know what he was saying but I could tell he started giving the invitation. And people started filing down the aisle. People are crying. People all over are praying and talking to the pastor and the deacons. And by the time it was over, I don't remember a number but dozens of people came to know Jesus that night in that crazy service in the middle of the road...including those three Mariachi singers.

Was it a miracle that those three guys came right then and there to that service in the road? Sure, it was. Even little bitty miracles are miracles and every miracle is meant to lead people to Jesus. And if you want your service approach to be used by God, then pray. Can you imagine what would happen if we all decided to be more service-oriented instead of wanting to be served? Can you imagine if we all wanted to serve and we used every service opportunity as an opportunity for God to use that to reach somebody for Jesus? *"Lord, I'm not able to do much but I pray that you would use this gift to the food pantry to lead someone to Jesus."* *"Lord, I don't have much to give but would you use my gift of cleaning, mowing, planning, listening, filling Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, straightening the kids' house, etc., etc. for your glory and to bring someone to Jesus like only you can?"*

Now, here's where the last ingredient comes in and it is the most important part. The good news is that you don't have to add it. God adds His Holy Spirit to the mix at this point and it always turns out for our good and His glory. We don't always think about the role of the Holy Spirit in leading someone to Jesus. We know that the Spirit lives inside of us and is our Counselor and our Guide. We have peace and joy because of the Spirit's presence in our lives but in **John 16:8**, Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to *"convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."*

Aren't you glad it's not your job to convict the world of anything? That's the Holy Spirit's job. You do your part by serving, having faith that God can and will use that service, praying to that end and then letting the Spirit do what He does. Maybe He brings a great revival or maybe a seed is planted in someone that bears fruit some day after you are long gone. All you have to do is be obedient. You use the service approach and let God use you.

Whatever evangelistic approach you use, they all are used for one thing. We just want other people to have what we have. We have peace and joy in this life with the promise of Heaven in the next life and we want everybody else to have the same thing just because we love other people. And we love other people because God loved us first.

He loved us enough to send His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins that we could never pay. Scripture says we have all sinned and what we deserve for that sin is eternal death in Hell, separated from God and all our friends and family. (Romans 3:23 and 6:23) But all we have to do is truly believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man gets to the Father but through Him. (John 14:6) That belief will be lived out in our lives by the changes that God brings in our lives; changes that make us more like Jesus, with the Holy Spirit living inside of us. If you have never asked God to forgive your sins and then repented of or turned away from those sins, do that right now. The Holy Spirit is calling you. Just trust and obey right now as the music plays.