

It's Your Serve  
May 15, 2016

In sports, when someone says, "It's your serve," they mean for you to start the game play by hitting or tossing the ball. "It's your serve" means it is time to take action. That is an appropriate title for us this morning because God is calling us to take action. It's our time to serve.

For those who are graduating it is a time of action. It is a time to take action in a new direction. For some graduates it is time to transition to college. For others it is a time to transition into vocational training. Others are transitioning into a job.

Graduates are moving from one stage of life to a higher, more responsible stage of life. Others will have less responsibility for you now. You have to take more responsibility for yourself. There is more freedom, but also more responsibility.

The same is true of the Christian life. When you become a follower of Jesus Christ, you gain freedom. But you also gain more responsibility. Freedom always brings responsibility.

**The freedom we have in Christ is a freedom to serve God within a right relationship.** Other religions are trying to earn a right relationship with God. Christians start with a right relationship with God. Therefore there is no pressure of trying to earn it. Instead, we can enjoy serving God in the freedom of our right relationship with Him.

However, though we start with a right relationship with God, we are only just beginning. Like a graduate who has just finished school there is long road ahead to success and maturity.

But what is it we must do to grow to maturity in Christ? If we asked each of you to write an answer to that question, some might put one of the following:

- Bible study is the key to growing mature in Jesus.
- Prayer is the key to growing mature in Jesus.
- Attending church is the key to growing mature in Jesus.
- Obey Jesus.

Those are all good answers. And they are all true. But there is an additional answer that is often missed. This morning we're going to see from the book of Ephesians what that additional answer is.

We begin in chapter four of Ephesians. Paul, the missionary, tells how it was God's plan for some to serve in unique ways.

**Ephesians 4:11 (NIV)** It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

**God calls some to vocational service.** (show the point and verse together)

God may have this in His plan for you. You may say to yourself, "I could never do that. I'm too shy. I'm not brave enough. I don't speak well." Remember that Moses tried such excuses on God. But it did not work.

I once thought such things too. In my childhood and teen years it never entered my mind that I might grow up to become the pastor of a church. If you had asked me when I was a junior in high school if I might become a missionary or preacher I would have told you no. I was as surprised as anyone when God's call came. And I still don't think I am very qualified for this. But I AM sure He called me. And He may call you. You should consider seriously the possibility of serving God in this way if He calls.

In fact, would you do that today, right now? Whatever your age, young or old, in school or retired, would you pray this prayer to God, "**God, I will serve You however and wherever You want me to serve.**"

Praying it doesn't mean He will call you to be a missionary. But Jesus died to save you from your sins. Is there anything you would not do for Jesus? Really? So pray this from your heart. Put yourself fully into the hands of Jesus. Let's take just a moment to pray.

(a moment for silent prayer)

God does not call all of us to vocational service. But God does call some. Look with me to see why God does so.

**Ephesians 4:11-12a (NIV)** It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service,

Even if God never calls you to vocational service, He has a place for you to serve in His church. We are all to serve God through various works of serving. These include...

**Evangelism Serving** - This is sharing the good news with lost people. This occurs in various programs of the church like worship, Bible Studies, and Vacation Bible School, both here at our facility and elsewhere.

However, it isn't always as a church that this takes place. It also takes place when your family befriends an unchurched family. As you become better acquainted you begin gauging their interest in spiritual things. You share what Jesus has done for you and begin inviting them to church events.

**Discipleship Serving** - This is building up believers in their obedience to Jesus. This occurs through the preaching and teaching ministries of the church, and in Bible study groups. But it also takes place in your home as you teach your children about the love of God and reinforce what they are getting here. Or this might not be any thing planned or programmed, but spontaneous. It could be you and a Christian friend talking about your relationships to Jesus and how you are struggling to live in obedience to Him.

**Program Serving** - This is direct serving in the programs of the church. This includes serving as choir members, ushers, committee work, and more.

**Support Serving** - This serving includes all kinds of behind-the-scenes work. It covers working in the nursery, preparing bulletins, buying food for the homeless ministry, gathering activity materials for a youth event, and much, much, more. Often, this serving isn't seen by anyone but God. Never-the-less such service contributes a great deal to the maturing of our church.

All of these are part of God's plan. God's plan is all of us serving. Look with me at what plans to occur through our serving.

**Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)** It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Do you see that? The maturing process of Emmanuel Baptist Church depends on ALL of us serving. Our maturity in Christ does not rest on the shoulders of the pastor alone, or the pastor and teachers alone, or on these and the committee leaders alone. God's plan is for all of us to be serving.

Now take notice of some specific benefits of serving:

**All of us serving draws us together in the Gospel.**

If you ask people on the street what makes a person a Christian, you will get different answers. I am not going to list some of them this morning. But I challenge you to take a survey of people you know at work, at school, or on your sports team. Ask them what makes a person a Christian and record the different answers you get. Not all of those answers will be centered on the gospel of salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This understanding is vital to our unity as a church. Serving together helps build that unity.

**All of us serving leads to a closer personal relationship with Jesus.**

In serving you realize your need for Jesus to see happen through your service what only Jesus can do. Serving then leads you to pray. And in seeing Jesus answer your prayer, you grow closer to Him.

**All of us serving forms Jesus' character in us.**

You will never become like Jesus from simply attending church, listening to sermons, singing hymns, praying, and studying the Bible. All of these things together will NOT produce Christian character in you. These are very important to your growth, but you will not reach maturity in Christ without serving.

As Americans we are used to thinking of most of this very individualistically. We think, I will grow in these ways through serving. But that isn't what he is saying. He is connecting the maturity of any of us to the maturity of all of us. Emmanuel Baptist Church cannot become a church of mature followers of Jesus unless we are all serving.

So if some of us are not serving, or not serving well, or not serving as Jesus wants to use us, it hinders all of us from "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." It hinders all of us from growing mature in Christ Jesus.

We need to look a little further this morning. He gives us a reason for attaining these things.

**Ephesians 4:14-15 (NIV)** Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

If we don't stand united on the Gospel, we open ourselves to accepting any false teaching that comes along. We see that happening around our nation today. We see some churches accepting the immoral ideas and false teachings being pushed in our nation. These have lost their way. They are no longer speaking the truth.

We must guard ourselves from the same happening to us. We need to be gathering for worship. We need to be singing our faith. We need to be studying and teaching God's word together. And we also need to be serving.

He brings it all together in the last verse.

**Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Serving is vital to our relationship with Jesus. Jesus matures His church as each person serves.

A good example of serving together is in Vacation Bible School. In Vacation Bible School we have all four kinds of serving taking place. We have teachers who are preparing lessons. These lessons include evangelism. There is an element of evangelism that runs throughout the VBS week. We are already praying for God to bring in unchurched children. We will be presenting the gospel to them and their parents during the week.

There is also an element of discipleship in these lessons, with teaching to promote obedience to Jesus. Some of our children and youth are already believers. We seek their continued growth toward maturity in Christ Jesus.

There is also need for lots of Program and Support serving in VBS. Some of this serving takes place during VBS and some takes place before, after, and behind the main action of VBS.

Vacation Bible School is one of the best opportunities we have for presenting the gospel to unchurched people. It is therefore important that all of us be involved in serving God's purposes through our VBS.

We are going to put on the best Vacation Bible School we know how. We have years of experience. We have a committed and experienced team of workers. We have enthusiasm. We have enough quality materials and resources. We have a good place to meet in. We have adequate space, inside and out. But all of that alone reflects what we can do. Only God can speak to hearts. Only God can convince someone that the

gospel is true, and once understood as true, only God can convince that it is needed. We can speak to ears and maybe to heads, but only God can speak to people's hearts.

We need you to serve. When you are asked to serve, do not let your immediate response be, "Probably no, but I'll pray about it." Instead, say, "Probably yes, but let me pray about it." And then make it a serious matter of prayer.

We aren't doing this so that we can say we did it. We aren't doing this because it is tradition. We aren't doing this because it is fun. We aren't doing this because we need the exercise. We aren't doing this because we need a special summer project. We aren't doing this because our kids are bored during the summer and need something to entertain them. We are doing this because unless people hear the gospel, are convicted of their sins, and place their faith for forgiveness in Jesus, they will go to hell. People need to be saved. That is why we must pray and serve.

#### Invitation

We are going to all this effort because people need Jesus. They need to hear the truth about their spiritual condition. That condition is that they are living in rebellion against God. This is sin. The consequences of sin is death and then judgment by God and then hell.

Have you realized this sinful condition about yourself? Well we have good news. Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins. Today, you can receive God's forgiveness if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Jesus is our Savior because He died for our sins. He rescued us from the consequences of our sins. We must receive Him as our Savior, admitting to God our sin.

Then we receive Jesus as Lord by turning our lives over to Him.