



So You Want to be the Greatest

Part 2 – Serve Local

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If you were with us last week, we started a series called *So You Want to be the Greatest*. We looked at what Jesus said, which was that the greatest among you will be your servant. Today we're talking about *Serve Local*. Next week, we're going to talk about *Serve Home*. I was going to put this long title on it: *Serving Your Local Church*. Amy said let's go with *Serve Local*. So, we're going with *Serve Local*.

How many of you have heard the term “shop local”? We were driving in New Jersey last month down a highway, bumper to bumper, with probably millions of people on this highway. I looked off to the left and there was this ginormous mall that was done. The weeds were tall, growing out into the parking lot. They took the letters down, but you could still see JC Penney, you could still see Sears. We were getting ready for Christmas and I know Amy was doing all of her shopping online at Amazon. I looked at her and I said, “That is your fault. That is the problem right there.” Amy wants you to know she’s passionate about it. I think she even has a shirt that says, “Shop Local.”

The idea here is how do you have an economy in a small town? What we've been learning, with how to help the breakdown of the family in Stone and Taney Counties, is that a dollar needs to stay in a community and circulate at least three times to have a stable economy. In some communities, the dollar circulates 120 times. The idea is go to the farmer's market. If you know someone that grows something that you need, go buy it from them. If someone that makes something in your town, buy it from them. The idea is shop local, support local.

A lot of times, when we talk about the church, and I hear this in meetings a lot. I hear “I'm not talking about the little “c” church; I'm talking about the big “C” church.” Today, we're talking about little “c” church. We're talking about the local church. Yes, we're part of the big church, global church, universal church (not universalist church), church worldwide, big “C.” Today we're talking about why you need to be a part of a local church and why you need to serve locally.

At the beginning of every year, we talk about the vision of our church and where we're headed and what we're doing and how God used this church in 2018 and what the plans are for 2019. Wednesday night was very exciting. We had 85 people at Starting Point. We had to put 25 people on a waiting list. Some of them weren't too happy about that and wanted to know why. I just said, “Tell them we like these 85 more.” No. I didn't say that, but you would think that was what we said. We want you to plug into the next one. We want you to be a part of the next one as you look at what it means to be a part of this church family.

So, we are a local church – a group of baptized believers – with three primary focuses. We have an **upward**, an **inward**, and an **outward** focus. Our love for God, our love for each other, and our love for those who are outside of the church. Again, keeping all of this in balance and understanding that we don't focus on one and exclude the other two. We don't get passionate about just serving one another and loving one another and forget about those that are in our community. We want to have an upward, inward, and outward focus. It all begins, as you will see in Ephesians 1, with the senior pastor being Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of God's family.

If you have your Bibles and want to turn to Ephesians 1, that's where we're going to jump in. **22 And God placed all things under his feet...** "His feet" being Jesus. **...and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...** He's going to develop this even more in Chapter 2 in just a second. **23 ...which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

The local church is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ; we use the word picture of a flock, part of the Kingdom of God, part of the family of God. That's what we see in the next chapter of Ephesians. **19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens...** You're brought into it with Jewish Christians. **...with God's people and also members of his household...** If you have placed faith in Jesus Christ, you are citizen of the Kingdom of God and a child in the family of God. It's one of the reasons we love calling ourselves Woodland Hills Family Church; it keeps that before us. **20 ...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**

In that day, all buildings started with a cornerstone. The foundation was built off of that cornerstone and built up. In this text, Paul is using that example. He's saying Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. It all starts with him, it all begins with him. He's the alpha and the omega; it begins and ends with him, but all throughout the way everything we're building is with Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone. **21 In him the whole building (the church) is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

So, that upward, inward, and outward focus, here's what it means. **Upward – We love Jesus.** And all God's people said... Amen. That's where it all begins. **Inward – We love each other.** We're called to love one another. Jesus said, "**A new command I give you: Love one another.** (John 13: 34) The church is about you loving the person you're sitting next to and them loving you back, you serving the person that you're sitting next to and them serving you back. Giving and being given to. Caring for and being cared for. Rejoicing and someone rejoicing with you. Mourning and someone mourning with you. That's the inward focus of the church. Sometimes churches become so inwardly focused that they forget about this last one. **Outward – We also love the lost.** We also love our community. We also want to be known as a church that reaches out.

On Wednesday night, at Starting Point, a new friend of mine came up to me and said, "But what do you do? How do I come from a church of 80 people, where I attended for decades? We all were close, but we didn't have a lot of outsiders coming in. How do I plug into a church like Woodland Hills?" That's what we want to explore today.

I asked him, "If I came to your church and visited your church, would I be received?"

He said, "Yeah, but you know what I'm talking about, Ted. It's hard because we have history together. We've done so much together that when someone comes in, how do you take the lost and those who are outside and make is so they are no longer foreigners and aliens, but they are part of the family of God and part of the Kingdom of Heaven?"

I grew up in a church that never really grew past 200. I remember wanting to invite my lost friends to church but having so much angst about that. I'm not going to have you raise your hand, but some of you have had that angst in a church before where you're like *I'm just really careful before I invite someone.*

In our church, we weren't allowed to wear shorts, women weren't allowed to wear pants. Your hair had to be a certain way. I can remember, before inviting my friends, it was awkward for me like, *Do I ask them to clean up their act before they show up?* It was super awkward. That's weird to me about a church that's like well that's our family. You should look like us and talk like us and act like us.

I just want you to know, that ain't how it is here. We are not into behavior modification where you have to clean yourself up, clean your act up... We don't want to do that. We want that to be Jesus working in you. That's him, not us.

I can remember sitting there going, *I would invite that friend, but he really needs a haircut before I take him to youth group on Wednesday night.* We had leaders that would run their fingers through people's hair and say, "Go get a haircut." It was that type of... You're thinking, *You poor thing.* I've been healed in the name of Jesus from all of this, as many of you have. Around here, we're constantly thinking about our upward, inward, and outward focus.

As we talk about the local church and as we dig into it today and dig into the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the First Century Church, as we look at Acts 2: 42-47, I want to start by saying what the church is not.

First and foremost, the church is not a **building**. It's not a place you go. Yes, we just saw many texts that you would say, Oh, Holy Temple, Chief Cornerstone, foundation, so the church is a building. No, the church is not a place you go. I love what Pastor Hillsong says. He says, "You can't go to church when you are the church." That's my Australian/British accent kind of all coming together there. You can't go to church when you are the church. Do I love meeting in a castle? There's no better place to worship a king than in a castle. I love it! Bad Dad joke. My son's in here going, *Oh, I gotta work with him on so much of this stuff.* Yes, but church not a place.

The church is not a **day of the week**. It's seven days a week. It's why how you see the way people dressed today is how you're going to see them dress all throughout the week. Church is happening all the time because we're the family of God and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The church is not an **event or a program**. Today, as we talk about the purposes of the church, you might get confused that if your church isn't doing this program right now, the purpose must not be important to them. Not true. You'll see today the difference between a program and a purpose.

The church is not a **business**. It's so important that we get this. The bottom line around here is not the bottom line. We don't make decisions based on finances. We follow generally accepted accounting principles. We file all the government stuff that we are supposed to file, but we don't make decisions based on how we can make more money off of this. How we can get more people to give? We're not constantly sitting around thinking about it. Your generosity is so overwhelming that we're trying to figure out how to be the best stewards with what God has brought to this place. We're not driven by red tape. We don't have a lot of rules.

Maybe you came from a church that had a lot of rules and you had a lot going on in your life. What's your rule on this? What do you think about this? We're like, "We don't have a rule on that." "Well you need one." "No, we don't. We're not a business. We're not driven by the bottom line." And when we select elders or when we select leaders, we're not just looking for people successful in business, we start by looking at the one who spends a lot of time on their knees in prayer before the Lord. We want to know someone is a spiritual leader in their home before we look at how they are in business. We have business men who are elders, but some that are not. It's not about being a business.

This is what I love about our church. I should wait to share this at the end in accordance with the notes, but I'm going to jump right in and share it because it's just still on my heart. Last week, you helped two more families transition out of hotels and into permanent housing. The reason I'm excited is we didn't have any meetings to make that happen. We didn't have to gather and take a vote. It actually wasn't the elders' decision, it wasn't even staff's decision; it was some of you in here working with families, saying, "Here's a real need. This family could get into permanent housing. I found a trailer for X amount; would the church help us pay for it?" We said, "Absolutely not! We'll pay for the whole thing."

The ability to be able to do that is because of your generosity and we don't have to sit around and say, "Well let's play this out and figure this out." We were able to function like a family. Does your family have a budget? How many of you are like, *Can we not go into the budget thing right now?* How many of you don't have a budget? How many of you have nothing to budget? Yeah, we have a budget and we stick to that budget, but when the resources are there and there is need... And it's cool to be able to say, because we're not a business... Do we have a business plan? Do we have a budget? Do we have people...? Yes, we do all of that, but we're not a business, we're not an organization and we're able to meet needs in love when they come up.

One of our elders, Mike Gaddis, oversees our benevolence ministry and we're able to meet real needs in real time and we don't have to save it for the business meeting next month. By the way, one of these families that you purchased a trailer for and are fixing it up... I shared this in the first service and this is why I'm glad we're not a business is because after I shared about one family transitioning out, people started coming up to me and going, "I need to know how many kids are there; I'm making them all crochets this week." "I do flooring; let me know... I would either like to clean their floors or replace their floors." To me, that's a family. That's a family in real time meeting needs.

When I shared this, I had some people tell me after the first service, "Boy, you opened up a huge can of worms. It's going to be flooding in and everybody wanting something." That's not how a family works. Is that how your family works? When your kids starts says I want this, I want this, you can say no. But we're able to meet needs.

Every time we share this, people get nervous that everybody's going to come here and want us to buy them a house. It hasn't happened yet. Why? It's because those that we're meeting the needs for... With the inward focus, yes, we're helping those who are in our church family, but now we're also helping those who are outside of our church family.

The church is not a **pastor**. And all God's people said... Amen. The church is not me. And all God's people said... Amen. Yes. Leave me alone. This is so important. I get frustrated when the church gets a bad rap for something I do or don't do. It's not about one person or two or three people. Sometimes people say, "So I don't go to that church because that church...." They really aren't saying that church; they're really saying that pastor. The church is far more than its leadership. Remember the apostle's teaching and the foundation of the church is built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Please keep that as the focus and please keep that as the priority.

The church is not a building, day of the week, event, business, or a pastor.

I know some come up to me at starting point and they're like, "You know what? I'm trying to figure out if I should join this church but it's so large and at my last church, my pastor was my best friend." I'm always like, "Oh," and then walk away. Do you know why? I want to hang out with you. I want to spend time with you. I can't. I want to, but God has not called me here to be your pimp daddy; I'm your pastor. Please understand the difference. "I need one person to meet all my needs and do everything for me." It ain't going to happen. But this is a place where your needs can be met. This is a place where you can grow. We are a family. We are the Kingdom of God.

Let's look at five ways to serve local. More specifically, to serve your local church.

1. Gather regularly for worship. The first of five purposes that we are going to look at today. The scripture says, ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*** (Matthew 22: 37) We read this in the Great Commandment, but then we see it played out in Acts 2: 42-47, when the church was formed. That's the First Century church. Something we've said for years around here is that we wouldn't be a 21st Century church built on 15th Century principles, but that we would be a 21st Century church modeling the First Century church. That's very important for us. So ...***praising God.*** (Acts 2:47) The scripture says ***Every day they continued meet together in the temple courts*** (Acts 2: 46) Gathering for worship.

A couple of weeks ago, I used that illustration by Francis Chan. Sometimes, when we worship, you'll hear people say, "I didn't get a lot out of worship today." Or you'll hear people say, "The music wasn't really my thing today."

I've never had a good response to that until Francis Chan shared this and now it's my new response. When someone says, "I didn't get a lot out of worship today," I now respond with, "That's okay. We weren't worshiping you." Isn't that a great line?

Well, some people in the first service took that and as they were leaving, getting on the golf cart going to the other parking lot and walking out past greeters in this parking lot... None of the greeters or the golf cart folks had been in the service yet and they didn't hear the illustration. But because 8:30 has so many comedians in training, so many people left the church service walking out and when the gold cart driver said, "So, how was it," they said, "We didn't get a lot out of it today." The greeters didn't have a clue what was going on and they heard this a dozen times. They were like *oh, no, is this the end of Woodland Hills?* By about the tenth time, one guy said, "By the tenth time I heard someone say that, I told them, 'Most people didn't, so you're in the same..." But then they had to come into church and figure out it was an illustration.

Here's what we want to talk about when it comes to gathering and it's very important because this is the service we livestream. It's also the service that is recorded to go out on Vimeo. I want you to know Vimeo, livestream, what great tools. Yesterday, I heard from a Sunday school class in St. Louis that uses the sermons as their Sunday school curriculum. We are grateful this is a tool, but here's what we want you to understand. All of you watching livestream or Facebook live right now, we never intended for livestreaming to replace your physical presence with the body of Christ. When we started it, going on 8 or 10 years now, it was never the intention that it replaced you being a part of what we're doing here physically. This is so important.

A month or so ago, a pastor out on the west coast came out and said, "Tomorrow, we'll be announcing our new location as a church." It's a local church and a local church pastor. He did like a one-minute video and on that video, he said, "Our local church now is everywhere because you can go to church on the app." A lot of pastor were frustrated. I get this is engagement. This is how people connect and all that. Again, an app is a great tool and can be used, but it shouldn't replace your physical presence.

I was kind of cutting up with a pastor friend on the phone about it. This is what pastors do. We have jokes that a probably a lot of people wouldn't laugh at. Who it was with isn't important. I was talking to Alex Himaya. Alex had a great line. Alex goes, "Yeah, for worship, press one. For communion, press two." I love this one. "For church discipline, press three."

There is so much in a local church that an app or livestreaming will never give you. If I can just say to those of you, I love your heart behind this. I love when you share this. You leave Woodland Hills, or you go to Florida or another state and you email or message us. You'll say something like, "We've not been able to find a church home here. We miss Woodland Hills." I want to just tell you that if you still consider us your church home and still consider me one of your pastors, keep looking. You need to find a local church where you live. You need to become a member. You need to tithe. You need to gather. You need to serve. You need to be a part of it.

Some of you live in Branson and you don't attend with us physically. You're saying, "But I get so much out of it just watching online." But there's so much you can't get just being online. There are limitations

to technology and benefits to the body of Christ. Are we in agreement on that? Use it as a tool. Stay connected with us, but don't let this be your local church. Find one where you live and plug into a Bible believing church and tithe, give, serve, invite people to it. You already invite people to watch this service, so invite people to go with you where you are.

2. Fellowship with other believers. You serve the local church by fellowshipping and being a part of pouring into relationships. I love it as we see this played out in the First Century church in Acts 2: 46. Stephanie Watson wrote this in really fancy script handwriting and it sits over our dining room wall.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts... They enjoyed one another's company.

We want that for you. How do you find that? How do you make a large church with three services and so many people feel small? Here's how we believe that happens: **Home groups, Bible studies, ministry teams.** They are the best ways to make a large church feel small. The only way you will find fellowship and make this church feel small and find the community that many of you are longing for right now is if you take personal responsibility for that. That's on you. Don't ever have the expectation that you need to know everybody in this service or everybody in the next. I don't have that expectation. I want to remember names, but I can even be a part of a church that is this big and feels small. A church over 2,000 people... You'll find it in home groups, Bible studies, and ministry teams.

This is very important because for some of you, this frustrates you deeply when you part of a home group and having fellowship and the home group decides to take the summer off. That wears some of you out. You don't need a program to have fellowship. That's what we just said about the difference between a purpose and a program. You can continue in meeting. Many do. We have Bible studies at the church, but they don't meet 12 months a year and you don't need them to have the purpose of fellowship. Many of you go out for dinner and lunch and coffee to make a large church feel small.

I also encourage you to plug in and serve. Many people here find community with the teams in which they serve and huddle with each and every week. Make a large church feel small. Fellowship, find relationships in this church.

3. Grow in your faith and help others grow through discipleship. This is very important to understand because sometimes we would say that discipleship means growing in your faith. That's only part of it. Some would say, "I want to go to a church that feeds me." I'm not going to allow my lower lip to get quivering on that comment because sometimes that is someone who just wants to learn and grow and gather knowledge for themselves, but that's not discipleship. Discipleship is growing, and then helping someone else grow. You learn the scripture, you learn wisdom from the scripture, you learn how to apply it to your life. The cycle of discipleship that we teach – Paul/ Timothy relationships – is that you would take what you have learned and how you've applied it and go help someone else.

We're seeing this played out in the church right now and I love it. One of the families we helped last week has an older couple, an older family in this church that's walking alongside of them. They have plenty of knowledge. They've been in church most of their adult lives, but now they are helping someone else grow. That is discipleship.

The scripture says this in the Great Commission. ...***teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*** (Matthew 28: 20) So we are a teaching church. We want people to understand the teachings of Jesus and the life that Jesus lived so that we would take on the teachings and the life of Christ.

In the First Century church, you see this played out. ***The devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*** (Acts 2:42) They gathered regularly for worship and for teaching.

A couple of years ago, I had a friend at a church... It doesn't matter what church. Watermark in Dallas, Texas. He asked me this question, "Ted, would you consider Woodland Hills a cruise ship or a battleship?"

Without hesitation, I said, "I hope we're both."

He goes, "You know the emphases of the question."

I go, "Yeah, I know. He who frames the question wins the debate. I get that. And you're asking me to make a choice that I don't believe the Bible asks me to make. I know what you're wanting me to do. You framed the question, so you're wanting me to choose the battleship, but I'm here to tell you that they ate together with glad and sincere hearts." They spent time together around potlucks. We're not getting into the potluck conversation right now. Could you imagine a potluck with 2,000 people? You're like *let's do it*. No. Have one in your Bible study or your home group. And all God's people said... Amen.

How many of you are going out with somebody from this church after this service? How many of you are going to a buffet? You're a cruise ship Christian. You're looking for the buffet. Again, I'm not in to when I'm asked to make a decision the scripture doesn't ask me to make. We can enjoy one another's company in fellowship, and still be are on purpose and on mission. We have much to do to reach this community.

This week we had meetings with the Forsyth Superintendent and the Hollister Superintendent. We're meeting with the Branson Superintendent and the Reeds Spring Superintendent about how our church specifically, but then how a broader group can begin to help meet the needs of families in our community. There will be moments where I'm enjoying the fellowship of those I'm serving alongside, but we're very much on purpose, on mission with that.

When it comes to discipleship, there's this tension between **truth and love**. It's a tension we understand exists and we're okay with it. We're okay with knowing that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one come to the Father except through me." "A new commandment I give you that you're called to love one another." We speak the truth in love.

After this series, we're doing a whole series on love. I think we're going with... I think we were either going to call it *Love Is...* We should let them pick what they want to call it. Might as well; let's do it. Katie is going to Disney; she's not paying attention much today. Or we were going to go with the

Foreigner song, *I wanna know what love is*. How many want an 80s themed series? How many would like another country series? How many say no to the country series? You can go to First Baptist Branson during that series. That's what we'll tell you. It was funny. We debated this on staff. I go, "We should do a western series." They go, "We just did a country series." I go, "I didn't say a country series; I said a western series." There's a difference between country and country western.

Truth in love. We don't have to sacrifice one for the other. All truth puffs you up and makes you a mean, arrogant person. You have to speak the truth in love. We'll see this in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3. If you don't have love, everything you say is meaningless. That's as clear as it can be. Paul shares that in 1 Corinthians 13.

4. We serve others in ministry. Again, look at the Great Commandment and then how it played out in the church. ***Love your neighbor as yourself.*** (Matthew 22:39) Then you come down to the First Century church. ***They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*** (Acts 2: 45) We see this in Chapter 4 as well. They sold property and brought it to the apostles and said, "Let's make sure everyone within our church family has their physical needs met."

At this church, **we believe every member is a minister.** There is not one or two or three people that do all the work of ministry. If you profess faith in Jesus and this is your local church, we want you to function as a minister. I just want to say I'm grateful for all of you who do that so well. I just hear story after story of a Bible study that meets a few miles from here. Again, it wasn't a Bible study that was put together by the church, but they all gathered together. Just to hear the stories of them going to Rockaway Beach and taking a young man shopping and caring for him. They didn't come and seek out permission or ask for something official to take place. They were just all functioning as ministers in the church.

We want you to know every member is a minister and you should **do for one what you wish you could do for all.** Find someone and serve. Don't look around here and be like, *The need is too great, so I'll do nothing.* The need is so great you need to do something. *The need is so great, I can't do everything.* Absolutely. Just like you can't know everyone, you can't serve everyone, but you can know someone, and you can serve someone.

5. Invite others to be a part of our church family through evangelism. Sharing your faith... Watch how this played out again in the scripture from the Great Commission to the First Century church. ***Go and make disciples of all nations.*** (Matthew 28:19) So, it's not just our church family, inward, loving everyone here. It's not just outward – loving the lost in our community. It's taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. It's making sure that we... Again, we have missionaries in this service right now that you've been supporting so well. The Truloves are headed back to Haiti. My family is going to Tanzania this summer to visit with missionaries and to do a conference with them. We've supported them for 17 years and we've never been over there. We've had elders go over and visit, but this will be our first time.

... the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47) This is one of the reasons I really focus on the words "the Lord added to their number." I think we have too many pastors

and churches that sit around during the week figuring out how they can add to their numbers. We focus on church health, not growth. We truly want to be a healthy church, balancing these five purposes of the church that we've looked at today, so that we can ultimately let the Lord determine the size of this church. He'll determine who shows up, and he'll determine who comes, and he'll determine the size of Woodland Hills. We're just going to stay faithful to worship and fellowship and discipleship and ministry and evangelism.

Our friend, Carey Neuhoff, says this and I'll close with it: "Churches that stop growing almost always have lost their heart for outsiders." May that never be true of us. May we never be so inwardly focused where member preferences take over.

I was kidding with a young man. At 8:30 he comes up and goes, "Do we only do hot chocolate in December?"

I said, "Yeah."

He goes, "I think it should be all the time."

I said, "Well you're talking to the right person, but actually you're not. I don't make that decision of when we have hot chocolate and when we don't." Who makes that decision? We're not even going to make that right now, but do you understand that sometimes when the church stops reaching out into the community, it's because we're so focused on what we want and what we want it to look like and what we want it to sound like... I pray that we would never lose our upward focus, a love for Jesus, a love for each other, and a love for those that are not yet part of us.

Father, we are grateful for Woodland Hills Family Church and what you continue to do here and what you did throughout 2018. May we steward well those who are part of this church family.

I ask a blessing over all of our leaders, from elders to pastors to staff to directors to the home group leaders who are just the front line of ministering to the needs of people and caring for people and guiding and directing people, that you would just give all of us this heart that's upward and inward and outwardly focused.

We're grateful for the new year and what you have planned through this church. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.