

GET AWAY FROM THE SIDELINES

Series: Building People
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Community, growth
John 14:12, Luke 10:1-9

Surely I tell you, whoever believes in me would do greater things than these.

John 14:12

This is a statement Jesus made: the greatest man that ever lived, the fullness of God in man. This is how Jesus thinks of you and I. Isn't that amazing? God has so much faith in you. Because of who He is, you are and can be so much more. Much more than what you see in the mirror. What if God desires to see you grow? To grow and become all that He has called you to be? To grow from what you see in the mirror today to who you were always created to be, to the reflection of the statement that Jesus made above.

Community is so important for growth to happen. Even Jesus had to grow and he could not do that outside of community. So there was a group of Hebrew believers to whom a letter was written which is in our New Testament known as the book of Hebrews. In this letter, whoever the writer was encouraging the church to not give in to the temptation of opting out of community. Actually, he says that considering everything God has done there is an appropriate response and that response is in community.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have the confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Faith in light of the above statement is a team sport, not a solo mission. Faith is a 'we' thing not a 'me' thing. No matter where you are on this journey of faith: you may be considering faith, you may be new to faith or you may have been on this journey for a while. You need us and we need you if we are all going to grow into the people God sees us as.

And last week my call was that you would start to show up to the communities God has given you. That y'all would start to show up to your family, to your marriages and to church. Because faith is a team sport and to grow in faith, you have to first of all at least show up for community.

Yet, you can only get too much by showing up. I mean, showing up will get you growing a lot. But it is nothing compared to how much you will grow if you chose to serve, to participate. So today I want us to consider that a bit. That faith is not just a team sport, but the kinds of team sport where everybody gets to play. Get away from the sidelines.

In 2 of the biographies of Jesus, there is a story that draws a picture of how Jesus hoped his disciples would grow. Jesus looked at them and knew that they could and would do more than he had and would have done in his time on earth.

After this, the Lord chose 72 more followers. He sent them out in groups of two. He sent them ahead of him into every town and place where he planned to go. He said to them, "There is such a big harvest of people to bring in. But there are only a few workers to help harvest them. God owns the harvest. Ask him to send more workers to help bring in his harvest.

"You can go now. But listen! I am sending you, and you will be like sheep among wolves. Don't carry any money, a bag, or sandals. Don't stop to talk with people on the road. Before you go into a house, say, 'Peace be with this home.' If the people living there, love peace, your blessing of peace will stay with them. But if not, your blessing of peace will come back to you. Stay in the peace-loving house. Eat and drink what the people there give you. A worker should be given his pay. Don't leave that house to stay in another house.

"If you go into a town and the people welcome you, eat the food they give you. Heal the sick people who live there, and tell them, 'God's kingdom is now very near you!'

Luke 10:1-9

Listen, there were 72 more disciples chosen to be sent out to every city Jesus was going to go to ahead of him and do the things they had seen him do. They had been following Jesus for a time now and they had heard him talk and seen him do the things he does and how he did them. And now it was time for them to be released to go do the same.

Were they already what they were meant to be? Nope. Did they understand everything Jesus had taught them? Nope. Did they believe everything Jesus had taught them? Nope. It is not too long after this that it hits even them that they did not quite believe. When Jesus was arrested and murdered, they all hid and said, "We had thought he was the one."

Did Jesus know this about them? I think so. He was willing to take a risk on them. Do you realize what Jesus was telling them? That if they were going to grow they needed to get away from the sidelines. If they were going to grow they needed to stop being consumers and start being participants.

They had a great teacher, they had a great friend. There is no doubt they were aware of how much they still needed to grow into. There is no doubt they could see how big the shoes that they had to fit in were. And in these places it would have been easier for them to say, “Well maybe I should sit back until I am ready”, “Maybe I should sit back until my father is strong enough”, or “maybe I should sit back until I have understood well all these things Jesus is teaching”.

But Jesus is yanking them out of the sidelines and saying, well actually you guys must go before me. This was a risk because if they mess it up Jesus would have to get into each new city cleaning up the mess before he gets to do the work. Was that a possibility? I guess so. Is it not amazing that it did not cause Jesus to stop?

We live in a culture where, especially in matters of faith and leadership, people prefer to relegate their growth to other people. Many centuries ago, people were happy to have priests as intermediaries between them and God.

There is a story in the Old Testament about a time when the children of Israel got ready to meet God. And they prepared for days. When the day came they heard the rumbling at the foot of the mountain where they gathered and saw how all of creation responded to the glory of God and they were terrified. They then told Moses that he should be an intermediate between God and them.

The funny thing about that is it is exactly how people have always preferred to respond to God. They would lift the temple and the priests so that they can stay away. Then the church was born in the freedom of the blood of Jesus and still, we would rather have a few individuals play intermediary.

So we go to our communities of faith and lift a few individuals and hope that they please God on our behalf and hope that they grow on our behalf. It always amazes me how so many believers will blame their pastors for lack of growth in their spiritual journey. They want to be taught how to grow. So they want better teaching. They want the church to work harder.

Parents have relegated the spiritual growth of their kids to the church. They hope that the church teaches their children about faith while making sure the topic never comes up at home let alone asking about what the kids learned at the church.

It is so bad that even in our civic lives we have relegated the responsibility of growth to our governments. The broken and poor of our society walk around as if they have no family because the scared responsibility of showing mercy has been left to the government and is now a political bargaining chip.

Yes, the government should take care of the old yet I want to know where are their children and their church. Yes, the government should take care of the poor, yet I want to know where is their family and their church.

Here Jesus knowing that he was dealing with people who would easily relegate to him their growth yanks them out of their comfort zones. Yanks them out of the sidelines and says to them go and do the stuff. Go and do everything you have seen me do and say everything you have heard me say. Which, you should know, is the same instruction he gave them after his resurrection. After they had seen him die and live again and believed.

See, what God is calling you to do, he is not waiting for you to get to some point to do it, the instructions are the same. If you are going to grow spiritually, do not wait until that day when you are everything you think you should be, start now. If you are going to do the things Jesus did; heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out evil spirits and declare the Kingdom of God, step into that now.

If you are going to be what God sees us as people of mercy and justice. People who look after the sick, visit the ones in prison and feed the hungry and clothe the naked; the ones who Jesus says the father has prepared a place for, then you do not wait until you have a million shillings. Instead, you start with the extra coat you have to clothe one naked person, you start with extra bread you have to feed the hungry person, you start with the one off-day you have to visit a sick person.

If you are going to be the church God is calling us to be, blessed with all manner of spiritual gifts. With teachers and preachers taking their ground, tongues and words of knowledge blessing and encouraging the church, gifts of healing and faith restoring the church then, you step into service in the community.

You do not wait until you are there instead you sign up for places of service. You join the kids' team, you join the worship team, you join the hospitality team. You simply step into places of service where you get to practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Get in the game! Watch out for what God is doing both in the community of faith and the world around you and join in. That is the invitation God is giving you.

Let's Pray