

Sermon: Shaped for Serving God
Text: Acts 2:42 – 47
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They called Elvis “*The King of Rock –n- Roll*”; nobody was more loved and admired than “*The King*,” and yet, Elvis died an unhappy and unfulfilled man. In fact, Pricilla wrote: “*Elvis never came to terms with who he was meant to be or what his purpose in life was. He thought he was here for a reason ... that agonizing thought was always with him and he knew he wasn’t fulfilling it.*”

How sad! That someone could be on top of the world and still not know what he was meant to be or do! But we’re learning that life has a purpose. We were planned for God’s pleasure; that’s worship! We were formed for God’s family; that’s fellowship! We were created to become like Jesus; that’s discipleship! And the fourth purpose of your life is: you were shaped to serve God! Ephesians 2 says: “*We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

The Bible says we were made – not to consume, but – to contribute. We were made to give back. We were created to serve God; And God never God gives us an assignment without equipping us for it. Job 10 says: “*Your hands shaped me and made me.*” Now, five things make you who you are: your spiritual gifts, your heart, your abilities, your personality, and your experiences. These five things uniquely shape you to serve God.

And so, I Peter 4 says: “*Each of us should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.*” You see,

the only way to really serve God is by serving others. This is what the Bible calls “*ministry*”. Ministry is not just something the pastor does; ministry is using your SHAPE to serve God by serving others. So, I want to talk with you about **your** ministry this morning.

You know, God gave us a perfect example of how to serve God by serving others. He is our model; and Jesus said: “*Your attitude must be like my own, for I did not come to be served but to serve.*” We’ve been called to serve like Jesus. Now, what does that mean?

First, serving like Jesus means being available! Jesus was always being interrupted. One day, He was walking through Jericho when some blind men started yelling at Him. And Matthew says: “*Jesus stopped and called them and asked, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’*” Jesus was available; He didn’t mind being interrupted.

And so, if we’re going to serve like Jesus, we’ve got to be available. Every day, everywhere we go, there are hurting people all around us and God wants us to see their needs and make ourselves available to minister to them. In fact, Proverbs 3 says: “*Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now.*”

But something always gets in the way, doesn’t it? We want to be used by God, but we just aren’t available. And there are basically three reasons that we’re unavailable. ***First, we are self-centered!*** Philippians 2 says: “*Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand.*” If God opens your eyes to see the

needs around you, He is calling you to set aside your own agenda long enough to serve. Focusing on self keeps people from serving!

A second barrier to availability is perfectionism. Some people are waiting for the perfect situation to serve, but Ecclesiastes 11 says: ***"If you wait for the perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."*** There isn't a perfect situation. Life is messy and serving others is even messier.

Some are waiting for perfect results before they'll serve. They think it has to be perfect before God will bless it. But if God only used perfect people who did everything just perfectly, nothing would ever get done. Nobody is perfect and yet, God uses each of us. God uses normal, ordinary, imperfect people like me and you. Perfectionism keeps people from serving.

A third barrier to availability is materialism. Luke 16 says: ***"No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money."*** Now, Jesus didn't say, "You should not serve God and money"; He said, ***"You cannot serve God and money."*** You have to choose and sometimes we're so busy with our stuff that we can't serve those around us. We have to decide what is more important: relationship or wealth. Materialism keeps people from serving.

You must be available to serve like Jesus.

Second, serving like Jesus means being grateful! John 11 says that Jesus walked up to the tomb of Lazarus, looked up and prayed: ***"Father, I thank you that you hear me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here."***

Jesus was grateful to be used by God and Paul picked up on that attitude; he said: **“I thank Jesus Christ because He trusted me; He gave me this work of serving Him.”**

Psalm 100 says: **“Serve the Lord with gladness.”** We don’t serve reluctantly; we don’t serve because we have to. The Psalmist said, **“Serve the Lord with gladness,”** out of a sense of gratitude for what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Now, there are several things that get in the way of serving with gratitude. **First, complaining and criticizing.** It’s hard to serve God when others are criticizing you for everything you do. Romans 14 says: **“Who are you to criticize someone else’s servant? The Lord will determine whether His servant has been successful.”** When you serve, God’s opinion is the only one that really matters!

A second thing that gets in the way of serving with gratitude is wrong motivations. Matthew 6 says: **“When you do good deeds, don’t try to show off. If you do, you won’t get a reward from your Father in heaven.”** You aren’t serving to promote yourself or your business in the community; you serve to promote the Kingdom of God. Sometimes, we’re like Little Jack Horner, we serve so we can feel good and sit back and say, *“Oh what a good boy am I.”* But Jesus said to serve with gratitude. When we serve with the right kind of attitude, our service really serves others and honors God at the same time.

Serving like Jesus means serving with gratitude.

Third, serving like Jesus means serving faithfully. Faithful means that you don't give up; you keep going. You don't quit in the middle of the job. At the end of His ministry, Jesus said: ***"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work that you gave me to do."*** He didn't stop. He finished the work God gave Him. He was faithful and He calls us to be faithful too. Revelation says: ***"Be faithful even unto death and I will give you a crown of life."*** Listen, you can retire from your job, but you can't retire from ministry. You've got to keep going.

I Corinthians 4 says: ***"The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful."*** So, what keeps us going? Well, three things: ***First, being grateful for God's forgiveness.*** If God never did anything else for me, I owe Him everything because of the cross. ***Second, future rewards.*** We are promised a heavenly reward for our faithfulness. ***Third, the comfort of knowing that what we do really matters.*** When we serve Jesus, that's an eternal thing; it really matters. I Corinthians 15 says: ***"Throw yourselves into the work of the master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort."*** Everything you do for Jesus really matters.

Now, to serve God, we must learn the difference between significance and prominence. There's a difference. You see, my nose is prominent, but I can lose my nose and still live. On the other hand, if I lose my liver, I'd die because it's significant. That's the way it is with service; it doesn't have to be prominent to be significant. Sometimes the things we do behind

the scenes are more significant to God than what we do up front.

Several years ago, two teenagers came into a worship service and couldn't find a place to sit. So, they turned to leave, but an usher said: "*Come on, guys. I'll find you a seat.*" And he took them down to a seat. That night both of those boys accepted Jesus. One of them was Billy Graham. Do you think that usher did something significant? Yes! And so, the size of the job doesn't matter, but the dedication of the servant really does.

Now, some of you are thinking: "*The church doesn't need me anymore.*" But if you believe that, you're wrong. There is more to do at Jesup First than I can do alone; there is more to do than we are getting done. You were shaped to serve God. You are here to give back to the One who has given you everything and only you can get the job done.

Now, the question is: how will God use you? Everybody get out your bulletin insert. You were shaped for serving God. I want you to take this home with you today; I want you to look at it ... study over it ... pray about it and find your place of service in our church. Then, fill out the card and bring it with you to church next Sunday. You see, God brought you here to make a difference. He wants to use you.

Now, when you boil it all down, you can do two things with your life: you can waste it or invest it. And friends, the best investment of your life is in God's Kingdom. Your stock has declined recently, but here's an investment that will never decline.

So, one day, you're going to stand before God and He's going to say: "*What did you do with your SHAPE?*" "*Well, Lord, I was busy with my goals and ambitions and I never got around to it.*" And God's going to say: "**Depart from me I never knew you.**" But Hebrews 6 says: "**He will not forget how hard you've worked for Him and how you've shown your love to Him by caring for other Christians.**" And God keeps His promises. He gives eternal rewards. Matthew 25:21 says: "**Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things; so I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.**" More than anything, that's what I want to hear. And that's what I want you to hear too. "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**"

Some people believe the best album Elvis ever made was a gospel album, "*He Touched Me.*" And on that album, there is a song that says:

*After the lightning and thunder, after the last bell has rung,
I want to bow down before Jesus and hear Him say "Well Done."
He is my reason for living; He is my King of kings.
I long to be in His possession. He is my everything.*

Friends, there's a place at Jesup First UMC for you to serve. Are you serving? Why not?