

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, October 10, 2017

Creating Caring Opportunities

Definition: God is a loving Father. Scripture tells us the reason we are able to love is because God loved us first. His love should **compel us to love others more** and sacrifice for them as He did for us. But, God does not ask us to do this only for the sake of others. He knows that as we serve, love and sacrifice for the needs of others - to go beyond ourselves - our own hearts will also change. It is amazing the **difference caring for others makes to everyone involved.**

Audio Segment: *Be Ready for God*

Segment Questions:

- Intentionality and practice are often keys to becoming an expert in something. How can you apply these keys to being an expert in creating caring opportunities? What are the key factors that limit your ability to act on those opportunities?
- When we care for someone we are investing into them as a person. Why is it important to invest in someone? How can investing in the men sitting next to us impact Men's Life?
- What are ways that investing in someone can have more than a physical or immediate impact on them?
- The communal living and sharing suggested in Acts 25:44-45 is not the norm of today's church. Why has this happened? In what ways has our caring for people been hurt or improved by this change?
- "The world is not made up of atoms; it's made of stories" (Josh Campbell). How does knowing the story of the person sitting next to you change your ability to connect and care for them? How could it impact your opinion, and thus response, to the homeless on Kirkwood?

Action Questions:

- Use the five devotional titles (Ready for God, Paying It Forward, Meeting Basic Physical Needs, The Invisible Among Us, and Two-Way Caring) to create a statement about the importance of creating caring opportunities in your walk with God.
- Think about your time in Men's Life and discuss if creating caring opportunities has been a part of its ministry to you or to others. In what ways can we further improve this area?
- Bloomington is a community that has a significant homeless problem. How do we see these "invisible" people with respect and care? How do we fulfill Mathew 25 when a homeless person asks for money?
- How can you improve your ability to create caring opportunities? How about Men's Life as a whole?

PERSONAL APPLICATION: What changes in your routine can you make to increase your ability to create caring opportunities?

Creating Caring Opportunities

When I reviewed the five days of devotions for this topic, I immediately starting thinking about how we must care for the least of these (Matthew 25:40: "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'). How we must serve the poor and the "invisible" or "marginalized" in our world.

I think we all realize the immense need in our world as you look at record breaking natural disasters that have hit some of the poorest communities or the record number of refugees who are at risk every day of not getting the bare essentials for life. But, I think we have all heard these things many times and often they can seem overwhelming in how we can truly have an impact. I am not diminishing the importance of these caring opportunities, and will come back to them later.

However, as I studied the devotions, I found myself coming back to a lesson more direct to Men's Life – the act of finding caring opportunities in serving those God has entrusted in our immediate, Christian life. We are called to share each other's burdens, to encourage one another, to meet together and share everything, and to serve the Father by serving others. Here are some key verses from the devotions:

1 Thess. 5:11: Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Acts 2:44-45 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

Galatians 6:2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

1 John 3:17-18: But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

John 12:26: Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

We shouldn't lose sight that creating caring opportunities means to be prayerful and intentional in knowing the needs and burdens of those with whom we worship and live with every day. We need to take time to know their stories so we can relate to their needs. In order to seize those opportunities to care, each day we must choose to be available to or ignore the opportunities God gives us. Availability involves being willing to adjust our own schedule, agenda, or plans to God's priorities for others.

I would like to suggest that if we truly serve, love, and sacrifice for the needs of those closest to us – truly go beyond ourselves – God will not only change our heart from being self-centered but He will also build a God centered community that is prepared to serve the world. Then we will be able to take on the immense challenges of caring for the truly less fortunate among us according to these scriptures:

James 1:27: Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Deut. 15:11 - For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.

Proverbs 19:17 - Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.

Let's join together to find the caring opportunities for each other so we can build a God centered movement to impact the immense needs of the truly marginalized in our greater communities.