

Empowered to Serve, Serving to Empower (Serving - Chapter 2)

n/a

Ready:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

Set

Shaun Alexander has always known there was something different about him. Even as a young 10-year-old boy, he sensed that his life would be far from ordinary. He began showing signs of above-average athleticism as a teenager and would go on to be one of the most prolific high-school football players ever produced by the state of Kentucky. And from there, he would achieve All-American status at the University of Alabama before making a massive impact in the NFL as the star running back of the Seattle Seahawks.

But it was more than his uncanny ability to run wild with the pigskin and score touchdown after touchdown that made Alexander special. It was his unusual desire to help others and serve the needs of anyone who crossed his path.

Up until his college career at the University of Alabama, Alexander's penchant for helping others was nothing more than an oddity. Then Alexander worked at his first Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp the summer before his junior year. That's when it all started to make sense.

"A lot of stuff happened at that FCA camp," Alexander says. "That's why I'm so involved with the FCA. I served that week but didn't know that it was God urging me on. I was doing these things by the grace of God, but when I saw the impact I had on those 10 boys that were my campers, I was like, *Wow! I'm giving them a service*. I get hyped off on providing a service for somebody. So that FCA camp was the first time where I had a natural setting of pouring out, and these boys were ready to receive. I just really enjoyed that. That's where the servant's heart really kicked in."

Alexander doesn't have to think too hard when considering where his interest in serving came from. His mother, Carol, exemplified generosity and compassion in ways that often defied logic.

"Let me tell you how powerful my mom was," Alexander says. "I honestly didn't know we were poor. I honestly didn't, because she was such a servant. She was always helping people

financially. She was always driving people places. She was always giving a good word to somebody. She was a servant to whoever had a need. I was just amazed by that.”

Alexander was also blessed to have solid examples of serving away from home. Lucy and Lee Sellers provided a nurturing atmosphere for the young athlete while he was attending college in Tuscaloosa. Later on, he would grow to appreciate the heart of service exemplified by his wife, Valerie, and her family.

“Without seeing serving in my mom, seeing it from the Sellers family in Alabama or seeing it from my wife and her family, I think it would be understandable to hear the world say, ‘You’ve got to think about yourself’ and believe it,” Alexander says. “We live in a selfish society where you’ve got to think about yourself. Society does not see you being a servant, and I think what happens is when you live your life and you see other people serve and you live your life as a servant, you learn how to do the greatest thing you could ever do, and that’s walk with humility. That is the most powerful thing.”

At that FCA camp, it was a powerful moment when the former NFL MVP realized that his desire to help people wasn’t just a personality quirk or the nice thing to do—it was truly a calling for all of God’s people. Not only did it answer some of his burning questions about life, but it also empowered him to act on that calling in a much more significant fashion.

“To do what God has called you to do is to be a servant,” Alexander explains. “Sometimes that is simply pulling out a chair for someone. Sometimes it’s opening up your arms to someone. Sometimes it’s opening up your heart. It all comes out differently, but at the end of the day, it’s about giving your life. That’s what a servant does.”

Once Alexander understood the purpose behind serving, he also came to another realization: “God’s master plan is for everybody to have a chance to get to know Him,” he says. “That is our purpose.”

He cites a favorite Bible passage as further reinforcement of this master plan: “Do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

These words written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth may not seem like they are intended to address the issue of serving, but Alexander sees that last line—“therefore glorify God in your body”—as evidence that we have been created, not for our own pleasure, but to do the work of the Lord.

“Your body is for the Lord by honoring Him, praising Him, worshiping Him, leading others to Him, glorifying Him and teaching others about Him,” he says. “So then how is the Lord for your body? Well, the Lord died for your sinful body. That’s amazing.”

For Alexander, the next step was to discover ways to live out that purpose and to step into the will of God. With two years of college eligibility left, he dove deeper into his work with FCA. In fact, his involvement with the organization’s summer camps has become a regular staple of his commitment to serving and has afforded a never-ending supply of spiritual rewards.

“Over and over, it’s the kids that you see changed,” Alexander says. “I remember one of the kids’ mothers wrote me a letter. She said, ‘You know, I’m not really spiritual and I don’t really know anything about that, but the last three years that you’ve been around my son has

changed him. He is the most polite and upstanding young man. I just thank you for being a part of his life.' You've got young men, 14, 15 years old going to camp and then getting their whole household saved. You can't understand how God is using you for that. It just never makes sense to you. It's amazing. So those are the kinds of things that impact me."

But Alexander doesn't just serve through organized programs such as FCA, Communities in Schools, America's Foundation for Chess and the Matt Talbert Center; he also serves in ways that step outside the walls of conventional outreach, and takes a biblical approach that can be traced back to both the Old and New Testaments. Taking his cue from the likes of Eli, who mentored Samuel (as chronicled in the first chapter of 1 Samuel), and Paul, who mentored Timothy (as recorded in Acts and 1 and 2 Timothy), Alexander mentors 70 teenage boys who he refers to as his little brothers and says he can't help but laugh when he thinks of how different they are now compared to how they were during their earliest meetings.

"I'm like, *God, I can't believe You used me to help save his soul.*" Alexander says. "It's so much bigger than me. I mean, his soul is saved forever. God used me to impact that kid so much that he is now going to spend eternity in heaven. I even crack up when I see these boys mentoring other boys. It's crazy to me. So there is a joy and a refreshing feeling that comes over you when you start to recognize the impact of you impacting somebody else. It's better than anything that you can feel on your own."

According to Alexander, one of the biggest challenges most people face when it comes to serving is the difficult task of finding one's place. Those desiring to give of themselves often look to other servants for an idea of what they should do instead of seeking out unique opportunities that better reflect their abilities and personality traits.

"Everybody tries to put everything in a clean-cut box," Alexander says. "People might think that just because I mentor 70 kids, all of those kids have to mentor 70 kids, and now we're at 490 people. No, it does not work like that. That's where I think religion comes in, and also with religion our own selfish motives come in; and all of the sudden we're just all messed up. People don't even want to be a part of it. Instead, I would just tell people to find one friend and love on them every day."

Others struggling with the concept of serving may simply feel that it's just too hard or too time consuming. Alexander points those individuals to the oft-sermonized passage found in Matthew 5:14-16. He is especially encouraged by verse 14, which points out, "A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden."

"Someone who is a light on a hill doesn't have to go find people," Alexander says. "They just live their life, and it's so attractive that people want to come and at least hear about it. So if I tell you, 'Go be a light on the hill,' you'd be like, 'Yeah! Is that all I have to do?' But if I told you, 'Hey, I want you to go and have eight Bible studies every day. I want you to call five other guys that you mentor every day,' then it's like, 'Oh my goodness.' That's hard."

Alexander also suggests that people should do the things they like to do and simply get together with people who share the same interests. After a while, opportunities to share the gospel with those who have yet to accept Jesus will come.

"That's serving," Alexander says. "You're being the part of the Body that God wants you to be. What's wrong is that most of us try to put a religious aspect on serving. But serving means you're going to do what the Master says. So now it's a choice. Do you accept the Master?"

Being a servant is walking in your calling—doing what the Master says. And if you're a servant, you don't have to worry about how or what."

Alexander also says that serving is circular in nature. The servant blesses a person in need, and then when the servant is in need, God blesses them back by providing them with a blessing of equal or greater value. His belief is substantiated by the words of Jesus in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap."

"The Bible always says that when you give, it's going to come back to you," Alexander says. "I always believe that when you give to meet someone's need, you're going to get back whatever it is you need. That's how God works. We don't understand how great God is and how powerful He is and how He knows the plans for us way before we think we need something. So if you're saying 'God, use me. Choose me' all the time, then whenever you are in need, that person that you need, God's going to walk them right to you. It's a powerful thing when you know that's how God works."

Alexander continues to practice what he preaches. In 2005, he began working on a concept known as Club 37. This national accountability group will facilitate the mentoring and discipleship of young men from all walks of life who are striving to grow stronger in their faith and more focused on God. Alexander hopes to launch the organization's first camp series by 2010.

"It's going to be amazing," he says. "There's going to be a mentoring relationship where all of the men will mentor and all of the [boys] will be built up and loved so that eventually they can be mentors too. It's going to be all for Christ. We're going to set up something where we're going to teach every young man to become a fisherman and how to do it with a heart of serving and a spirit of excellence."

Another part of the process will be for the young men involved in the program to meet with each other once a year. Alexander says this concept goes back to his time at the FCA camps where he first experienced camaraderie and brotherhood with like-minded Christian young men.

"One of the most powerful things that young men can see is that we're all over this world, all over this country," he says. "It's powerful."

But without a strong element of faith, Alexander says that none of this is possible. It takes a childlike trust in God and His will for our lives to truly be able to move forward as the servants that He has called us to be.

“That to me is the definition of serving,” says Alexander. “Even if I don’t know how it’s going to happen, I know that God told me to go, so I’m going. That could be speaking. That could be financial giving. That could be giving of time. That could be your body. That could be your mind. That could be watching TV or not watching TV. That could be listening to the radio or not listening to the radio. It all should go back to ‘God, what is it You want me to do? I’m Your servant.’ Jesus can call us friend. Amen to that. Thank You for calling me Your friend. Other people can be called ambassadors of the Kingdom. Amen. Thank You for calling me one of Your people. I love that. But we’ve got one title: servant. That’s the only thing we can call ourselves. We can know that we’re Jesus’ friend. We can know we’re ambassadors of the Kingdom. But when it comes to us and God, we only have one title, and that’s servant.”

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of serving is that service done with complete humility reaps the reward described by Jesus in Matthew 20:16: “So the last will be first, and the first last.”

On the other hand, those who serve with selfish motivations or with a spirit of pride will face the brutal reality noted in Matthew 7:21-23: On the Day of Judgment, many who seemingly served God on Earth will be exposed as frauds. To those people, Jesus will say, “I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!” (v. 23).

That’s a message Alexander says is imperative for all believers to understand.

“If you have any pride in you, you’re in trouble,” he says. “Every time you find yourself serving, you have to humble yourself. You have to humble yourself of the thought of who you are, the thought of, *Man, I shouldn’t have to do this*. Don’t ever think like that. And when you stay in that humble mode, then often you get to walk right into greatness.”

Go

1. Can you think of a time when you realized that God had a special plan for your life? Like Alexander’s awakening at FCA camp, what pivotal moments helped you understand more about that plan? How did that experience empower you and give you the confidence to move forward?
2. Read Matthew 29:19-20. Why do you think that Jesus chose these as His last words to the disciples? What level of confidence do you think this final charge gave the disciples? How empowering is it to know that, as you step out to do God’s will, Jesus is “with you always, to the end of the age”?
3. The late novelist and historian Henry Brooks Adams once said, “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” When has a teacher or mentor had a profound impact on your life? In what ways have you personally been able to mentor someone else? How did that mentoring process affect you? How did it impact the individual you were mentoring?
4. Read Matthew 7:20-23. What is your initial reaction to the harsh rebuke Jesus gives the religious leaders He is addressing? How is it possible for people to do good things for others and still be labeled “lawbreakers” on Judgment Day?
5. Read Matthew 20:16. How does this Scripture contrast with Jesus’ words in the previous passage? When you live a humble life of service, what are some ways you might “walk right into greatness” as Alexander suggests?

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Bible Reference:

1 Corinthians 6



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