

Shared Talents (Serving - Chapter 11)

n/a

Ready:

In every way I've shown you that by laboring like this, it is necessary to help the weak and to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, for He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Acts 20:35

Set

Taking life for granted and daydreaming about greener pastures are things everyone does at one time or another. They are so common, in fact, that they've been the centerpieces of countless offerings from the entertainment world over the past 60 years. Feature films ranging from 1946's *It's A Wonderful Life* (starring Jimmy Stewart) to 1988's *Big* (starring Tom Hanks) and 1990's *Mr. Destiny* (starring Jim Belushi) have all tackled the subject.

Not to be left out, the music industry has a history of addressing the topic in such hit songs, among others, as Joni Mitchell's 1970 folk tune "Big Yellow Taxi" and the more overtly stated 1988 rock ballad "Don't Know What You Got (Till It's Gone)," performed by old-school metal icons Cinderella.

Most of the time, people who fall prey to this syndrome aren't visited by an angel to show them what life would be like without them. They usually don't travel to an alternate reality where everything they dreamed about comes true, only to realize how much they miss their former existence.

No, it's not always as blatant as the strike of a lightning bolt, a mysterious message from a stranger or the writing on the wall, but rest assured, the reality that life is bigger than one individual eventually makes itself known.

Just ask former Carolina Panthers' star defensive back Mike Minter. His life-altering moment came in 1994 as a sophomore at Nebraska. Just two games into the season, Minter found himself in uncharted territory. He was lying on the field, writhing in pain, having just torn the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in his left knee. Unsure of what this injury meant to his football future, Minter was profoundly impacted by the unfortunate circumstance.

"When football was taken away, it was like, *What am I doing? What is life all about?*" he recalls. "I thought football was all there was. I was laying there on the ground looking up, and I didn't have football anymore. I didn't know what to do."

It was in that moment of forced introspection when Minter's self-centered mindset started to

slowly shift toward a greater understanding of serving. Strangely, though, he had seen plenty of examples of selfless behavior most of his life. He can laugh now at the realization that it took him 20 years to understand the concept, and Minter's present-day understanding makes him appreciate those who quietly laid that foundation.

"My first example of serving was probably through my grandmother," Minter says. "We were kind of at our grandmother's house at a young age, until she passed away when I was seven years old. She would give of herself to her kids and to her grandkids. That was where it all started. And then my mom was just like that. When people needed something, they always came to my mom, and she would always be the one that provided shelter for people. We didn't have much, but she would provide food for others."

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Minter's family moved to Lawton, Oklahoma, when he was just eight months old, where they lived with his grandmother. He spent the rest of his childhood there and eventually graduated from Lawton High School, where he excelled in both football and basketball. After graduating in 1992, he accepted a scholarship from the University of Nebraska and went to play for legendary head coach Tom Osborne.

Minter didn't see his first action on the field until 1993 as a redshirt freshman. During that season, he saw most of his action as a backup safety but showed signs of future greatness with 21 tackles, 2 forced fumbles and 1 sack. It was during his sophomore year that the ACL injury occurred in the second game, forcing him to watch from the sidelines as his Cornhuskers won the national championship.

As a junior, Minter came back impressively to reclaim his starting position, and in the process he helped lead Nebraska to a successful title defense. This was the Cornhuskers' first claim to two consecutive back-to-back national championships in 40 years. Minter then wrapped up his collegiate career by earning All-Big 12 First Team honors with 51 tackles, 5 interceptions and 6 pass deflections.

But more importantly, the future NFL star began to grow in his faith, thanks to an unlikely duo—a baby boy and a coaching legend.

"My wife [Kim] and I had our first son [Michael] and I began to think about life and how I was going to teach him about life," Minter says. "Then there was Coach Osborne, who was very consistent—a man who was very stable. I used to wonder how and why, and I wanted to be like him. All of these things were making me question what life was all about."

Minter didn't stop there. He took his desire for knowledge and put it into action. Minter took full advantage of Nebraska's historically strong Fellowship of Christian Athletes program, where Coach Osborne was (and still is) not only a strong supporter but also an active participant in that organization. Through that mentoring process, Minter—who describes himself as "a thinker"—began searching to find the meaning of life from a biblical perspective.

"Even though I wasn't saved, I always knew there was a God, and I just didn't know how to get to Him," Minter says. "I just started researching different religions, and somebody told me about Jesus Christ and who He was and what He did for us and how He came to Earth to die for us, and this is how we get to heaven—and you don't have to do anything. All you have to do is accept what He has done. You don't have to go lift weights and be the fastest kid on the field. All you have to do is sign up. And I said, 'Man, that's the greatest gift of all. He's going to take all of these things I've done in my life and forgive them and give me joy. That's where it's

at.”

That decision compelled Minter to get on his knees and pray for God's forgiveness as well as a greater desire to know his Creator. He knew that God had the answers to all of his many questions and was ready to start the learning process. Minter says one thing he began understanding right away was the biblical principle of serving, and it was when he accepted Christ that he recognized a previously hidden talent.

“My calling is to show people the potential they have inside of them and how God sees them,” Minter says. “God has given me a blessing to be able to look at people and see their potential. I look at anybody, and God will show me their potential. That’s what I cling to.”

One of Minter’s earliest opportunities to exercise his gifting came at the Orange Bowl, where he was able to visit a project in Miami. He was amazed to discover just how much impact a simple message of hope such as his could have on others.

“The first thing that I saw was kids who didn’t really know how much they’re loved by God,” Minter says. “They didn’t know how much they had. All of the sudden, I got to talking to them about Jesus and about how much He loves them and how much He wants them to be what He has called them to be. Then all of the sudden, I started to see the lights come on. There isn’t anything like that.”

Minter’s ability to affect lives in a positive manner greatly increased in 1997 when he was selected by the Carolina Panthers in the second round of the NFL Draft. By the sixth game of the season, the rookie defensive back had earned a starting spot that—outside of 10 games missed in 1998 due to staph infection and two games in 2001 due to an injury—he would not relinquish until his retirement nine years later.

In 2003, Minter anchored the defense that led Carolina to an American Football Conference championship and the franchise’s first Super Bowl appearance. The Panthers lost a hard-fought game against the New England Patriots, 32-29, but Minter made his presence felt with a career high 18 tackles. Even more amazing than Minter’s individual effort was the fact that he played most of the second half on a broken left foot but did not reveal his injury until after the game.

Off the field, Minter was seeking out ways to serve others. His home church in Charlotte had built a day-care center, and the idea inspired him to do something similar for the surrounding community. But Minter wasn’t interested in a solo venture. Instead, he was looking for solid partnerships that would stand the test of time.

“God laid on my heart to get NFL guys together in business,” Minter says. “In the National Football League what happens is you have a player maybe over here doing something and a player over there doing something, but they never come together. You never have that power together. So God laid on my heart to bring NFL guys together and use what we have learned and seen over the years.”

Minter looked no further than his own team for support. He joined forces with defensive end Mike Rucker, wide receiver Muhsin Muhammed and running back Steven Davis. Although Muhammed and Davis eventually left Carolina (Muhammed played for Chicago before returning to Carolina in 2008, while Davis moved on to St. Louis before retiring after the 2006 season), the four-man partnership has remained intact throughout the process.

The end result was Ruckus House—a day-care and learning center that focuses on shaping the lives of children through education and Christian values. Minter and his team opened the first facility in Harrisburg, North Carolina, during the spring of 2005.

“When you bring education, kids, faith and football all together, you will have a dynamic combination,” Minter says. “They [Rucker, Muhammed and Davis] all have kids, and they agreed. They all understood the importance of education at an early age, and all of them are saved and understood the importance of having faith and instilling the characteristics of God into kids early on. So that’s how the Ruckus House came about. That’s how it happened.”

On August 7, 2007, Minter officially retired as an NFL athlete. In nine seasons with Carolina, he set team records for game starts (141), consecutive starts (94), fumble recoveries (8) and interceptions for touchdowns (4). Minter also ended his career with 790 tackles and 15 interceptions, making him one of the franchise’s most prolific defensive players.

As difficult as it was for Minter to walk away from the game he loves, he is thankful that even greater opportunities were already awaiting him outside of the stadium. That future included the launch of a second Ruckus House in Concord, North Carolina, and plans to expand the program across the state and perhaps nationally as well.

“It’s been unbelievable to see everything that’s been going on,” Minter says. “Kids are changing. Parents are changing. As a matter of fact, I just heard a story about how a kid changed and was praying after hearing a Christian song. The mom just pulled off to the side of the road and started crying, because she was so touched by this. That was something that blew my mind. We’re doing what God called us to do.”

Minter’s heart for serving goes well beyond his involvement with Ruckus House. In March 2007, he visited the African nations of Senegal and Gambia. While there, he visited facilities that had been set up by the YMCA. (Minter was asked to go on the trip because he is a member of the board of directors of the YMCA of Greater Charlotte.)

“I’ve always wanted to go to Africa,” Minter reveals. “That was a big thing for me. What it showed me was how connected all of us are. We’re so connected. In America, we have a tendency to just think about America. It opened my eyes to the world and how connected we are. If one thing gets affected by something, it affects everybody else.”

Minter says there are far too many stories from his trip to be recounted in a short period of time. One of the most memorable moments, however, came when he made his first visit to an orphanage.

“I’ve never been called to adopt, so I just didn’t understand that,” Minter says. “My wife always said she wanted to adopt when our kids get older, and I’ve been like, ‘I don’t know about that.’ So we went to the orphanage; there were about 25 babies there, and I thought I was just going to hold one of them and play with them and then leave. But all of the sudden, my heart just connected to these babies. These babies reminded me of myself. It began to show me

how important and how great it is for people to give of their own love and life and home to be able to help kids and babies that don't have that opportunity. And it just blew my mind. It softened my heart on adoption and how important it is."

Since that life-altering moment in 1994 as a confused, injured young athlete, Minter has continued to learn about and embrace the value of serving as modeled by Jesus. He can see a marked difference in the people-centered man he is today as opposed to the self-centered man he was just a few years ago. Minter also has a greater understanding of the purpose behind blessings and success, which can be found in the parable of the talents.

Found in Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells a story of a master who travels away from home for an extended period of time but first leaves three of his servants with the responsibility of taking care of his money. He leaves each servant a different amount of money. The first two take their money (or talents) and multiply it through various business dealings and ventures. The third servant is afraid of losing his money, so he buries it until the master returns. Upon his return, the master praises the first two servants and gives them even greater responsibility, but he scolds the third servant and throws him out of his house.

"God blessed these people with these different talents, and they had to do something with it," Minter explains. "One buried his and didn't do anything with it, and God came back and said, 'Wicked man. You didn't do what you were supposed to do.' One multiplied his talent a little bit and the other maximized his to the fullest. That's where I feel like I sit. And it wasn't theirs to keep. It was to give to other people."

Minter has also learned the truth found in Acts 20:35, in which followers of Jesus are reminded that "it is necessary to help the weak" and that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

"That Scripture right there is so true," he says. "It's absolutely a promise. The more you give, guess what? The more God can say, 'Okay, now let Me give you more.' If you come with your hands closed because you don't want to let go of what you have, then God can no longer put anything in your hands. You've got to open them up and let Him have His will to put and take whatever He wants into and out of your hands. That's how I look at it."

Sometimes Minter finds himself frustrated with other Christians who struggle with serving. He feels that one of the greatest dangers is when people take ownership of the church and use phrases like, "It's my church" or "My church did it." Minter warns that taking a position of ownership leads to a loss of focus.

Minter also believes that too many believers are caught up in their circumstances and don't realize that God can use them to serve no matter where they are in life. Just like the three servants in the Parable of the Talents, we are all given different measures of blessings. It's up to each of us to decide whether we will multiply those gifts or hide them where no one else can be impacted with the gospel of salvation and hope.

"Don't worry about tomorrow," Minter says. "You maximize where you're at today. If you maximize where you're at, you're going to fulfill what God has for you right now. Don't look at what the next man has. That's not what God's called you to do. He's called you to that specific situation for that specific time. We've got to understand that, because we have a tendency to look at other people and what they're doing. But that may not be doing what God wants you to be doing. Maximize where you're at, and God will take you to where you need to be."

Go

1. When Mike Minter tore his ACL as a sophomore at Nebraska, he contemplated his future and his purpose in life. Can you describe a time when life-changing circumstances had you asking similar questions? What answers have you been able to find so far?
2. It took Minter the responsibility of fatherhood and the mentoring influence of Coach Tom Osborne for him to understand the importance of serving. What individuals or life situations have helped you come to the same revelations? Can you describe a time when you have been a life-shaping influence on someone else?
3. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What are some of the different personality traits displayed in the first two servants as opposed to the third servant? Why do you think the master was so upset at the third servant? What is the message of this parable as it relates to serving? What are some things that the talents in this story might represent today?
4. Read Acts 20:35. Think of a time when you received a gift. Now think of a time when you gave someone else a gift. How did each of the scenarios make you feel? Which was more gratifying? Why?
5. Minter says, "Maximize where you're at and God will take you to where you need to be." How might a lack of position or resource stop you from serving? What are some ways that you can serve in spite of such limitations?

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Bible Reference:

Acts 20



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