



DEFINING MOMENTS

Process Tool

The Outward-Focused Life: Becoming a Serving Church

Summary

Everyone wins when a Christ-follower serves. The challenge for pastors is leading the people in their churches away from the “serve me first” messages that surround us to a place where serving others becomes the norm. In this edition of *Defining Moments*, host Nancy Beach interviews Dave Workman of Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, well known as a church where serving is a lifestyle that extends the love of God in creative ways to its community. Bill Hybels also offers insights into leading and inspiring people to become servants of Christ.

Outline

I. How Christians Are Perceived

- A. Christians are often perceived as being against things, such as the deterioration of morals in society or certain forms of legislation about lifestyle issues.
- B. The culture, however, has moved to a point where the energy is more about what things you are for.
- C. We have to redefine for our own people what a disciple is.
 1. A disciple is a surrendered and transformed person who loves God and others.
 2. The world has not seen a great view of surrendered and transformed people loving God and loving others.
- D. Dave once did a series at Vineyard titled “Jesus Loves You, but Everyone Else Thinks You’re a Jerk.”
 1. The purpose was to train believers to change typical perceptions of them as hypocritical, judgmental, critical, or cheap.
 2. They interviewed a waitress from a local Chili’s restaurant who was not a believer.
 - a. She reported that none of her co-workers want to work on Sundays.
 - b. They see Christians as demanding and cheap.
 - c. They don’t tip, and they leave little brochures about hell on the tables.
 3. After the series, congregants began leaving \$20 tips.
 4. The waitress and her boyfriend started coming to Vineyard, and she has now been baptized.
 5. At Willow they ask conference attendees for help in building bridges of respect with local restaurants and hotels.
 6. All Christians need to be challenged on these issues.
- E. Servanthood is too far down on the list of how others perceive Christians.

1. If all that non-believers know of Christians is that they go to church, they would think that attendance is the highest value.
2. Unless we live out servanthood where non-believers are, they'll never connect church with servanthood.

II. Vineyard's Radical Commitment to Serving

A. Two things drive them:

1. Practical evangelism
 - a. We live in polarized and confrontational society.
 - b. Non-believers need to see another model.
 - c. Servanthood opens that door wide because it's such an out-of-the-norm experience in our culture.
 - d. Servanthood is a lost form of evangelism.
2. Theology
 - a. As noted in Mark 10:45, "... Even the Son of Man, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (NIV).
 - b. Jesus later tells His disciples in John 20:21 that just as the Father sent Him, He's sending us.
 - c. In Philippians 2:5-7, Paul tells us that our attitude has to be the same as Jesus' — although He was God, He didn't cling to His rights but let go of everything to take on human form and become a servant.
 - d. That theological view of incarnational Christianity has to be played out in some way.

B. Servanthood is lived out as a lifestyle, not a program.

1. It's more than short-term mission trips or volunteering at homeless shelters.
2. Those are life-transformational experiences, but different than a lifestyle.
3. In the same way that it seems harder sometimes to talk to your own family about Jesus, we often find it's easier to serve outside our own neighborhoods.
4. We need to shift that paradigm.

C. One way Vineyard has reached out in their neighborhood is through what they call TurkeyFest.

1. The week before Thanksgiving, they put hundreds of boxes on stage, with a simple sheet inside listing the items needed for a Thanksgiving dinner for a family of four to six people.
2. Congregants return the next weekend with their boxes filled, and the congregation prays over them.
3. The congregation then scatters throughout Cincinnati to deliver them.
4. After giving the box of Thanksgiving dinner, they ask if there is anything they can pray for the recipients about.
5. All of a sudden, the door swings wide open, because serving people opens up the door to the heart.

D. A congregation has to be well taught to achieve this paradigm shift.

1. Don't beat yourself up if your congregation isn't there yet.
2. It's worth teaching more about so you can create the culture in which people look forward to these kinds of opportunities.
3. Create the lifestyle, not a program.
4. Vineyard has given the congregation lifestyle serving suggestions, such as:
 - a. Buy the meal of the person behind you at the McDonald's drive-through.

- b. Show up at a subdivision with a bunch of rakes and rake leaves.
 - c. Pass out water bottles at busy intersections.
 - d. Clean bathrooms for local businesses, especially the employee restrooms.
 - e. On Christmas Eve, send out people with boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts to give away to people who have to work on Christmas Eve night.
 - f. These are all lifestyle activities rather than programmatic.
- E. Connect cards have been a critical piece of Vineyard's outreach efforts.
- 1. Connect cards are business cards they pass out with sayings on one side like, "You matter to God," or "God loves you."
 - 2. On the flip side, the card has the church's Web site and phone number.
 - 3. People have carried those cards around for months and years while God has been doing stuff in their lives.
 - 4. The card gives them information on how to connect with the body of Christ when the time is right for them.

III. Inspiring People to Live the Outward-Focused Life

- A. The value needs to be heated up in your church by the teaching of the Word of God.
- 1. If your church is not very generous, they haven't been taught to be generous.
 - 2. The servanthood value has to be taught in unapologetic and passionate ways.
 - 3. You need to continually underscore that our fundamental identity as Christ-followers is with serving towels over our arms, ready to engage in acts of compassion and servanthood that the Spirit prompts us to do.
 - 4. Unless you continually underscore this value (four to six messages per year), your congregation will inevitably turn more inward-focused.
- B. Every other communication device in society is saying, "It's all about you."
- C. The spirit behind the outward-focused church is one of generosity.
- 1. The heart of the Father is the heart of One who gives even his own Son.
 - 2. We need to teach how that plays out in practical and normal ways.
- D. Address the pace of life issue so it's not a barrier to the outward-focused life.
- 1. Everyone is busy, but we make time for what we think is important.
 - a. We need to seek first the Kingdom of God, and trust that everything else will be added.
 - b. At Vineyard, families have purposely made servanthood part of their regular routines so their kids catch that it's important.
 - 2. Develop an attitude of availability.
 - 3. Train people to have an inner dialogue with the Holy Spirit so He can catch their attention.
 - a. He's already way ahead of us and working in the lives of others.
 - b. We want to be attentive so we notice what He's already doing.

IV. Serving and Evangelism

- A. The culture is getting more resistive to traditional evangelistic efforts.
- 1. Jesus said to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves.
 - 2. We need to think about ways to actually earn the right to have conversations that are natural and life-giving as opposed to merely proclamational and perhaps judging.
 - a. Discover people's stories before you preach God's story.

- b. Discern what people really need in their lives before you assume that all they need is the Gospel.
 - c. Think about how to really engage with people far from God.
 - 3. Dave, Bill, and other church leaders are thinking a lot about these things these days.
 - 4. At Vineyard, they create moments of receptivity in people by catching them off guard when serving them with the love of God.
 - 5. This is probably where evangelism is heading more in the future.
- B. Much of our traditional evangelism training has been focused on having all the right answers.
 - 1. We all need some knowledge of apologetics, but think of how irritating it is when you're talking with someone who thinks they're always right.
 - 2. Even if they are always right, it still feels irritating to you.
 - 3. Somehow Jesus was able to talk with people, knowing everything about them, and yet He was humble of heart.
 - 4. There's something about that that somehow we've missed.
- C. In one of his speeches, Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve... you only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."
 - 1. That's the essence of the outward-focused life.
- D. Ryan is a youth pastor who brought a few students to an outreach at Vineyard recently.
 - 1. Dave asked him about his story while they were passing out boxes of detergent in Section 8 housing.
 - 2. Ryan was a hell raiser as a kid, had lots of trouble with drugs, etc.
 - 3. Three times he either got a bottle of water from someone on a corner, got his car washed, or something else like that, and he started thinking, "What kind of people do this kind of stuff?"
 - 4. He came to Vineyard and went through an Alpha program.
 - 5. He met Christ, began serving, and now he's a youth pastor.
 - 6. It all started for him with a bottle of water on a street corner.
- E. It's very freeing for people who don't have the gift of evangelism to know they can make a contribution to the Kingdom through serving.
 - 1. In the past, we have made evangelism look like you have to be a salesperson.
 - 2. Serving people is easy to do.
 - 3. After a bit of training, asking people if there is anything they would like to receive prayer for is also easy to do.
- F. The combination of the gift of servanthood and sincere interest in a person's life is a powerful one-two punch.
 - 1. It's amazing how wide open people are to prayer after they've been served.
 - 2. Serving others has impact because it's so unexpected.
 - 3. In our competitive world, most people are into things for what they can get out of it, and they are self-protective.
 - 4. When someone simply offers you something with no strings attached, in the name of God, it's a head turner.
- G. In Nigeria recently, Dave met with 25 pastors whose homes had been burned down by extremists.
 - 1. They asked Dave how they could serve the people who burned their homes and harmed their families.
 - 2. They asked if they could clean the bathrooms of Muslim business owners.

3. Dave replied that he couldn't even understand what that must be like for them, but they should go for it because it would shock the daylights out of these people.
- H. Often we think of evangelism as the harvest point.
1. Yet, in our own lives, we recognize how many nudges or bumps occurred along the course of our lives to get us to the place where we crossed the line of faith — it's a process.
 2. The planting and watering of seeds are just as critical as the harvest.
 3. You're not going to harvest if you're not planting a lot and watering a lot.
 - a. Many churches in Cincinnati have benefited from Vineyard doing a lot of seed throwing and watering.
 - b. That's a win for the Kingdom.
 4. Some churches have tried this serving model and have not been successful.
 - a. Sometimes we get confused about the importance of the methodology.
 - b. The methodology is not as critical as the heart and the culture in the church.
 - c. Dave points people to Mark 4, where Jesus tells the story of the sower.
 - 1) He sows lots of seed, and it lands on four different types of soil.
 - 2) Only one type of soil produced fruit — that's a 75% failure rate.
 - 3) If that's good enough for Jesus, it means we must have a lot of seed that we can fling.
 - 4) The point of that parable was to say whatever you do, don't stop sowing seed.
 - 5) You may not get the return you hoped for, but unless you sow a ton of it, you better not expect a harvest.
 - d. Serve them all, and let God sort them out.

V. Personal Benefits of Serving

- A. Often when we talk about serving, we focus on the benefit to the person being served, rather than for the one who is serving.
- B. Bill has been planning a message based on the words of John the Baptist, talking about preparing the way for the coming Messiah.
 1. As John addressed the religious people, you'd think he might direct them to prepare for Christ's activity in their lives by reading or checking into a monastery and thinking deep thoughts.
 2. But, he actually challenges the crowd to share their clothing and food with those who lack it, tells the tax gatherers never to overcharge people, and tells the soldiers to stop intimidating people (Luke 3:11-14).
 3. To prepare for the coming of the Messiah, you serve others in order to create room in your heart for the activity of God to increase.
 4. Bill has found that whatever benefit occurs for those he serves, it's never as great as the spiritual formation that happens in his own life.
 5. Everyone wins when a Christ follower serves.
 - a. God gets lifted up.
 - b. The person being served gets blessed.
 - c. The person doing the serving is a part of recreating the activity of God in their own life.
 - d. It's just win, win, win.

VI. Serving in a Broken Economy

- A. People like to give to outward-focused things.
- B. Operational costs of ministries are the hardest thing to get people to give toward.
- C. If the overall mission of the church is clearly outward focused and articulated well, it makes asking for money a little easier as long as we are authentic and legitimate.
- D. Dave believes it will be tougher for churches that are not outward focused to survive in this new economy.
- E. God will create a way to make churches that are outward focused continue their impact.
 - 1. It's in His heart to provide.
 - 2. He is not experiencing an economic hardship right now.
 - 3. He owns "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10, NIV), and the wealth in every mine.
 - 4. God can flow his resources to those He believes will pass them out on earth.
- F. Bill gave a message recently on the current economic crisis.
 - 1. In the message, he said that many would have to humble themselves and depend on the rest of us in the church in a way that they'd never had to do before.
 - a. He struggled to say that because in his head he was counting the cost of tens of thousands of dollars going out the door, but the Spirit kept urging him on.
 - b. One week later a young couple he'd never seen before stopped him after the service and gave him a check for \$100,000.
 - c. They said that the Spirit prompted them during his message the previous week, and they wanted to be the people who helped with the first \$100,000 of those needs.
 - d. Bill will never stop being in awe of the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - e. It's our job as pastors to say the things of God, to preach what an Acts 2 church is, and to trust that the Spirit will take those words and prompt other people to meet the needs.

VII. Preventing Churches from Turning Inward

- A. It's in downturns that you really want to position yourself for God's full blessing on your life.
 - 1. The stupidest thing that Christians can do is to stop tithing and shut down the spirit of generosity, because that is exactly what God blesses.
 - 2. He will bless when we're generous and bless when we trust Him with a tithe.
 - 3. It's in these difficult times that we live out what we believe, we test our faith, and we see if the Word of God stands up to its promise.
- B. It's our job as leaders to teach people the theological truth that God is really their provider, not their investments.
- C. There are many ways to serve that don't cost any money.
 - 1. We have a society that's starving for listening because everyone wants to talk.
 - 2. Just sitting down and listening to someone pour their heart out is a huge deal.
 - 3. Extending grace or forgiveness doesn't cost you anything but a little pride.
 - 4. Karl Menninger, the author and psychiatrist, says that generous people are rarely mentally ill.
 - 5. Every so often Dave tells his people that if they want to become whole emotionally, they should become generous.
- D. In his book, Dave says that serving is the best way to refresh your grasp on grace.

1. When you serve people with no strings attached, it has a powerful impact; people don't know how to respond.
 2. The concept of grace is completely unique to Christianity.
 - a. You cannot earn your way into heaven.
 - b. You cannot earn God's approval.
 - c. He gives it as a gift.
 3. Serving others is a mini dramatization of the whole concept of grace.
- E. Don't be surprised by the messiness of servanthood.
1. If you make it a goal to develop an outward-focused church, it's going to be messy, because people are messy.
 2. But, nothing makes a church more alive than seeing it through the eyes of an explorer, a seeker, or a new believer.
 3. Part of the dynamic of the Acts 2 church was the infusion of a few thousand brand-new believers at its inception.
 4. When you get an outward-focused church going and there are regular baptism services with freshly redeemed people, the momentum grows.

VIII. Making an Outward-Focused Church Work

- A. It's important for the pastor to teach about the value of servanthood, but the work doesn't end there.
- B. You can't develop an outward-focused church if you still have an inward-focused staff or budget.
- C. It all has to be aligned.
- D. First, develop an outward-focused vision, and then ask questions like these:
 1. Who's carrying out this vision?
 2. Who's leading the charge?
 3. Are we organized around it?
 4. Do we have alignment on our staff with this?
 5. Do we have budgets for it?
 6. Do we make time in the church calendar for it?
 7. Do we wave this banner at our weekend services?
- E. Without these systems aligning, it's all talk and no action.
- F. The leader's job is to take people where they normally wouldn't go.
 1. People will only go where the leader goes.
 2. They can smell phoniness and manipulation a mile away.
 3. Only authentic leaders create authentic people.
 4. Carry out the work so your entire staff and congregation own the goal.
 5. When doing a series on the poor, Dave fasted for 21 days to show the people that leadership was serious about this issue.
 6. Vineyard tells the stories of living an outward-focused life from the stage on weekends and on their Web site (www.outwardfocusedlife.com).

IX. Outward-Focused Young People

- A. For over a decade, Vineyard has provided a five-day summer serving experience for middle school and high school students.
 1. Participants have come from many different denominations throughout the Midwest.
 2. The program consists of some interactive teaching in the morning, and then they go out and serve in different areas around Cincinnati in the afternoon.

3. They return for dinner and a big worship experience where their stories are told.
 4. They are housed in host homes so they get a sense of community where they're serving.
 5. It is a life-changing experience with many repeat attenders.
 6. The hope is that they experience what the outward-focused life is all about and take a little bit of that servant culture back to their own environments.
- B. The next generation is looking for a mission and a cause, and if we don't tap into that, the church misses out on a huge energy burst that's available for our cities.
 - C. Bill believes that the younger generation doesn't like what it sees in the older generation -- self-absorbed, over-entertained, over-fed, underchallenged, bored people.
 1. They don't want to turn out like that, so they're more radicalized.
 2. 20-somethings have led the way at Willow with the most radical kinds of serving ideas.
 3. Willow's AXIS ministry has challenged 20-somethings to pick up and move from comfortable suburbs to apartment complexes in compromised areas in order to radiate Christ.
- X. Next Steps**
- A. If your church is inward-focused, take a hard look at whether your practices and teaching match your stated mission.
 1. Begin teaching the values of generosity and servanthood.
 2. Make outward-focused activity part of your church's routine and liturgical calendar.
 3. Over-resource the outward-focused value.
 - B. Keep your outreaches simple and short so anyone can get their feet wet.
 - C. Visit a place where outward-focused servanthood is happening.
 - D. Read the book *The Outward Focused Life*.

Process Questions

1. What is one key idea or insight from this interview that particularly resonated with you? Write a few thoughts about it below.

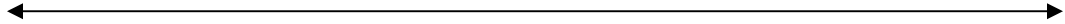
2. Dave challenged his congregation to change the way non-believers perceive them -- to be seen as loving servants rather than hypocritical, demanding, or cheap.

a. When you think of how outsiders perceive your congregation, where does servanthood fit in? Place an "X" on the continuum below.

*We're known
for servanthood.*

*A few members are
known for servanthood,
but it's not a lifestyle for most.*

*We're not known
for servanthood.*



b. What might be some other perceptions outsiders have of your church?

c. If there are any perceptions of your congregation/church that you'd like to change, write a few ideas about how you might be able to do that.

3. Many church leaders are thinking a lot these days about what it takes to reach those outside the faith in today's culture. Consider the elements of developing an outward-focused church that Bill, Dave, and Nancy discussed, and check one if you feel it is an area God is calling you to work on. You can also write in your own.

- Promote servanthood as a lifestyle instead of a program.
- Heat up the value of servanthood through teaching the Word of God.
- Address the pace of life issue.
- Explore how serving can fit with your church's evangelism efforts.
- Examine and teach on the personal benefits of serving.
- Teach people the theological truth that God is really their provider, not their investments.
- Other: _____

If God spoke to you about one of these areas on the previous page, think of an action step you can take to move forward and record it below.