

This sermon is based on chapter five of the “Someone Like You” book (pg. 59)

*This message is focused on how if we show up consistently and meet needs with dignity, we can multiply compassion through community and make a huge impact.*

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## Introduction

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Good morning! Today as we continue in our series, Someone Like You, we’re going to be looking at the story of Dave Simpson. Almost 20 years ago, Dave founded an outreach called 2.4 Ministry, serving breakfast daily to people struggling with homelessness in downtown Minneapolis. And for the last couple decades it’s been going 365 days a year, 7 days a week, including all holidays. Volunteers show up at 4:30am and finish at around 7am, which is pretty incredible, the level of commitment. The name 2.4 comes from the concept of tithing, giving back 10% of a 24-hour day, or roughly 2.4 hours.

Now, these days they cook and serve inside a homeless shelter, and they have volunteer teams, over 50 people, that cover each day of the week. But it all got started by one guy, a print shop owner, who just decided to go downtown one day to a park and serve the homeless. Let’s take a look at Dave’s story.



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Length: 5 minutes 15 seconds

What an amazing story, and an amazing ministry. Now, there’s a main idea here today. And the idea is that Jesus calls us to serve with **consistency** and **compassion** through the making of **connections** that are beyond ourselves. And by doing so, we serve the person right in front of us. Let’s pray as we begin.

### **(Open with prayer.)**

I want to share three major points today. **1) Just show up, 2) Meet needs with dignity, and 3) multiply compassion through community.**

## **Point Number One: Just Show Up**

**Just show up.** There's a story of Job. And many of you may have heard of Job. The patience of Job. He's featured in the Old Testament.

And he was caught in the crosshairs in this kind of cosmic conversation between God and Satan. God didn't cause it, but he allowed Satan to create this tremendous disruption in Job's life. He lost all of his children, lost his wealth, even elements of his own health. And, you know, that would push the most righteous of people to the brink of losing their faith.

I'm going to read a brief little excerpt from Job, because there's an important lesson in there. So Job 2:11-13. *"When Job's three friends... heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads."*

Now catch this, *"Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."*

Now, Job's friends, if you read further, did some things that weren't terribly helpful later on. But did you catch what they did when they saw him? They sat on the ground with him for seven days and they didn't say a word. People, don't underestimate the power of just showing up. Can you remember a time that somebody showed up for you?

Did they have an advanced degree in counseling? Did they mention a bunch of biblical platitudes which were terribly helpful? What was it that really made the difference? It was just the fact that they were willing to be **present**. We must be willing to be **inconvenienced** at times. To show up in the lives of others that need the presence of somebody that's just willing to be there.

**Serving isn't about grand gestures, it's about faithful presence.** Again, Job's friends did the simplest thing possible. They just showed up, to be faithful to their friend and present in his grief.

Now, in my work in ministry, I deal with a lot of people that are suffering and are struggling. And I've done some coursework in how to deal with grief and people that are in mourning. The truth is, I don't remember a lot of it, but I'll tell you the thing I do remember:

**When I don't know what the right thing is to say, it's because there isn't a right thing to say.**

Being **silent** with someone grieving or enduring suffering is probably the most important thing we can do. Again, serving isn't about grand gestures. It's about faithful presence. So serving others in Jesus' name often happens in mundane and ordinary moments.

Brother Lawrence was a French Catholic layperson in the 17th century, served in a monastery, had a very, very menial Job. He washed dishes. He was a janitor, he cooked, he cleaned, but he was known for maintaining a **constant** awareness of God's presence through the day, even while performing all these mundane tasks. And he wrote a little book called Practicing the Presence of God.

And if you've never seen this, you ought to look it up. It's an amazing little book, and it's inspired many Christians to follow his faithfulness during the mundane, ordinary moments of our days. Whether doing our job, navigating the checkout at the store, driving, mowing our lawn, or whatever it is.

We do so with the contemplation of who God is, being aware of his presence and honoring him in everything we do. So check this out.

**You may be the only version of the Bible that someone reads.**

Let that sink in. Just remember that serving others in Jesus' name often happens in mundane and ordinary moments. Now, **the impact of your serving may not be immediate, but it's always meaningful.**

*Share a personal story of yourself or someone you know who waited a long time to reap a spiritual harvest after investing for many years. Could be your own story of people investing in you.*

Let's read this verse from Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

The people that have prayed for me, I thank God for their faithfulness and their persistence, and not giving up on me or the God that they serve. They never grew weary. They never gave up. And just think about the impact that that has had, not only on my life, but my family's life and everybody that I've intersected with since. And it all goes back to that central moment of those people's faithful prayers.

So here's a question: Who has God placed in front of you today? To love in an active and a consistent way? Who might that be?

Now, as a believer, you have a call on your life. It's not to save the whole world, but it's to serve the person faithfully that's right in front of you. Remember, the impact of serving may not be immediate, but it's **always** meaningful.

### **Point Number Two: Meet Needs with Dignity**

**Meet needs with dignity** – that's compassion.

*Share a story of a time you had to change your thinking, strategy, or attitude in order to serve someone in a way that blessed them and met their needs with dignity.*

You see, **showing dignity honors other people because they bear God's image.** Every person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. We don't treat people as our project. Satan creates a trap where we will objectify the other person, not putting enough stock in their ideas or their thoughts or their concerns or their preferences.

We think we're doing good things to help. But it might be just something that enables poor choices. And while we're doing it, we only do it because it **feels** charitable to us. We must continue to bear these words in mind. And you've probably heard these words before. Matthew 25:40, the second part of the verse. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

18th century Pastor Jonathan Edwards characterizes it like this, I'm paraphrasing, "God already has everything he needs." So we have nothing. Nothing that we can give him. So he's designated the poor as the recipients of the gifts that we wish to give to God.

Check that out. It's like a perfect social system, right? I mean, those with resources, we have a need to give.

We have a need to be generous, to be kind, to be charitable. And there's people that need to receive it. And God set this all up. You see, showing dignity honors other people as they bear God's image.

Here's another point: **service is not about pity. It's about partnership.** There's a book by Richard Bahr called "Those People: The True Character of the Homeless." And one of the quotes in the book goes like this, "Do you know what it's like to go through your **entire day** and have people try not to look at you?"

Just think about that. You see, making eye contact sets up a social contract with the other person. When we make eye contact with somebody, we now have the right and privilege and opportunity to actually speak to them or engage with them, or perhaps ask something of them. And many people feel like, "Well, I don't know what I would say to a homeless person or to a panhandler."

So then we don't look at them because there's no contract. We have no obligation to engage them.

I'm here to tell you from my unhoused friends: **that hurts.** It hurts. It hurts deeply. You see, they already know that they're seen as inferior. They know the situation they're in. They're not dumb. They're poor.

Whose fault is that? Are they somewhat responsible for the situation they find themselves in? Maybe. Were they dealt a bad hand in life? Here's a better question: Does it matter?

I know from speaking to a lot of people over the years that there's concerns about how do I engage with a homeless person. Should I give them money? There's actually an appendix in the "Those People" book that provides some guidance on that.

But look, **compassion looks people in the eye rather than looks down on them.** See, service isn't about **pity.** It's about **partnership.**

**We must see the interests of others and not just see them as an opportunity to serve.** I need to learn to see other people's interests. I need to learn to be curious. Not just because I have a bank account.

One of the things I love about 2.4 Ministry is that they're told by guests it's one of the few places that they're actually asked **how** they would like their food.

Would you like oatmeal? How about grits? Would you like butter on that? Sugar? White or brown? How many sugars in your coffee?

Love is empathetic. It's not self-serving. I mean, real, godly service is curious, and it listens and it takes action. Let me ask you a question. When you go out to breakfast, would you just eat any old thing that somebody put in front of you? I'll bet not. So why do we expect that of somebody that's maybe not housed? Here's a key verse.

Philippians 2:4: "Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Question. Before rushing in to help, can you ask yourself, what does this person truly need and how can I affirm their worth in the process? See, we must see others' needs, not see them as an opportunity to serve. Like we just check a box that says, "I served today." We have to see their interests. We have to be curious.

And that brings us to point number three.

### **Point Number Three: We Multiply Compassion Through Community**

So at 2.4 ministries they have over 50 volunteers, most serving one time a week, sometimes once a month on a rotation.

When we serve **together**, our impact is **multiplied**. It expands exponentially. Our love deepens. So in Acts 4:32 it reads, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."

**Compassion grows when it's done in community.** You see, the early believers really got it right. I mean, they were described as being one heart, one mind, which meant that they were on the same page that they had shared values, that they had unified goals. And it was that incredible unity that attracted people to this new church, this new thing following Jesus. And that faith spread throughout the whole known world.

Just imagine if those people in that time hadn't had that fellowship. We probably wouldn't be sitting here today. So compassion grows when it's done in community.

Also, **serving in community provides needed reminders and encouragement.** If you're part of a recovery community and by that I mean like Al-Anon or like a faith-based recovery, you know the concept of having a sponsor and a sponsor is somebody that doesn't necessarily provide advice, although sometimes that's warranted.

A sponsor holds you accountable. And not just for **abstaining** from whatever's tripping you up. But holds you accountable to **doing the work** of recovery. The reading, the meetings, working the steps, and so on.

A sponsor also provides **encouragement**. Oftentimes, as we begin to make progress in our recovery, we're the last ones that can really notice and a sponsor can provide a nice mirror for that.

It is curious to me that Jesus sent his disciples on the world's first missionary journey two by two. There's not an explicit purpose for why this is chosen. But I can imagine that some of these same reasons might actually apply. Serving in community provides needed reminders and encouragement.

**Next, consistent service provides spiritual benefits.** The author, Dallas Willard, wrote a great little book called *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, and it talks about fasting and prayer and service and worship and studying God's Word **and** about this, the discipline of **service**.

Here's what Willard writes, he says "This spiritual discipline of service is essential for spiritual growth and becoming more Christlike." But he goes on to say that "Service is a way to cooperate with God's grace."

It's a curious way to put that, isn't it? Service is a way to cooperate with God's grace, to yield to his power, and move us to be more Christlike. Now, if you are sitting here today and you haven't yet made that decision to follow Jesus, I just want to be perfectly clear. Service is not a ticket to eternity.

That's not what this is. This is not a works-based thing. But for people that believe and follow, just like prayer and fasting and studying God's Word, all of those things are an investment. They're an investment in the One who created us. Sacrificial service can provide valuable, valuable dividends in your life. And I know, I can testify to this.

I know that Dave Simpson and his wife Judy can testify to this. My wife Carla can testify to this, that the sacrifice that we've made in service pales in comparison to the reward. It pales in comparison to the reward. Hebrews 10:24 reads, "*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*" Consistent service can provide spiritual benefits.

And finally, please come and serve. Come and serve with us. Whether it's within the church, within one of our compassion ministries. Come and see what God's doing here in our community.

Use this message to spur you along to engage in one thing new. Jesus calls us to serve. He calls us to serve with consistency, compassion, and making connections that are beyond ourselves. And in doing so, to serve the person that's directly in front of us, who is directly in front of you.

Let's pray.

**(Close with prayer.)**