

Series: **OLIVE BRANCH DNA**

January 29, 2006
IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Luke 9:23-25

I. INTRO

- A. I was helping my daughter, Selina, with her homework a few weeks ago, and I saw something I don't think *I* ever learned in 4th Grade. She was learning in science that the world is pretty much divided up into **consumers** and **producers**. In case you hadn't noticed, they're opposite to each other. Consumers mainly take what producers offer—and that's where it ends.
1. As I saw that stuff in Selina's notes, I thought, "That's actually quite profound—especially in a culture like ours." I think we humans, when it comes to where we are on the food chain, are considered *consumers*. The earth and its atmosphere produce grain, grapes, oxygen, water, olives, oil, metal, sugar, coffee, wood—and we consume. And we produce waste. Carbon dioxide—sewage—and profound amounts of garbage, when we're done consuming. I'm not trying to make anyone feel bad—that's just the truth. The only thing that balances that out is when we give back.
 2. I thought, "Wouldn't it be tragic if all we did in this world, after a lifetime of living in it, in a lifetime, was consume; take what this planet and the people on it produce—and give back...well...mainly waste.
- B. Anyone here who's ever been a child? I guess that includes everyone. We start as pure consumers. We eat, sleep, cry and produce waste. Then we start to reward our parents for their work by smiling—then learning and helping—and eventually doing things only our parents could do. A parent's long term job description is to turn children from consumers into producers. When that happens—**ding!**—we're done!

-And, I think that's maybe how our Heavenly Parent determines where we are in our growth as His children—when we learn to give back. I'm pretty sure I'm not exaggerating when I say that God's goal for us, over time, is to change us from **consumers** to **servants**.

II. LIVING IN AN IT'S-ALL-ABOUT-ME WORLD

- A. You need to know that transitioning from a consumer to a servant will be tough in a culture that's set up like ours. Not only do our **instincts** drive us to consume—our culture implies that life is pretty much all about consuming. You have the odd person of the year award given to people like Bono and Bill and Melinda Gates, who have found some profound ways to give and serve—but that's not the message we hear most.
1. The message we hear most clearly every single day is that you can measure the success of your life by what you have or consume. ***That using what someone else produces, in itself, makes you a better, more desirable person!*** How many of you think that's true? It's actually pretty absurd isn't it?

There's a hidden, more subtle message in most of what drives this. It's actually become the slogan for a company. Can anyone guess what it is?

Because...you're worth it! And when this is pretty much all you hear, you can get brainwashed.

2. Let's just be honest about this. Consuming is fun. Buying great stuff, newer stuff, good stuff is fun. It's a kind of high. It feels **good** to have people come running when you snap your fingers. But greatness never comes by consuming—it comes by serving and giving.
- B. Let me tell you something even more incredible. Consumerism got religion! And I'm not just talking about the ***name it and claim it*** stuff you may see on TV. I'm talking about something much more respectable that I believe has been around for 2000 years. It's very subtle, but let me try to pin it down.
1. It's the concept that even God and the church are all about me and my family. It's the mindset that spiritual maturity basically amounts to knowing your Bible and consuming more and more of what God has to offer. Period. The church exists to make that easy to do.
 2. Now, the tough part of defining this clearly is that The Olive Branch ***is*** here to meet a wide variety of needs. Needs for training, for inspiration, for helping children, teens and adults believe, sense that they belong and become what God has grow. We offer support tough times and counseling.

-Let me just be really clear; your needs ***are*** important. Very important. And sometimes when we're new at our faith, or wounded or frail or over-whelmed, we just need to allow others to care for us, nurture us.

-And God is ***always*** there for us. All we do is call. He promises that we will never be alone.

That He will give us strength, provide for all our needs, love us more than we could possibly imagine, give us peace in the storms of life, help us to know which path to take, come looking for us when we get off course.

-But ultimately our calling in life is not about ***using*** God and others as a shopping mall where we come and consume God-products.

-As in a home, no one can bypass the stage of spiritual infancy. But if we don't move on from that point—to learning to give and serve, we never grow up. It ultimately turns into a form of spiritual self-centeredness. We begin to ***act*** like customers at a restaurant; connoisseurs of the servanthood of others. Instead of passionately living out the truth we feed on and using the strength to serve others, we become fussy sermon-tasters. We were meant for ***more*** than that!

III. IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

- A. A little over two years ago when we started The Olive Branch, we spent a ***lot*** of time talking about what this new church was going to be like. We wanted it to be a safe place. We wanted it to be a church without walls. We didn't want to play any games. We didn't want the mindset at the core to be, "This is ***ALL*** about us—our favorite songs, our preferences, our traditions."

-Know why? It's a form of spiritual narcissism. It's the opposite of everything Jesus said, lived for, and died for. Jesus said that if you want ***true*** greatness, greatness that lasts—it doesn't come by seeing how many people you can get to serve you and work for you.

True greatness comes by taking the very role you may not *want* to take. That of a servant. Let me read the rest of it. ***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45 NIV).***

1. Anyone here ever heard of a servant who practices the philosophy of the consumer; “It’s all about me. Come serve me!” When you’re a **servant**, who’s it all about? It’s all about the one you’re serving. And as a Christ-follower, it’s about serving Him. How many of you think you can become a great Christ-follower by consuming lots of God-stuff—and that if you do that, then the **serve** part doesn’t really apply to you?

-According to Jesus, the answer is, ***It will never happen.*** Anyone know what happens to a person if they gorge themselves and never exercise? They get ***fat and weak!*** Spiritually, it’s the exercise of **servicing** that makes you strong. Jesus had more to say about this:

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process (Luke 9:23-25 NLT)?

2. It’s pretty clear, isn’t it. If you really want to follow Christ, there are three things that need to happen:

#1--**You have to put aside your selfish ambition.** This means your life can’t be all about you, your ego, your comfort, your perks, your preferences.

#2--**You need to shoulder your cross daily.** This means that just like there was a price tag on Jesus doing His Father’s will, there will be a price tag on us doing what God wants us to do

#3—**You need to follow Him.** If you **follow** someone, what does that make them? Well, it makes them your **leader**. So, let’s just be really clear here. Who serves whom? Does Jesus become our servant—and we study the Bible to figure out how, through performance and prayer and learning all the hidden secrets, we can get Him to serve **us** best? Or, do we become his servants—and we study the Bible and talk to Him to figure out how to **know Him and serve Him best?**

3. Jesus makes a very profound statement next—and I want to spend the rest of our time talking about it.

It’s very simple—and it goes to the very roots of our lives: **If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life (Luke 9:24 NLT).**

-I think Jesus is saying, “When our lives and relationships become pretty much about ourselves, it kills them.

- a. Think about your world of friends? What do you think would happen if you made your friendship all about **you?**

There aren't too many people I know of who would be interested in a friendship where someone comes along with 160 pounds of need—and just takes.

- b. How about marriage, for those of you who are married. Everyone gets married expecting that the marriage will meet some of the needs they have for intimacy, friendship, companionship, right? How would it work if one spouse said, “Our marriage is all about **you** meeting **my** needs. I'll let you know how you can do that as we go along, okay?”
-Imagine saying wedding vows like: “I promise to love, cherish and support **ME**—and help you do the same. It would kill the marriage.

4. I think most people understand that the best friendships, the best marriages come from two people who are both focusing on how they can serve, help, love and support the other person. Not how they can manipulate someone into loving, serving, caring for and supporting them.

-And a relationship with God is, in many respects, no different. When our energy in relating to God is focused on consuming what He has to offer and manipulating Him into giving us what we want—a really cushy, soft spoiled life with lots of money and no trials—that is a **non-relationship**. If you and I make anything about ourselves—parenting, work, driving, the home, sexuality, friendship—even our relationship with God—we will kill it.

-In the book of Acts, Jesus is quoted as saying, “**You're far happier giving than getting (Acts 20:35 Msg).**” Are you ready for some paradoxical truth? We human beings are happiest, we are at our noblest—**at our BEST**--when we are **giving and serving and loving—not sitting around waiting to receive, be served and be loved**. Know how Jesus knows that we are happier giving than getting? Because He was there when we were **made**. He put that in our DNA. He knew we were made in the image of God--and God is, at heart, a **giver**—not a taker.

- B. For The Olive Branch to be the healthy, growing, God-honoring, joy-filled place God intends for it to be—**it can't be about us**. If it ever starts being all about us—it will become a club—and it will die!

1. There's something in business terminology called the **Pareto principle**, or the 80-20 rule. Basically, it says, “20% of the work you do will give you 80% of the results you're looking for. When it comes to organizations, it says that 20% of the people will do 80% of the work.

-I accept that as **normal** in our world, but I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind, do you? Let's imagine something better. Let's dream about what would happen if everyone said, “I didn't come to be served—but to **serve** and give my life away. My life will **not** be about me getting everything I can for **me!**”

-I want you to dream about something with me. It's not original—I heard it from Rick Warren—but it's grabbed me by the heart.
Right now, there are around **2 billion** Christians in the world. What would happen in this world if **all** of them were mobilized? Mobilized to follow Jesus fully. Mobilized to end AIDS, end world hunger, end oppression—and **love God and**

others? What if **2 billion** people said, “I follow Jesus. ***I didn’t come to be served, but to serve—and to give my life for others!*** Think of how that would change the face of our world—forever!

2. How do you think something like that would start? I think it starts one person at a time. We’ve talked about our sense of calling to be a **movement**. Know what that is? It’s when a small group of people start moving in the right direction—and their influence creates a chain reaction.

-The only way this crescendo of making a difference can start in Markham is if we are willing to say, “This is **not** about us. This church will be about what God is doing to reclaim people and reclaim this world for Himself. That is **Jesus’** calling for His church, His people. And that’s where I want to be. And I think that’s where you want to be.

3. I think one of the questions is **how?** We have made our starting point clear. It’s with people who are undecided about Jesus. It takes time and space for a person to count the cost—or maybe figure out why they’ve gotten disillusioned with God or the church. We want to be a **SAFE PLACE** for people to make that decision.
 - We’ve said what we want to see happen next—what we want to **produce**. Fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The term **Christian** has become way too broad and generic. **Christ-follower** refers to those who receive the life Jesus died to give them. When you **follow Jesus**, you believe that everything He said was true and right—and actually **follow** him. When you’re **fully devoted** it means that He’s your Lord. He’s in charge of how you live, spend your money, and use your time. He comes first.

-So, what are the steps toward becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? We’ve thought a lot about that.

- a. The first step is...**BELIEVE**. Believe Jesus was who He said He was—the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior. Believe that what He said about life and about reality was true. Believe that Jesus, by his death on a cross and resurrection made a way for your sins to be forgiven—and for your eternal destination to be settled, once and for all.
 - Believing doesn’t mean checking your brain at the door, or holding your nose and taking a flying leap into the darkness. If you’ve just started the process of investigating truth, we want to make sure you have the evidence, the space and the time you need to make a great decision.
- b. The next step is that we want you to **BELONG**. When Jesus walked on this planet, He lived—and died with open arms. And his arms were open to everyone who would come. He offered his friendship to anyone who would accept it. And he asks us to open our arms and accept others as they are.

-A sense of belonging is one of the most critical needs people have. The sense of **belonging—acceptance** doesn’t usually happen when you’re looking at the back of someone’s head in a large gathering like this. That’s

why one of the fundamental building blocks at *The Olive Branch* is our **Roots** groups—or small home groups.

-Eventually, we want everyone to have a small group they call home; where they belong.

- c. We want everyone to **believe, belong**—and in that context, **BECOME**. I want you to think about what it would be like for you to become the person you've always wanted to become—that God **created** you to become. Know what stops us from becoming all God has created us to be?

-Sometimes it's because we're not sure where to start. And we're afraid of letting go of what seems familiar—and afraid of inviting the power of God into the spaces in our lives we're not proud of. We'd kinda like God to zap us--you know, **Ding!...WE'RE DONE!—microwaved into maturity**. But it takes longer—and is more painful than that.

-There's something you need to know. **Becoming** means learning to give and learning to serve. The other option, of course, is not becoming who you were created to become.

4. Over two years ago when *The Olive Branch* was started, we decided that we wanted the people who would be at the core of this church, helping make the decisions, to be players, not spectators. Partners in this ministry.

-**Partners** are the ones who say, "I'm in! I will be someone who, in the power of God, helps **make** it happen. I will not just consume what the church offers—I will serve. I will grow, give, gather and use my gifts alongside everyone else."

-If we are going to be what God has called us into existence to be, then we will have to get radical about following Jesus Christ. And we will have to do what He asked His Followers to do--serve and give our lives away. We want to be one of Markham's greatest assets. We want to be a safe place for undecided people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We don't want to play games or play church—because what we do involves the eternal souls of people we love. This friends, is the real thing.

-We want grace and love and hope and life spill out of our lives into every boardroom, classroom, living room, bedroom, office store, street, neighborhood, group where we find ourselves. But if that's going to happen, then our focus can't be on ourselves.

- C. You need to know this morning, that though I want everyone here to become full partners with us in what we're doing—what I'm saying isn't some pep talk to get everyone jazzed up about the organization. It's for **your** welfare—for you to become a **truly** great person. At the end of this life—when we take our last breath—we have to give an account to God for what we have done with all the resources, gifts, and opportunities He's given us.

Making life all about you isn't just a dissatisfying, disappointing way to live. It goes way deeper into our souls and our destinies than that.

1. When I tried to think of a word snapshot for this, I remembered the Christmas right after we moved here from Pennsylvania. We were invited to someone's home for a Christmas dessert along with a bunch of others. We asked, "What is the dress"—and we were told, "Oh, it's **casual**." We asked if it was okay if we brought our kids—which were 8, 6 and 2. We were told, "Sure. No problem."

-Well, we got to this home—and not only was it huge and gorgeous and decked to the hilt—it was piled with the fanciest desserts I had ever seen. And when I saw the people, I suddenly discovered the difference between *Pennsylvania* casual—and *Toronto* casual. We were dressed in jeans. The only thing casual about everyone else is that they weren't wearing tuxes and evening gowns. And **no one brought their kids!** We felt like the Beverly Hillbillies! "Now, let me tell you a story about a man named Jed..."

2. Someday we will all be invited to a dinner where the honored guest will be someone who was born on Christmas. You will **want** to be prepared for that day—cause it will be something else! At that dinner will be people like Peter—who spent his whole life honoring that Guest, Jesus. If you sit next to Peter, you'll want to know that before he died, nailed upside down to a cross, he was forced to watch his wife get crucified. You could ask him, "Peter—was it worth it"—but it won't be necessary, because you'll be aware of thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people—all at that dinner **because** of him.

-At that banquet will be a little known back street evangelist named Mordecai Hamm. You won't recognize him—but you might recognize the man next to him, Billy Graham--thanking him over and over for leading him to Jesus.

-And there will be Mother Theresa—glowing, every wrinkle a mark of beauty—who gave her life loving the diseased, the starving, the dying just like she would Jesus. There will be long haired, bearded, wild looking guy there—Keith Green. Keith made a huge impact on Lori and me and Blaise as one of the most radically sold-out Christ-followers we knew. Keith was snatched out of this world in his 30's, along with 2 of his children in a plane crash. Maybe he'll be singing a song he wrote—"There is a Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord..."

-These will be people who could somehow see ahead beyond their own fears, beyond the busyness of life—and decided to give up their culture's worship of comfort and convenience and security

They decided to live like Jesus and love like Jesus. People who gave up entire fortunes; people who worked very ordinary jobs as slaves, garbage collectors and shoe salesmen, cooks, Moms—but people who made massive impacts because they were fully devoted to the One who gave His life for them. People who lived their lives...all for Jesus. All for Jesus.

3. You're gonna want to be ready, dressed, prepared for that banquet because **this** is the one that counts! No one will belittle you or humiliate you—but our culture's obsession with **it's all about me** just won't cut it there. Not with people like that. And you will want something eternal to show for your life. You will. -And you **can!** That's what's so cool. No matter where you are right now, you can make way more of a difference than you ever thought you could. Friends, Jesus

knew about life. He did—because He **created** it. And He said that the way to live it is to not try to grab it, hold it, preserve it; stash it—but **give** it. Your decision to do that is the first step toward a life of influence you'll **want** to live.

-So, let's agree together, ***It's not about me. The Olive Branch is not about us!*** My question is--are you in? Do you want to partner with us in this next chapter of eternal history?

IV. CLOSING

- A. As some of you know, I just got back from Pittsburgh where I was helping my parents move. Lots of thoughts and feelings were going through my mind. My Dad retired last Sunday from 54 years of pastoral ministry—today he turns 80. For the day I can remember, I have no idea where they're going to church.
- I spent Wednesday evening going through my Dad's shop—kind of a lifetime accumulation of creating—scraps of wood, screws, bolts, old hinges—stuff he thought he might use someday. After 2 hours I hadn't even made a dent.
- Then, all day Thursday, packing and moving what they had from their home of 14 years—attached to the back of the church—to the place where they'll retire. You wouldn't at all be impressed with their possessions. You wouldn't be at all impressed with how they've prepared for retirement. They somehow didn't get around to it until they were in their early 60's, if I'm not mistaken. My Dad never pastored impressive churches—the largest was about 350 people. And, like all parents, they had—and have--their share of flaws and quirks and blind spots. I am **not** glorifying them.
- But what I envy is their legacy. 54 years of loving and selflessly serving others—doing, from the best I can see, what Jesus said to do: **If you give up your life for me, you will find true life.** And they have finished well in this part of the course that God laid out for them—and the path of transformed people they have left behind just keeps getting wider—and will continue to. I find myself in that path of changed people.
- B. I could do the whole thing of ***Imagine this...*** with all the numbers and results of a transformed community and the healed lives and hundreds of baptisms and healed marriages and truly whole children that represents—and I think that **will** happen. But what I **want** you to imagine is a church full of people who truly finish well—and start a movement toward God in all their circles of influence. What if you were one of them! But that can only happen with true servants—not consumers. That's my prayer for us. That's where I want to be! And I'd love to take that journey with you!