

Good morning. For those of you who don't know me very well I am an introvert. I know that word means different things to different people but essentially it means I get my batteries recharged from being by myself. It's not that I don't like people that people exhaust me. And for me personally that also means that I tend to form close relationships with just a few people seldom seeking out new relationships. Now there's nothing wrong with being an introvert. It's how I'm wired and I know many of you probably are wired the same way. However for me if I get too far into my introversion it can become stagnation. It's kind of an odd thing. While my battery is recharged by being by myself I feel that I am most likely to grow. In the presence of others. I read scripture every day but it's not until I'm with a group of people they really feel the scriptures come alive. I love hearing people's different perceptions and perspectives and their experiences enrich my own.

I pray several times a day. But there's something particularly powerful about praying with a group of people. I also occasionally sing praise and worship songs by myself in my car. You're

welcome. However there's nothing quite like my voice joining the voice of you all's voice in the congregation. There's something about the sense of community that really strengthens faith. So my comfort might be in introversion keeping to myself. But when I shift my focus to outward things I feel an inner joy that I can't experience otherwise. Just like individuals I think churches also have personalities right. Like you have your loud charismatic churches you have your more quiet studious churches. And I've been thinking a little bit about what's the personality of our church like and when I've done that thinking I've come to the conclusion that maybe in recent years we've been a little bit introverted. It seems like when we make decisions when we plan worship services when our committees make their decisions we focus on ourselves.

We look inward in order to kind of plot our path. And. There's nothing wrong with that. The church needs to take care of the people who come here. However I would argue that is not our primary goal.

The Great Commission tells us Jesus himself tells us go and make disciples of the whole world in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's a pretty powerful word. Go.

It tells me that the walls of this church were never meant to contain us. Instead they are meant to be a launching pad for all the ministry we do outside of these walls. I have a few questions I'd like for you to ponder with me as we go here. What would happen if our church became a little more extroverted. What would happen if we focus more on the what the people of Eldorado need instead of just those already in our congregation. What if our church actually became a launching pad for all the great ministry we could do in our community. Those are powerful questions and I think we're starting to see some of the answer. Through our partnership it's Skelley through our partnership with Skelley is young I think it's had a big impact both on our congregation and how we see our role in the community and also at the school itself.

It's impacted staff teachers students and their families.

Twice this fall we have issued a call to the congregation. Let's join Skelley students in what they're doing and twice I've been impressed. We have answered that call and we've had over 20 people volunteer both for the grandparents day at Skelley and also the Thanksgiving meal. What a powerful witness. You know that we have people willing to show up and relate to the kids that we probably don't know very well and scripture promises us as we give.

We receive more. And I was also excited as members of our congregation came back anxious to share.

About their experiences Skelley. I heard stories funny stories that kids relayed to their sort of match for the day per joyous fun stories. But there's also some sad stories too. But the point is we were present for all of it. And as our focus turned outward.

I saw our volunteers experience inward joy and Skelley is just one example of shifting our focus outward our kids and youth have a tradition of volunteering for the kids need to eat program here in Eldorado.

For those of you not familiar with kids need to eat. It's basically a lunchbox program that feeds kids who might be a little bit food insecure over the summer and we volunteered at Quail Ridge Apartments this summer several days and it was such a joy to get to know the kids who came in many times you'd see the same kids day after day. And you'd also get to know their parents a little bit and there was this one family in particular. I served about two weeks total over the summer and this one family in particular that would get so excited as they came to the Globus as it's called. And they saw me there. The little girl was maybe two or three. And everyday she came in like a tutu. Right. Like a really frilly outfit. And she reminded me so much of my youngest when she was that age.

She's also a fan of the tutu. She also had an older brother and the older brother was going to enter kindergarten in the fall and he had this amazing collection of how shoes he had broken his foot earlier in the spring and couldn't wear regular shoes so his family had bought for him a few different pairs of of house slippers. And so over the course of the summer I got to know this family a little bit. I learned that the little boy loved superman and that the how shoes that looked like dinosaur feet were his favorite. And so as my time with kids need to eat kind of drew drew to a close I became a little bit sad. You know I had formed a relationship with this family especially the kids and I didn't really I didn't know if I would see them again.

And then we had Thanksgiving at Skelley. And you know we go in. We also helped prepare the food. Many of are involved with that so thank you. But we prepared the food and we set up and then the kids came in. And you know it's mass chaos and loud and fun. And the kids come in and they sit down and once we serve the kids we're asked to have a seat and just eat dinner with the kids.

And guess who was at my table. That little boy with the dinosaur slippers. I got to break bread with him and catch up on what his life was like. What a blessing for me and it all happened. Outward focus brought me inward Joy. You know those are two different contexts volunteering ones for kids need to eat. Volunteer here for my church at Skelley. But I knew that kid and the kid knew me and it was it was just an awesome experience to get to see him again. What I hope is that as our relationship with Skelley develops more we'll see more and more of that kind of relationship develop. If we're in the schools and the kids and the staff they see us around they will learn that we are fun loving people who can be trusted. And so when you run into one of the kids at Wal-Mart My hope is you know a little boy little girl will tug on mom's short sleeves and say I know that lady she's nice and she you know that kid may or may not remember that we're from the church but that doesn't matter.

We're doing what we're supposed to be doing. Those kids are experiencing the love of Christ through us and we don't even have to use his name.

Another example of outward focus inward joy. Many of you have heard about an effort we have right now in Eldorado called Thrive. BUTLER It's actually a county effort. Several members of our congregation were instrumental in getting up and going and guys we're about to graduate our first class. And that's pretty darn exciting. What happens is people who are living in poverty who want to make a commitment to get out they go through a 16 week course where they learn a little bit about what social class means and start to evaluate their own life and how they can get out. So that 16 weeks is almost finished and we have 10 people going through the process. Several members of our church have also gone through a training call bridges out of poverty where they have committed to learning what it's like to live in poverty.

And it is my hope that some will volunteer to be team members where they join with people living in poverty to help them out.

That's outward focus inward Joy often when we think about community building we think of people who are very much like us right like our co-workers our neighbors even people we work out with in the morning but that's not the extent of our community.

Outer Aytos a very diverse place. You have people living in wealth. You have people living in middle class. You have people living in poverty. You have people who value education and those who simply don't see the point. You have people who go to church every Sunday. There are many more who have never heard of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We have male we have female. We have different races and ethnicities. This is the alterative community. And I challenge us to look beyond our usual social circles and to interact with people maybe we wouldn't normally all these people and all their wonderful diversity need to feel accepted and heard in their community and in their church. And

I think that's what God is calling us into next Scripture often tells us about the joys of Givi. And when I read scriptures about giving I think both in terms of finances but also in terms of time.

Scripture repeatedly tells us things like those who give receive much in return. And we often hear that kind of in a financial context right. Like you give more. God will grant you more material resources and.

I don't know that that's really the way that that was meant to be read. I think what is meant is when you give up your resources you get that inward Joy.

And it's worth so much more than those possessions that we might hold onto. I'm

also somewhat of a nerd and I love research and I love written research and the scriptures reinforce one another. And so as I was preparing for this I did some research and it's amazing research is showing us that people who give. Report higher levels of happiness those who give of their time. Report higher levels.

Of Happiness. In fact one study showed that.

People who volunteer in their community once a week or more are 16 percent more likely to report being very happy than those who are not so. Research

confirms what Scripture tells us. It is good for the soul to give if we take that into a church context as well. There

was a study done called the reveal study and I read about it through a book called Luth and the whole point of this study was to figure out what congregations were doing that were considered spiritually vital. These were live places where people who attended there were growing in their faith and that revealed study showed in those congregations.

Seventy percent of people volunteered for their church over 50 percent volunteered to serve the needy at least once a month.

60 percent of congregants tithe in those churches.

So what we learn through this study and through scriptures outward focus inward joy but also inward growth.

I sometimes find great meaning in referring to some of the old saints.

People who lived very wise lives sometimes long ago and one of my very favorites is Saint Francis Saint Francis sort of epitomized what this outward living looks like outward and upward focus was totally on God and serving other people. And so today I'd like to close with one of his most well-known prayers. And I'm suggesting that we consider it a challenge for our own congregation and our own lives to develop an outward focus so that we can experience inward peace and inward joy. We pray with me Lord.

Make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred. Let me so love. Where there is injury. Pardon. Where there is doubt. Faith. Where there is despair hope. Where there is darkness light where there is sadness joy. Oh divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled. As to console.

To be understood.

As to understand to be loved. As to love. For it is in giving that we receive in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.